

# The Doctrine of Baalim

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1. We have covered the **Doctrine of Baal** back in Num. 22:41. Generally speaking, it refers to a Canaanite deity, yet not their top god.
2. The *im* ending for a Hebrew word marks it as a plural, so Baalim is simply a transliteration which we might think of as meaning *Baals*. *Baalim* occurs in the following verses: Judges 2:11 3:7 8:33 10:6, 10 1Sam. 7:4 12:10 1Kings 18:18 2Chron. 17:3 24:7 28:2 33:3 34:4 Jer. 2:23 9:14 Hosea 2:13, 17 11:2.
3. There is apparently a raging debate as to whether (1) *Baalim* refers to a heathen pantheon of gods; whether (2) *Baalim* is the what as known as *pluralis excellentiae*, which is where the plural is used rather than the singular *to describe the god in the wide extent of his influence and the various modes of his manifestation*;<sup>1</sup> whether (3) *Baalim* refers to the images of Baal and the other gods; or whether (4) *Baalim* is just the simple plural usage of *Baal*. The short answer to that is that we can interpret it as meaning any combination of these. Before I cover these four viewpoints, let me explain that some theologians get an idea that seems good to them, based up the implications of perhaps one passage, and they run with it. Without carefully examining relevant Scripture, these ideas often appear, at their face, valid. However, you should never allow yourself to be swayed unless a good theory is backed up by Scripture. Furthermore, when you have a good idea, you must test it out with God's Word. There have been times that I came up with good ideas, notions and interpretations, that, upon further and closer examination, I had to discard because they did not line up with God's Word.

I have found that the easiest way to determine which of these interpretations is correct is to examine each and every passage where we find *Baalim* and let that context guide us. Judges 2:11 3:7 8:33 10:6, 10 1Sam. 7:4 12:10 1Kings 18:18 2Chron. 17:3 24:7 28:2 33:3 34:4 Jer. 2:23 9:14 Hosea 2:13, 17 11:2.

The Occurrences of Baalim (Baals) in Scripture	
Scripture	Interpretation
Judges 2:10–13: <a href="#">And all that generation also were gathered to their fathers. And there arose another generation after them who did not know the LORD or the work that he had done for Israel. 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.</a>	The usage of <i>Baalim</i> here appears to simply refer to heathen gods, but not necessarily to a pantheon of gods or to a particular god, but just to the various gods of the heathen. <i>Bowing down to them</i> indicates that we are speaking of idol worship as well; so <i>Baalim</i> here seems to refer both to the <i>gods of the heathen</i> as well as to the <i>idols of the heathen</i> .

<sup>1</sup> *Manners and Customs of the Bible*; James M. Freeman; reprinted in 1972 by Logos International; p. 120.

The Occurrences of Baalim (Baals) in Scripture	
Scripture	Interpretation
Judges 3:5–7: So the people of Israel lived among the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Amorites, the Perizzites, the Hivites, and the Jebusites. And their daughters they took to themselves for wives, and their own daughters they gave to their sons, and they served their gods. And the people of Israel did what was evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God and served the Baals and the Asheroth.	The entire context is required here to get the full impact of this verse; we are actually transitioning between vv. 6 and 7, from general to specific. However, even in the specific sense, Israel is serving the <i>Baals and the Asheroth</i> (this is the plural of <i>Asherah</i> ). We have some specific instances in Scripture where both
Judges 10:6–8: 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. So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines and into the hand of the Ammonites, and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year.	<i>Baals and Ashtaroth</i> here are simply used in the plural in order to name the various gods of the people named in context.
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.	The usage here appears to be the same as that above; in the simple plural form. Since these things are <i>put away</i> , the implication is, we are speaking of idols and figurines as well. They first worship the gods and goddesses of the heathen, which requires them to have figurines and statuettes as a part of their worship.
1Sam. 12:10: And they cried out to the LORD and said, 'We have sinned, because we have forsaken the LORD and have served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. But now deliver us out of the hand of our enemies, that we may serve you.'	This use seems to be consistent with the use above; the plural of both nouns is found here.
1Kings 18:18–19: And Elijah answered, "I have not troubled Israel, but you have, and your father's house, because you have abandoned the commandments of the LORD and followed the Baals. Now therefore send and gather all Israel to me at Mount Carmel, and the 450 prophets of Baal and the 400 prophets of Asherah, who eat at Jezebel's table."	Since we have <i>Baal</i> and <i>Baalim</i> here, it would make less sense for <i>Baalim</i> to be the plural of great import; therefore, referring to the variety of heathen gods is a more likely usage here.
2Chron. 17:3–4: The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals, but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel.	Again, <i>Baalim</i> appears to be a simple plural here.
2Chron. 24:7: For the sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken into the house of God, and had also used all the dedicated things of the house of the LORD for the Baals.	The simple plural usage fits well here, as above.

The Occurrences of Baalim (Baals) in Scripture	
Scripture	Interpretation
2Chron. 34:2–4: <a href="#">And he did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, and walked in the ways of David his father; and he did not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. For in the eighth year of his reign, while he was yet a boy, he began to seek the God of David his father, and in the twelfth year he began to purge Judah and Jerusalem of the high places, the Asherim, and the carved and the metal images. And they chopped down the altars of the Baals in his presence, and he cut down the incense altars that stood above them. And he broke in pieces the Asherim and the carved and the metal images, and he made dust of them and scattered it over the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.</a>	Here, the images are clearly differentiated from <i>Baalim</i> ; however, it also appears as though <i>Asherim</i> is used to represent images and idols (which is consistent with where it is found elsewhere in Scripture).
Jer. 2:23–24: <a href="#">How can you say, 'I am not unclean, I have not gone after the Baals'? Look at your way in the valley; know what you have done-- a restless young camel running here and there, a wild donkey used to the wilderness, in her heat sniffing the wind! Who can restrain her lust? None who seek her need weary themselves; in her month they will find her.</a>	Consistent with the typical plural usage.
Jer. 9:13–14: <a href="#">And the LORD says: "Because they have forsaken My law that I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice or walked in accord with it, but have stubbornly followed their own hearts and have gone after the Baals, as their fathers taught them.</a>	Consistent with plural usage.
Hosea 2:13: <a href="#">And I will punish her for the feast days of the Baals when she burned offerings to them and adorned herself with her ring and jewelry, and went after her lovers and forgot me, declares the LORD.</a>	This is one of the few places where <i>Baalim</i> could refer to a pantheon of gods or to the intensive plural. It could also be a simple plural usage as well.
Hosea 2:17: <a href="#">For I will remove the names of the Baals from her mouth, and they shall be remembered by name no more.</a>	This is in the same chapter as the previous verse, and indicates either a pantheon of gods or the simple plural usage.
Hosea 11:1–2: <a href="#">When Israel was a child, I loved him, and out of Egypt I called my son. The more they were called, the more they went away; they kept sacrificing to the Baals and burning offerings to idols.</a>	Here, <i>Baalim</i> is spoken of separately from the idols, although they could be seen as equivalent in this passage. Seeing it as a simple plural is also consistent with the context.
What we find over and over again, is the use of <i>Baalim</i> is consistently reasonably thought of as a simple plural; and occasionally, as a possible reference to the idols used in the worship of the <i>Baals</i> . So, even though we could see this as a pantheon of gods or as an intensive plural on occasion, there is no context which requires us to understand this plural form of <i>Baal</i> in the same way.	

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4. The reasons in favor of Baalim standing for the images which represent Baal (and the other gods):
  - a. This occurs in tandem with Asheroth, which is though by some to refer to the images of Asherah (Judges 3:7).

5. The reasons in favor of Baalim standing for one god, but in sort of a big way:
  - a. This is a theory held mostly by those who hold to the theory the Elohim refers to One God. To support that Elohim refers to One God or to a Unity of Plurality, we often have the plural noun but a singular verb (Gen. 1:1). We don't, however, find this with the word *Baalim*.
6. The reasons in favor of Baalim standing for the pantheon of gods:
  - a. We do not have verbs such as *set up*, *cast down*, *adorn* or *break* used with Baalim. This is what we would expect when dealing with this noun if it referred simply to images.
  - b. In connection to Baalim, we usually find the verbs *serve* (Judges 2:11 3:7), *worship* (Judges 2:11 3:7—it depends upon the translation), *seek* (2Chron. 17:3), *go after* (Jer. 2:23), *follow after* (1Kings 18:18), and *put away* (1Sam. 7:4). Obviously, the latter verb could go either way.
  - c. That Baalim refers to a pantheon of gods is fairly clear by Hosea 2:17: “For I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth, so that they will be mentioned by their names no more.”
  - d. The most convincing argument that these refer to a pantheon and not to the states or images is 2Chron. 28:2, which reads: **But he [Jotham] walked in the ways of the kings of Israel; he also made molten images for the Baalim.** Obviously, Jotham wasn't making images to represent other images.
  - e. That Baalim generally stands for the pantheon of gods and that Asheroth stands for the images of female deities can be seen clearly in 2Chron. 33:3: **For he [Manasseh] rebuilt the high places which Hezekiah his father had broken down; he also erected altars for the Baalim and made Asheroth and worshiped all the host of heaven and served them.** This is also obvious in 2Chron. 34:4: **And they tore down the altars of the Baalim in his presence, and the incense altars that were high above them he chopped down; also the Asherim,<sup>2</sup> the carved images, and the molten images he broke into pieces and ground to powder and scattered it on the graves of those who had sacrificed to them.**
  - f. That Baalim stands for several gods as opposed to the term standing for one heathen god is found in Hosea 2:17: “For I will remove the names of the Baalim from her mouth, so that they will be remembered by their names no more.” It would be reasonable for these names to refer to the many local Baal's, such as Baal-Peor (Num. 25:3, 5 Deut. 4:3), Baal-Berith (Judges 8:33 9:4), and Baal-Zebub (2Kings 1:2, 3, 6, 16).
7. **Conclusion:** I think that we can safely conclude that whenever we find the word *Baalim*, that it refers to heathen gods in the plural, but not necessarily a pantheon of gods.

I have found that it is helpful to abbreviate doctrines and place them within the exegesis.

### The Abbreviated Doctrine of Baalim

1. There are 4 possible interpretations of the use of the word *Baalim* (translated *Baals*, *lords*, *Baalim*):
  - a. This can be the intensive plural usage, as *Elohim* is occasionally used; when the noun often takes a singular verb, even though it is a plural noun.
  - b. This word can be used to refer to a specific pantheon of gods worshiped by the heathen.
  - c. *Baalim* could be a simple plural noun, referring to the variety of gods worshiped by the surrounding heathen.
  - d. *Baalim* might refer to the idols, carved images, and statuettes so often found among the heathen and in heathen Baal worship.
2. In several passages, it is clear that this simply refers to the several gods worshiped by the heathen (Judges 3:5–7 10:6–8 Hosea 2:17).
3. There is at least one instance where this may be reasonably interpreted as referring to the images and idols of Baal worship (1Sam. 7:3–4).
4. There are a few instances where this word *might* be seen as an intensive plural or referring to a pantheon of gods; however, there is no passage which is so compelling as to demand that interpretation.
5. The plural use of the noun; and its occasional use to refer to the images and idols, is a consistent application of this plural noun, which does no damage that I can see to the interpretation of any of the

<sup>2</sup> It is Asherim and not Ashtaroth here.

## The Abbreviated Doctrine of Baalim

passages wherein the word I found.

If you would like to confirm this for yourself, either go to the complete doctrine of Baalim or examine the passages for yourself: Judges 2:11 3:7 8:33 10:6, 10 1Sam. 7:4 12:10 1Kings 18:18 2Chron. 17:3 24:7 28:2 33:3 34:4 Jer. 2:23 9:14 Hosea 2:13, 17 11:2.

You may think, *this is a lot of time to spend on this little word*; or, if you went to the doctrine itself, which is 5 pages long, you might think, *this is way too much time to spend on this little word*; the idea is, I want it to be clear what the meaning of the word is; and that there are no questions or preconceived notions to be applied; whether you spend anytime learning the entire doctrine is a whole other question.

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