

The Doctrine of the Goddess Ashtoreth

Hyperlinks

[Hebrew](#)

[Mythology](#)

[Extra-Biblical
References](#)

[Scriptural References](#)

[Research and
Opinions of
Theologians](#)

Charts, Maps and Short Doctrines

[Ashtaroth in Scripture](#)

[Ashtoreth in Scripture](#)

[ISBE's take on
Ashtoreth](#)

[ISBE on Ashtaroth](#)

[Summary of the
Doctrine of Ashtoreth](#)

1. There are a couple of pertinent Hebrew words here:
 - a. ʿAsh^etârôwth (עֶשֶׂת תַּרְוֹת) [pronounced *ǵahsh-taw-ROHTH*], which is transliterated *Ashtaroth* and is found in Judges 2:13 10:6 1Sam. 7:3–4 12:10 31:10. All of the references could be understood to refer to either the goddess of Sidon or to a goddess pantheon. Strong's #6252 BDB #800. There is a city by the same name and Strong's # found in Deut. 1:4 Joshua 9:10 12:4 13:12, 31 1Chron. 6:71 (56). These words are identical.
 - b. Interestingly enough, the Israelites took the consonants from the heathen name for this god along with the vowels from the Hebrew word for *shame*, and put them together for the way that this is found in the Bible. *Thus any magical power or ascription of praise to the pagan deity was forever prohibited from the Biblical text.*¹ The Greek transliteration in the Septuagint is Astarti (Ἀστάρτι) in Judges 2:13, with the common variant of Astaroth (Ἀστάρωθ), as found in 1Sam. 31:10. Now, we don't know when this practice actually started. That is, we don't know if the original authors of Scripture wrote the interspersed form of the proper noun or whether some legalists afterward began to change the pronunciation in that way (I lean toward the latter). Recall that the original Hebrew was written without vowels and that the Masorites added vowel points after the time of Jesus Christ. However, the pronunciation followed the Scriptures long before the vowels were recorded by the Masorites. So properly, I am musing as to when this pronunciation began.
 - c. We also have the word *Ashtoreth*, or, ʿAshtôreth (עֶשֶׂת תֹּרֵת) [pronounced *ǵahsh-TOH-reth*], which is found in 1Kings 11:5, 33 2Kings 23:13. This clearly refers to the goddess of the Sidonians in all instances. Strong's #6253 BDB #800. This is the singular form of *Ashtaroth*, which, as we will see, *does not* refer necessarily to the goddesses or goddess of Sidon in particular.² Both forms of the word are feminine.
 - d. According to several very reputable theologians, *Ashtaroth* are the figurines which represent *Ashtoreth*.³ However, most of the passages clearly read either *Ashtaroth* or *Ashtoreth*, appear to be used as proper nouns. In 2Chron. 33:19, the *Asherim* (**not** *Ashtaroth*) are set up; this means that the plural form of *Asherah* could mean *figurines of Asherah*, implying that the plural form of *Ashtoreth* could also stand for the *figurines of Ashtoreth*. However, we have the singular form *Asherah* used in 2Kings 23:6 wherein the *Asherah* is in the house of God and Josiah takes it to the brook Kidron and burns it by the brook, and then stomps it into powder and scatters the dust (2Kings 23:6). This all makes much more sense if we understand these to be *figurines* of the goddess Asherah, rather than *groves* or some female

¹ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 359.

² *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 361.

³ See Scofield note for Judges 2:13 in *The New Scofield Reference Bible*; Dr. C.I. Scofield; ©1967 New York-Oxford University Press; pp. 290–291. See margin notes for 1Sam. 7:3–4 in New King James Version; Thomas Nelson Publishers; ©1994; p 245.

pantheon of deities. What this does indicate to us is that the plural or the singular form could refer to figurines; and therefore, it would be reasonable that the word Ashtoreth (or its plural form) could refer to a figurine or to figurines. This opinion that Ashtaroth refers to figurines was not known to be expressed until 1617 A.D. by Selden, a lawyer and an antiquarian (a student of ancient history).

- e. There is actually not a single instance where *Ashtaroth* or the singular *Ashtoreth* refers clearly to anything other than the goddess (or to a goddess pantheon).
 - f. *Ashtoreth* and *Ashtaroth* are not equivalent to ʿĀshêrâh (אֲשֵׁרָה) [pronounced *uh-shay-RAW*], which is generally transliterated *Asherah*. Strong's #842 BDB #81. She is not mentioned in the Bible with the patriarchs or with the kings over the single kingdom, but she is found in the book of Judges and after the split of the kingdom. She is coupled with Baal just as Ashtaroth is. *Asherah* refers both to the goddess and the statue (or statues) of the goddess. I have already quoted passages where it is clear that this name can refer to statuettes, figurines, or other man-made idols.
 - g. The old and often used translation for *Asherah*—*groves*—does not appear to be appropriate most of the time that we find it. Therefore, only a few modern translations follow suit. On the other hand, there are a few times (3 or 4) when the translation *grove* or *groves* is appropriate.
2. The Singular versus the Plural:
- a. *Ashtoreth* is singular and *Ashtaroth* is plural. Although we would like to have the former stand for the goddess and the latter stand for figurines, statues or images, such is not the case. 2Kings 23:6 makes it clear that the singular use of *Asherah* in this passage refers to a figurine.
 - b. Similarly, *Baal* (singular) and *Baalim* (plural) cannot be clearly associated with the deity and the figurines/images, respectively. Context, rather than number, determines the usage.
 - c. We have, in many ancient languages, what is called *pluralis excellentiæ*, which is *a form of speech designed to describe the god in the wide extent of his [or her] influence and the various modes of his manifestation*.⁴ That is, the plural form is used, even when speaking of a singular deity. The power and many manifestations of the deity are emphasized. Let me hypothesize that this is a reasonable explanation where we find the plural noun (*Baalim* or *Ashtaroth*) used with a singular verb. However, let me point out that, from the beginning, when the Bible speaks of God, it is *Elohim*, which is the plural of *God* (Gen. 1:1). In this situation, I believe that we are speaking of 2 or more members of the Godhead both acting in a particular situation. I would further postulate that reference to heathen gods in the plural is merely a Satanic copying of the divine title.

I think the best way to approach this is to simply look at each and every Scripture and determine from the context which usage appears to be the more likely. Bear in mind that these words may be used in more than one way. Judges 2:13 10:6 1Sam. 7:3–4 12:10 31:10

| Ashtaroth in Scripture | | | |
|--|-------------------|---|--|
| Scripture | Plural Excellence | Pantheon/Plural Usage | Figurines |
| Judges 2:11–14: <i>And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals. And they abandoned the LORD, the God of their fathers, who had brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went after other gods, from among the gods of the peoples who were around them, and bowed down to them. And they provoked the LORD to anger. They abandoned the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth.</i> | Possible usage. | Possible usage. I think the usage here refers most likely to just a grouping together of the various male and female gods of the heathen. | Possible usage. In the context, we have the Israelites bowing down to the gods (elohim) of the people around them, which sounds like physical idols; however, this can indicate worship for the gods which they idols represent. |

⁴ *Manners and Customs of the Bible*; James M. Freeman; reprinted in 1972 by Logos International; p. 120.

| Ashtaroth in Scripture | | | |
|---|-------------------------|--|---|
| Scripture | Plural Excellence | Pantheon/Plural Usage | Figurines |
| Judges 10:6: The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him. | Possible interpretation | I think again, as above, Baalim (or, <i>Baals</i>) and Ashtaroth refer to the male and female gods of the heathen, who are actually enumerated in this verse. | We do not seem to be speaking of figurines here, as <i>who</i> the Baals and Ashtaroth are, are enumerated below. |
| 1Sam. 7:3–4: And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the LORD with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only. | Possible interpretation | Again, I think the idea is, various Israelites were worshiping various heathen gods, enumerated back in Judges 2:11–13. That is, some Israelites might worship the gods and goddesses of Moab; others those of the Canaanites. | As representations of these false gods, Israelites probably had physical idols; and Samuel appears to be telling them to <i>put away these idols</i> . I think we might reasonably understand this usage to refer to both the gods and goddesses of the heathen as well as to the idols which represented those gods and goddesses. |
| 1Sam. 31:9–10: So they cut off his head and stripped off his armor and sent messengers throughout the land of the Philistines, to carry the good news to the house of their idols and to the people. They put his armor in the temple of Ashtaroth, and they fastened his body to the wall of Bethshan. | Possible interpretation | We are speaking of a particular temple here, representing a particular goddess, group of goddesses or goddess pantheon. In this temple is clearly found <i>idol figurines</i> , as this passage indicates. | As before, we may understand this to refer to the concept of a female deity (deities) as well as to the idols which would be in the temple. |

Although the plural excellence is a nice theory, at no time is this definitely an interpretation. In every case above, the word reasonably represents the goddesses worshiped by the heathen, which are also represented often by statues and statuettes.

[Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine](#)

[Return to the Chart and Map Index](#)

Again, we will examine every Scripture where the term *Ashtoreth* occurs. 1Kings 11:5, 33 2Kings 23:13

| Ashtoreth in Scripture | | |
|--|--|--|
| Scripture | A Particular Goddess | Figurines |
| Kings 11:5–8: For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. So Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and did not wholly follow the LORD, as David his father had done. Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem. And so he did for all his foreign wives, who made offerings and sacrificed to their gods. | We have an enumeration here of the various gods and goddesses which Solomon built worship areas for. Ashtoreth is specifically here called the goddess of the Sidonians, which appears most likely to be a particular goddess. | Although it is possible that figurines were set up in the place of worship for these gods and goddesses, the use in this passage appears to be what these idols represent. |
| 1Kings 11:33: ...because they have forsaken me and worshiped Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, Chemosh the god of Moab, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and they have not walked in my ways, doing what is right in my sight and keeping my statutes and my rules, as David his father did. | Identical to the usage of the passage above. | |
| 1Kings 23:13–14: And the king [Josiah] defiled the high places that were east of Jerusalem, to the south of the mount of corruption, which Solomon the king of Israel had built for Ashtoreth the abomination of the Sidonians, and for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. And he broke in pieces the pillars and cut down the Asherim and filled their places with the bones of men. | Used exactly the same as the previous two passages. | Notice that the term <i>Asherim</i> is used for the actual figurines which were destroyed. |

This is the singular of the word used above; and it is clearly used for a particular goddess, who would have been represented by figurines.

Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine

Return to the Chart and Map Index

3. The heathen worship, which the Israelites often adopted, involved horribly degenerate practices:
 - a. Sexual union with temple prostitutes (Deut. 23:17 1Kings 14:24 15:12 2Kings 23:7 Isa. 57:3–5a).
 - b. The murder of children in sacrificial rites to the various gods (Lev. 18:21 Psalm 106:37–38 Isa. 57:5b).
 - c. Apart from their worship, the heathen practiced homosexuality and bestiality (Lev. 18:22–30).
4. Mythology and legends about Ashtoreth:
 - a. In general, she was the goddess of fertility, love and war. She seems to be the equivalent of Astarte, the Phœnician goddess of fertility; as well as the Babylonian goddess, Ishtar; Athtart of Aram; Astarte or Aphrodite of Greece; and Venus of Rome.
 - b. She apparently represented morning and evening stars, and, as such, was considered to be androgynous in origin. She later became female under Semitic influence, yet seemed to retain almost an equal footing with the male gods in Assyria and Babylonia.⁵
 - c. According to some legends, she was the consort of the shepherd god Dumuzi (called Tammuz in Ezek. 8:14). She apparently wept for him at his seasonal death.⁶

⁵ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; Vol. I; pp. 270–271.

⁶ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 360.

- d. She is also thought to be the consort of Baal, their names occurring in tandem several times throughout Scripture. Similarly, Asherah was the goddess of war and fertility and the consort of El, who is the chief god of the Canaanites.
- e. In one of the myths concerning Ashtaroth (Inanna or Ištar—same goddess, different cultures),⁷ she goes down to the realm of the goddess of death, Ereshkigal (or, Irkalla). She is condemned in the underworld and stripped of her ritual garments and imprisoned as an impaled corpse.⁸
- f. Durant describes her thus: *Ishtar (Astarte to the Greeks, Ashtoreth to the Jews) interests us not only as analogue of the Egyptian Isis and prototype of the Grecian Aphrodite and the Roman Venus, but as the formal beneficiary of one of the strangest Babylonian customs. She was Demeter as well as Aphrodite—no mere goddess of physical beauty and love, but the gracious divinity of bounteous motherhood, the secret inspiration of the growing soil, and the creative principle everywhere. It is impossible to find much harmony, from a modern point of view, in the attributes and functions of Ishtar: she was the gods of war as well as of love, of prostitutes as well as of mothers; she called herself “a compassionate courtesan”; she was represented sometimes as a bearded bisexual deity, sometimes as a nude female offering her breasts to suck; and though her worshipers repeatedly addressed her as “The virgin,” “The Holy Virgin,” and “The Virgin Mother,” this merely meant that her amours were free from all taint of wedlock.*⁹

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Hyperlinks](#)

5. Extra-Biblical information concerning Ashtaroth:
 - a. Ashtaroth is the mother goddess who was worshipped in the Near East and elsewhere in the ancient world.
 - b. Her figurines are found in sites that go back as far as the Lower Paleolithic.
 - c. The earliest written documents mentioning Ashtaroth are from the Mesopotamian Sumerian mention of the goddess Inanna. The indication is that worship of her goes back as far as the fourth millennium B.C. in southern Iraq.¹⁰
 - d. There was apparently a strong sexual aspect with regards to the worship of Ashtaroth in every culture in which she appeared. In Erech, in Babylonia, prostitution was practiced in her name, with groups of men and women who were employed apparently as priests and priestesses and practiced immoral rites with worshipers.
 - e. The sexual aspects were either de-emphasized or not practiced in Assyria, where she reigned more as a goddess of war.
 - f. Each year in Sumeria and later in Babylon, there was the marriage ritual at the national akītu festival, a part of the New Year's festivities, during which a temple prostitute and the king enacted the marriage between Dumuzi and Inanna.
 - g. She is also mentioned several stelae from the Middle Kingdom period of Egypt, in the papyri of the New Kingdom; and in Syria-Palestine, she is depicted in art with Egyptian clothes and attributes.¹¹
 - h. 'Athtart is often found in the Ugaritic tablets from Ras Shamra, being the main character in eleven contexts. She and Ba'al hang out in many of these.¹²
6. Scriptural references:
 - a. Obviously from Judges 2:13, the name Ashtaroth is connected with heathen worship: [And so they forsook Jehovah and served the Baal and the Ashtaroth.](#) Ditto for Judges 10:6: [Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of Jehovah, and served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Syria, the](#)

⁷ Inanna is apparently Sumerian and Ištar is Akkadian. Evidence of them being identical is given in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 360.

⁸ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 360, from the myth *Inanna/Ištar's Descent to the Nether World*.

⁹ *The Story of Civilization; Volume I Our Oriental Heritage*; Will Durant; MJF Books; ©1963; p. 235.

¹⁰ *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 360.

¹¹ Paraphrased from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1, p. 360.

¹² More mentions are given on p. 360 of *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 1.

gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines. In this way, they forsook Jehovah and they did not serve Him.

- b. During the period of the judges, there were periods of time when the Israelites, or a pocket of the Israelites, did forsake the Baals and Ashtaroth and served God (Judges 10:10 1Sam. 12:10).
- c. Samuel spoke to all the house of Israel, saying, "If you return to Jehovah with all your heart, remove the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your hearts to Jehovah and serve Him alone, then He will deliver you from the hand of the Philistines. So the sons of Israel removed the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and served Jehovah alone (1Sam. 7:1–2).
- d. The alliance with Ashtaroth involved war and allegiance for the purpose of being blessed in war. The Philistines found Saul's dead body and cut his head off, stored the weapons of Saul and his sons in the temple of Ashtaroth, and then hung Saul's body up in degradation (1Sam. 31:8–9).
- e. When Solomon became older, his wives turned his heart away from God and toward their various heathen gods and goddesses, including Ashtaroth (1Kings 11:4–9).
- f. Because of this evil, God would split up the kingdom under Solomon's son, giving ten tribes over to Jeroboam (1Kings 11:26–39).
- g. Some of the great reforms under Josiah included tearing down of the high places built for the various gods of the heathen, including Ashtaroth (2Kings 23:1–14).

[Return to Top of Page](#)

[Hyperlinks](#)

7. The research and opinions of theologians:

- a. Easton: *The moon goddess of the Phoenicians, representing the passive principle in nature, their principal female deity; frequently associated with the name of Baal, the sun-god, their chief male deity (Judges 10:6 1Sam. 7:4 12:10). These names often occur in the plural (Ashtaroth, Baalim), probably as indicating either different statues or different modifications of the deities. This deity is spoken of as Ashtoreth of the Zidonians. She was the Ishtar of the Accadians and the Astarte of the Greeks (Jer. 44:17 1Kings 11:5, 33 2Kings 23:13). There was a temple of this goddess among the Philistines in the time of Saul (1Sam. 31:10). Under the name of Ishtar, she was one of the great deities of the Assyrians. The Phoenicians called her Astarte. Solomon introduced the worship of this idol (1Kings 11:33). Jezebel's 400 priests were probably employed in its service (1Kings 18:19). It was called the "queen of heaven" (Jer. 44:25).*¹³
- b. Fausset: *The chief goddess of the Phoenicians, as Baal was the male. By the plural (ASHTAROTH, Baalim: Judges 10:6 1Sam. 7:4) different phases of the same deity, according to the different places of worship, are indicated. Always plural until under Solomon Ashtoreth or Astarte of Zidon was introduced (1Kings 11:3, 5). She appears among the Philistines as the idol in whose temple they hung up Saul's armor (1Sam. 31:10). She is identified as Ishtar or Nana, the planetary Venus among the Assyrian gods in inscriptions. Her name appears also in Cyprian and Carthaginian monuments; and on the sarcophagus of a king Esmunazar, who restored her temple at Zidon, along with his mother her priestess, Am-ashtoreth. She partly represents the planet Venus, partly the moon, "the queen of heaven" (Jer. 7:18 44:17–18). (See ASHTEROTH–KARNAIM). Our "star," Greek "aster," Latin stella, is akin. Her worship was most licentious and abominable; closely connected with that of (See ASHERAH, "THE GROVE". Ashtoreh is the goddess, asherah "the grove," the image or the symbol of the goddess, of wood; asher, yashar, "to be straight," a straight stem of a tree living, or fixed upright (1Kings 18:19 2Kings 21:7 2Kings 23:6 2Kings 23:13–14 2Kings 23:15 Judges 6:25 Judges 6:30). The "bringing out the asherah from the house of the Lord," and the "cutting down," suit such a symbol, not a grace in our sense. The active and passive powers of nature, generative and receptive, suggested the male and female deities, Baal and Ashtoreh. The ewes of a flock were called Ashteroth on this principle, propagating the flock (Deut. 7:13). The earliest worship of apostasy was that of the sun, moon, etc. This naturally was grafted on idol worship, Baal sometimes being the sun god, sometimes distinct (2Kings 23:5). So Ashtoreh and the moon. The stone pillar was the symbol of Baal, as the sacred tree was the symbol of Ashtoreh; stone marking his strength as the male, the tree her fruitfulness (Deut. 16:21). The sacred tree constantly accompanies the gods in the Assyrian monuments. In the*

¹³ M.G. Easton M.A., D.D., *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; 1897; from e-Sword, topic: Ashtoreth.

*Moabite Dibon stone the male form Astar is prefixed to Chamos or Chemosh, answering to the female Astarte. Identical with Athtar or Athtor of the Himyeritic inscriptions, and Estar of the Ninevite inscriptions; the Canaanite form of the male Aphroditos answering to the female Aphrodite.*¹⁴

- c. Smith: *The principal female divinity of the Phoenicians, called Ishtar by the Assyrians and Astarte by the Greeks and Romans. She was, by some ancient writers, identified with the moon. But, on the other hand, the Assyrian Ishtar was not the moon-goddess, but the planet Venus; and Astarte was by many identified with the goddess Venus (or Aphrodite), as well as with the plant of that name. It is certain that the worship of Astarte became identified with that of Venus, and that this worship was connected with the most impure rites is apparent from the close connection of this goddess with Asherah (1Kings 11:5, 33 2Kings 23:13).*¹⁵
- d. Smith (on Ashtaroth): *Ash'taroth. Ash'taroth and once As'taroth. (a star). A city on the east of Jordan in Bashan, in the kingdom of Og, doubtless so called from being a seat of the worship of the goddess of the same name (Deut. 1:4 Joshua 9:10 12:4 13:1).*¹⁶

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia¹⁷ is certainly going to have a take on this:

ISBE's take on Ashtoreth

1. Name and Origin

The name of the supreme goddess of Canaan and the female counterpart of Baal.

The name and cult of the goddess were derived from Babylonia, where Ishtar represented the evening and morning stars and was accordingly androgynous in origin. Under Semitic influence, however, she became solely female, but retained a memory of her primitive character by standing, alone among the Assyro-Bab goddesses, on a footing of equality with the male divinities. From Babylonia the worship of the goddess was carried to the Semites of the West, and in most instances the feminine suffix was attached to her name; where this was not the case the deity was regarded as a male. On the Moabite Stone, for example, 'Ashtar is identified with Chemosh, and in the inscriptions of southern Arabia 'Athtar is a god. On the other hand, in Atar-gatis or Derketo (2 Macc. 12:26), Atar, without the feminine suffix, is identified with the goddess 'Athah or 'Athi (Greek Gatis). The cult of the Greek Aphrodite in Cyprus was borrowed from that of Ashtoreth; whether the Greek name also is a modification of Ashtoreth, as has often been maintained, is doubtful.

2. Attributes of the Goddess

In Babylonia and Assyria Ishtar was the goddess of love and war. An old Babylonian legend related how the descent of Ishtar into Hades in search of her dead husband, Tammuz, was followed by the cessation of marriage and birth in both earth and heaven, while the temples of the goddess at Nineveh and Arbela, around which the two cities afterward grew up, were dedicated to her as the goddess of war. As such she appeared to one of Assur-bani-pal's seers and encouraged the Assyrian king to march against Elam. The other goddesses of Babylonia, who were little more than reflections of the god, tended to merge into Ishtar who thus became a type of the female divinity, a personification of the productive principle in nature, and more especially the mother and creatress of mankind.

The chief seat of the worship of Ishtar in Babylonia was Erech, where prostitution was practiced in her name, and she was served with immoral rites by bands of men and women. In Assyria, where the warlike side of the goddess was predominant, no such rites seem to have been practiced, and, instead, prophetesses were attached to her temples to whom she delivered oracles.

3. Ashtoreth as a Moon-Goddess

In Canaan, Ashtoreth, as distinguished from the male 'Ashtar, dropped her warlike attributes, but in contradistinction to Ashe^{ra}, whose name and cult had also been imported from Assyria, became, on the one

¹⁴ Andrew Robert Fausset, *Fausset's Bible Dictionary*; from e-Sword, topic: Ashtoreth.

¹⁵ Dr. William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*; 1894; from e-Sword, topic: Ashtoreth.

¹⁶ Dr. William Smith, *Smith's Bible Dictionary*; 1894; from e-Sword, topic: Ashtaroth.

¹⁷ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Ashtoreth.

ISBE's take on Ashtoreth

hand, the colorless consort of Baal, and on the other hand, a moon-goddess. In Babylonia the moon was a god, but after the rise of the solar theology, when the larger number of the Babylonian gods were resolved into forms of the sun-god, their wives also became solar, Ishtar, "the daughter of Sin" the moon-god, remaining identified with the evening-star. In Canaan, however, when the solar theology had absorbed the older beliefs, Baal, passing into a sun-god and the goddess who stood at his side becoming a representative of the moon - the pale reflection, as it were, of the sun - Ashtoreth came to be regarded as the consort of Baal and took the place of the solar goddesses of Babylonia.

4. The Local Ashtaroth

Hence there were as "many Ashtoreths" or Ashtaroth as Baals. They represented the various forms under which the goddess was worshipped in different localities (Judges 10:6 1Sam. 7:4, 12:10, etc.). Sometimes she was addressed as Naamah, "the delightful one," Greek Astro-noe, the mother of Eshmun and the Cabeiri. The Philistines seem to have adopted her under her warlike form (1Sam. 31:10 the King James Version reading "Ashtoreth," as Septuagint), but she was more usually the moon-goddess (Lucian, *De Dea Syriac.*, 4; Herodian, v.6, 10), and was accordingly symbolized by the horns of a cow. See ASHTAROTH-KARNAIM. At Ashkelon, where Herodotus (i.105) places her most ancient temple, she was worshipped under the name of Atar-gatis, as a woman with the tail of a fish, and fish were accordingly sacred to her. Elsewhere the dove was her sacred symbol. The immoral rites with which the worship of Ishtar in Babylonia was accompanied were transferred to Canaan (Deut. 23:18) and formed part of the idolatrous practices which the Israelites were called upon to extirpate.

[Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine](#)

[Return to the Chart and Map Index](#)

The plural of Ashtoreth is Ashtaroth. ISBE¹⁸ also covers this.

ISBE on Ashtaroth

Ashtaroth is the plural of ASHTORETH (which see). The name denotes a place associated with the worship of this goddess. Ashteroth-karnaim is mentioned only once in canonical Scripture unless we accept Gratz's restoration, when Karnaim appears as a city taken by Israel: "Have we not taken to us horns (karnayim) by our own strength?" (Amo 6:13). It is identical with Carnion or Carnaim of 1 and 2 Macc, a city of Gilead with a temple of Atar-gatis. The name Ashtaroth has been identified with A`stertu in the lists of Tahutmes III of the 18th Egyptian Dynasty; and with Asharti of the Tell el-Amarna Letters. Its claim to antiquity is therefore well established.

As far as the Biblical record is concerned, the names at the head of this article might stand for one and the same city, Ashtaroth being a contraction from Ashteroth-karnaim. But in the days of Eusebius and Jerome, we learn from the Onomasticon, there were two forts of this name 9 miles apart, lying between Adara (Der'ah) and Abila (Abi'l), while Ashtaroth, the ancient city of Og, king of Bashan, lay 6 miles from Adara. Carnaim Ashtaroth, which is evidently identical with Ashteroth-karnaim, they describe as a large village in the angle of Bashan where tradition places the home of Job. This seems to point to Tell 'Ashtara, a hill which rises about 80 ft. above the plain, 2 miles South of el-Merkez, the seat of the governor of the Haura'n. Three-quarters of a mile North of el-Merkez, at the south end of a ridge on which the village of Sheikh Sa'ad is built, stands the weley of the stone of Job, Weley Sakhret 'Ayyu'b. By the large stone under the dome Job was said to have sat to receive his friends during his affliction. An Egyptian inscription, found by Schumacher, proves the stone to be a monument of the time of Rameses II. At the foot of the hill is pointed out the bath of Job. In el-Merkez the building known as Deir 'Ayyu'b, "Monastery of Job," is now part of the barracks. There is also shown the tomb of Job. The stream which flows southward past Tell 'Ashtara, is called Moyet en-Neby 'Ayyu'b, "stream of the prophet Job," and is said to have risen where the patriarch stamped his foot on his recovery. It is to be noted also that the district lying in the angle formed by Nahr er-Rakka'd and the Yarmu'k River is called to this day

¹⁸ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*; James Orr, Editor; ©1956 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; © by Hendrickson Publishers; from E-Sword; Topic: Ashtaroth.

ISBE on Ashtaroth

ez-Za^{wiyet} esh-shar^{ki}-yeh, “the eastern angle” (i.e. of the Jaulaⁿ). The term may in Jerome's time have covered the land east of the 'Allaⁿ, although this is now part of the Hauraⁿ. At Tell 'Ashtaraⁿ there are remains pointing to a high antiquity. The site was also occupied during the Middle Ages. Perhaps here we should locate Carnaim Ashtaroth of the Onomasticon. It does not, however, agree with the description of Carnaim in 1 and 2 Macc. The Ashtaroth of the Onomasticon may have been at el-Muze^{ri}-b, on the great pilgrimage road, about 6 Roman miles from Der'ahⁿ - the distance indicated by Eusebius. The old fortress here was situated on an island in the middle of the lake, Ba^{heiret} el-Bajjeh. A full description of the place is given in Schumacher's *Across the Jordan*, 137ff. It must have been a position of great strength in antiquity; but the ancient name has not been recovered.

Some would place Ashteroth-karnaim, the Carnaim of the Maccabees, at Tell 'Ash'ari, a site 10 Roman miles North of Der'ah, and 4 1/2 Roman miles S 2 of Tell 'Ashtaraⁿ. This clearly was “a place hard to besiege, and difficult of access by reason of the narrowness of the approaches on all sides” (2 Macc 12:21). It crowns a promontory which stands out between the deep gorge of the Yarmu^k River and a great chasm, at the head of which is a waterfall. It could be approached only by the neck connecting it with the mainland; and here it was guarded by a triple wall, the ruins of which are seen today. The remains of a temple close by the bridge over the Yarmu^k may mark the scene of the slaughter by Judas.

The whole question however is obscure. Eusebius is clearly guilty of confusion, with his two Ashtaroth-karnaims and his Carnaim Ashtaroth. All the places we have named lie considerably North of a line drawn from Tell Abiⁿ to Der'ah. For light upon the problem of identification we must wait the results of excavation.

[Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine](#)

[Return to the Chart and Map Index](#)

I have not done a very good job here when it comes to editing; so let me sum up the most pertinent information:

A Summary of the Doctrine of Ashtoreth

1. Both Ashtoreth and Ashtaroth refer to a goddess in the ancient world. Ashtaroth is the plural of Ashtoreth; however, this does not mean that Ashtaroth necessarily refers to figurines or idols (it doesn't); but it may refer to a goddess pantheon.
2. Ashtoreth is variously thought of as a goddess of fertility, love, and/or war. She might be thought of as the moon goddess or possibly as the goddess of Venus. These different attributes were predominant in different cultures; that is, Ashtoreth could be very sexual in one culture; and very warlike in another.
3. A reasonable assumption is, these various goddesses of the different cultures actually had different names and different characteristics; however, the Bible gives them all the name Ashtoreth (Ashtaroth).
4. The designation *the virgin mother* or the *holy virgin* was originally applied to this goddess (or, to some of the goddesses referred to in Scripture as Ashtoreth).
5. This goddess is also presented as being bi-sexual or dual-sexual (an hermaphrodite).
6. Similarly, Baalim is the plural of Baal. Baal is a well-known god of the ancient world.
7. The heathen worship, which the Israelites often adopted, involved horribly degenerate practices:
 - a. Sexual union with temple prostitutes (Deut. 23:17 1Kings 14:24 15:12 2Kings 23:7 Isa. 57:3–5a).
 - b. The murder of children in sacrificial rites to the various gods (Lev. 18:21 Psalm 106:37–38 Isa. 57:5b).
 - c. Apart from their worship, the heathen practiced homosexuality and bestiality (Lev. 18:22–30).
8. Asherah is possibly a related word, although it is debatable whether Asherah is equivalent to Ashtoreth. However, when we find Asherah and Asherim, often these words refer to figurines or idols. Sometimes, this is translated *groves*, which is where idolatry was practiced. However, this is only a reasonable translation 3 or 4 times.

[Return to the Beginning of the Doctrine](#)

[Return to the Chart and Map Index](#)