



Draft a brief description of the two gods in 1 Kings 11:5. What was the cult around them? What did they promise? What was worship like? "Solomon followed Ashtoreth, the goddess of the Sidonians, and Milcom, the abhorrent idol of the Ammonites."

In 1 Kings 11:5, Ashtoreth and Milcom represent the official or major gods of two neighboring peoples: Sidon/Phoenicia and Ammon. The verse's concern is not merely that Solomon knew of other deities, but that he "followed" them—giving allegiance and creating sanctioned places of worship that competed with exclusive covenant loyalty to Yahweh.

Ashtoreth of the Sidonians

Ashtoreth is the Hebrew form of *Astarte*, a prominent Phoenician and wider Northwest Semitic goddess, related in the ancient Near Eastern religious world to figures such as Ishtar. Sidon and Tyre were important Phoenician port cities, and Astarte was especially associated with Phoenician civic and royal religion.^[1]

- **Sphere and promise:** She was associated with fertility, sexuality, reproduction, prosperity, and at times political or military power. In an agricultural society, devotion to such a deity offered an appealing promise: fertile fields, healthy livestock, successful pregnancies, family continuity, and material flourishing.
- **Cult setting:** Worship normally involved shrines, temples, altars, offerings, votive gifts, incense, feasts, prayers, and processions. She was often worshiped in connection with Baal, the storm and fertility god, because rain, crops, human fertility, and communal well-being were understood as interwoven.
- **What worship was like:** The evidence supports a material and ritual cult involving images, offerings, sacred sites, and rites seeking divine favor. Claims that every Astarte cult universally required "temple prostitution" should be stated cautiously: sexualized religious imagery and fertility symbolism are clear, but the older sweeping popular picture of formal temple prostitution as a standard, documented practice is more disputed among modern scholars.
- **Biblical contrast:** A fertility cult could tempt Israel because it seemed practical and immediate: if rains fail or a family longs for children, turn to the god or goddess said to control those outcomes. Scripture's polemic insists instead that Yahweh—not a nature deity—is the giver of rain, harvest, life, and blessing.

Milcom of the Ammonites

Milcom (also spelled Milkom) was the chief or a major national deity of the Ammonites, Israel's neighbor east of the Jordan. The Bible calls him the “abomination” or “detestable thing” of Ammon—a theological judgment, not a neutral description. He appears both in biblical texts and in Ammonite archaeological material, including inscriptions and seals.^[2]

- **Sphere and promise:** The name is related to the Semitic word for “king,” and Milcom appears to have been a god of royal, national, and protective significance. His cult likely offered security for Ammon's king and people: strength, protection, victory, stability, and national survival. Archaeological evidence associates Milcom with descriptions such as exalted, strong, and benevolent, as well as bull and astral imagery.^[2]
- **Cult setting:** Like other ancient national cults, his worship likely centered on shrines or high places, altars, sacrifices, vows, prayers, and royal or state-sponsored devotion. An Amman Citadel inscription is understood to contain an oracle associated with Milcom, suggesting that his worship could include seeking divine guidance.^[2]
- **Milcom and Molech:** The relationship between Milcom and *Molech/Moloch* is debated. Biblical passages sometimes place the names close together—1 Kings 11:7 uses Molech where 11:5 has Milcom—so older interpreters often equated them. Many scholars, however, distinguish the evidence carefully: Milcom is securely an Ammonite deity, while the precise meaning of *Molech* and its relationship to sacrifice terminology remain contested.
- **Child sacrifice:** Biblical law and prophetic texts strongly condemn the passing of children “through the fire” for Molech. It is therefore appropriate to say that the biblical tradition links Molech-related worship with child sacrifice and treats it as utterly incompatible with Israel's worship of Yahweh. But 1 Kings 11:5 itself does **not** say Solomon offered children, and the direct evidence does not allow us to reconstruct every detail of Milcom's cult as though it were identical with later Molech practices.^[3]

A concise teaching description

Ashtoreth was the Sidonian/Phoenician goddess associated with fertility, sexuality, prosperity, and power. Her worship offered the hope of fruitful land, livestock, families, and commercial well-being through offerings and rites at local shrines and temples.

Milcom was the national god of the Ammonites, associated with royal authority, protection, strength, and the welfare of the nation. His worship sought security, divine guidance, and victory through state-supported cultic devotion, altars, vows, and sacrifice.

Both cults made visible, tangible promises—fertility, prosperity, protection, and power. In 1 Kings 11, Solomon's sin was giving such gods the allegiance that Israel's covenant reserved for Yahweh alone.^[1] ^[2]

Important interpretive point

The heart of the passage is allegiance. Ancient people did not normally think of worship as a private opinion about gods; worship was a way of seeking life, protection, rain, children, military success, and political stability. Solomon's accommodation therefore communicated that Yahweh was insufficient for those needs. The narrative rejects that conclusion: Israel's king was to rely on Yahweh alone rather than import the worship systems of his foreign alliances.

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1. <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Astarte-ancient-deity>
2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Milcom>
3. <https://jewishvirtuallibrary.org/the-cult-of-moloch>
4. https://biblehub.com/topical/a/ashtoreth,_chemosh,_milcom.htm
5. <https://www.studylight.org/commentary/1-kings/11-5.html>
6. <https://christianitypath.com/1-kings-11-5/>
7. <https://uasvbible.org/2026/02/26/the-abomination-of-ashtoreth-astarte-queen-of-heaven-and-the-corruption-of-covenant-worship/>
8. <http://www.kukis.org/Doctrines/Ashtoreth.htm>
9. <https://divinenarratives.org/ashtoreth-origins-worship-and-influence-on-israelite-religion/>
10. <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/dictionary/milcom/>
11. <https://biblehub.com/topical/a/ash'toreth.htm>
12. https://biblehub.com/commentaries/1_kings/11-5.htm
13. <https://www.academia.edu/45308764/Milcom>
14. <https://leonmauldin.blog/2023/11/20/the-gods-of-the-ammonites/>
15. <https://www.bibleocity.com/1-Kings/11/5>