

## **Naked Bible Podcast Transcript**

**Episode 423**

**The Queen of Heaven**

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### **Episode Summary**

The “queen of heaven” is an enigmatic deity figure that appears in Scripture in a handful of verses (Jer 7:18; 44:17-19, 25). Who was the queen of heaven to whom the people of Judah were offering idolatrous sacrifice? What can be known of her? Can she be identified with a named ancient Near Eastern goddess? This episode of the podcast entertains these and other questions with our guest, Dr. Peter Goeman.

### **Transcript**

**TS:** Welcome to the Naked Bible Podcast, Episode 423: Queen of Heaven, with Dr. Peter Goeman. I’m the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he’s the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hey, Mike? How are you doing?

**MH:** Well, I’m not doing too bad. I mean, about the same status quo.

**TS:** Yeah.

**MH:** As far as my health goes, but yeah, I think the transition to the new chemo has worked out a little bit, so not too bad, not too bad.

**TS:** Well, at least you got your baseball going on now so you must be enjoying that.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah, absolutely. Every day it gives me something to listen to.

**TS:** Well, this topic, Queen of Heaven... This piques my interest, so I don’t think I was aware of this topic.

**MH:** Well, this is a question I get asked in email a lot. “Hey, Mike, what about the Queen of Heaven in the book of Jeremiah?” And typically when I get the question, it’s from somebody who wants to oppose Catholic teaching about Mary and they presume that this gives them a good sort of Biblical reference point. So

when I came across this in Dr. Goeman's blog I thought, well, you know, he spent some time thinking about this. This would be a good topic for the podcast.

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**MH:** Well, we're happy to have Dr. Peter Goeman with us for this episode on the podcast. Peter, as I am wont to do when we have guests, I'm going to ask you to introduce yourself to our audience. I know you've listened to the podcast a lot, but the people in our audience are not going to be familiar with you. So just tell us who you are and where you teach, where you got your Ph.D., and anything else that's sort of interesting and sets up the context for your interview.

**PG:** Alright, well, yeah, thank you for having me on the podcast. In one way, it does kind of feel like I already know everybody because I listen to the podcast and have really benefited from it, but I am really happy to be on this side of things, just trying to share anything that might be helpful. I would say the first thing to introduce myself is that I was blessed by God to grow up in a Christian family and that each time I look back on that, I just think that there's no replacing that. And so my parents were just so influential in my life to teach me a love for the Lord and a love for the Bible, and I was just so grateful for that. So I grew up in Northern Minnesota, which I know you spent some time in the Midwest.

**MH:** Mm hmm, yeah.

**PG:** So you are very familiar with the winters there, so you won't be surprised, then, to know that I moved to California after that to escape the winters! So I went to California... Actually, this kind of plays into even how I got into academics in a certain way. I went to California to play baseball, and I really wanted to be a professional baseball player. So I went where I could play baseball year-round instead of having to play two months out of the year or whatever. And it was there that I went to a private college: Masters University. I played on the baseball team there and loved every second of it.

But at school, God really changed my heart, and instead of wanting to play professional baseball then (which I never would've stood a chance to do anyway), he really changed my heart to want to pursue understanding the Bible, to learn how to read Greek and Hebrew, and things like that. So I went to seminary immediately after college. I majored in business, but I went into seminary just really wanting to learn things about the Bible. I studied under people that you are very familiar with (Dr. Bill Barrick, Mike Grisanti), just really loved pouring myself into the Old Testament. And I remember specifically making the decision that I wanted to learn the Old Testament as well as I could so that I could learn the New Testament better, because as you've been very helpful

pointing people to the realities, the Old Testament is such a foundational reality of scripture. And so I was just really convinced that I needed to do that.

5:00 So I studied under Dr. Mike Grisanti as my mentor in the Ph.D. program at Masters Seminary there. So I went from the university there to the seminary program, went all the way through and did a ThM and then got the Ph.D., and I specialized in the Ph.D. in Old Testament Law Studies. So I did my dissertation on the Levitical Prohibitions Against Homosexuality, and that was just really timely because that was at the same time that the Obergefell decision was in the Supreme Court for the United States, and so everyone was asking a lot of questions about what the church's relationship to homosexuality was and things like that. So I was, in that sense (I really do think), blessed by God to be able to be studying something that's so impactful (Old Testament law), but then also dealing with a cultural issue of how the church should relate to these issues, and everything like that.

So it was in seminary that I met my wife. I just really thank the Lord for her. We also have three young children—5, 3, and 1. Right after I graduated from the Ph.D., we moved to Raleigh, North Carolina (actually a suburb outside in Cary), where I teach at Shepherds Theological Seminary in the Old Testament Department with some of your old friends and acquaintances. So that is actually... In one sense, that is kind of how I first became aware of you and all that connection, and so I was really privileged to be able to connect to a lot of the godly men and women out here as well.

So in the end, I just really think as I look back on that progress... I just really thank the Lord for bringing me along those ways and giving me good godly mentors teaching me the Old Testament and New Testament connections. It's just a huge blessing.

**MH:** Yeah, well you're in a great environment out there. And, again, with all the mutual friends that we have, I mean, that's just an ideal environment in a lot of ways. So you *should* be grateful. I know you are, but you should be grateful as to where you wound up.

**PG:** Yeah, absolutely.

**MH:** Well, we want to talk today about something you blogged about. Why don't you say something about your blog before we jump in here?

**PG:** Well, yeah, I mean, I run a small blog, *petergoeman.com*. It started out as just a place to hash out some issues that I had been thinking about. And I like to just write. I try to write once every two weeks or so now with my teaching schedule. That's pretty much all I can do. But yeah, I'm just really thankful to be able to do that, and that way some of the different churches that I've been at... I

can kind of stay connected to some of those people in the youth groups that I've been a part of or some of the elders in the church because they'll subscribe to the blog. So in that way, we can kind of keep a running conversation going on about different things I'm studying.

**MH:** Sure.

**PG:** So that's kind of fun.

**MH:** Yeah, why don't you spell your last name so the people can get it.

**PG:** Yeah, good clarification there. So my last name's pronounced "Gay-men," but it's spelled G-o-e-m-a-n. And I should say as well that I'm really impressed that you actually pronounced that correctly because most people don't know how to pronounce that.

**MH:** Yeah, well I got lucky.

**PG:** Yeah.

**MH:** Well, we want to talk about the Queen of Heaven today. As you can imagine, I get questions about the Queen of Heaven every so often, so this is sort of a recurring question. When I was reading your blog at one point and saw that you had devoted some time to this, I thought, "Well, this would make a good Naked Bible Episode, since Peter's put some thought into this." So here we are. But as we jump in here, how did you get interested in this topic? I mean, this isn't sort of a... You ask the random Old Testament person what they're really into, you're probably not going to get "Queen of Heaven" very often. So what drew you into this?

**PG:** Well, it's probably very similar to the questions you get. I remember being a young Old Testament professor, and one of the classes I have to teach is the Old Testament Survey classes.

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** So we'll go through the Genesis through Kings. Then in the second part, we'll go through Chronicles through the end of the prophets and Malachi. And I just remember getting to Jeremiah and giving the big picture of Jeremiah and working through it and a student raises their hand as I finish up the lecture and I say, "Are there any other questions before we move on," and somebody just raises their hand and says, "Who's the Queen of Heaven?"

**MH:** Yeah.

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**PG:** I just remember thinking to myself, “Oh I have no idea.” Like that’s a really good question! And so I don’t even remember what I said, but I remember thinking to myself, “That’s pretty embarrassing that I have no idea who the Queen of Heaven is.” So yeah, I’d never really put much thought into it, and so the question just kind of put me on my heels. So I spent a couple weeks researching it and then decided, “Hey, you know what? I bet you there’s a lot of people who want to know who the Queen of Heaven is!”

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** So I ended up writing that blog post. One of the interesting things about that is that if you google “Queen of Heaven” or you look on YouTube trying to find anything on Queen of Heaven, most of the things you get are actually about Mary.

**MH:** Yeah.

10:00

**PG:** Because in Catholicism, Mary is known as the Queen of Heaven. And I think in some of the comments on the blog article you have these debates between Catholics and Protestants about Mary. I was just kind of wondering... That’s so strange that they would wind up on my blog, but again, if they’re just searching for Queen of Heaven looking for something on Mary, they find out about this issue in Jeremiah, and it probably is kind of shocking to them.

**MH:** Yeah, I was kind of wondering that, too, if you ever ran into the Catholicism thing, because it’s kind of used pejoratively against some of the Catholic teachings about Mary. I was wondering if that’s what dragged you into this or not, but it sounds like it’s a little wider than that as far as your interest.

**PH:** Yeah, and I would say, too, just completely and honestly, I didn’t have a lot of interaction with knowing that Catholicism actually had a title for Queen of Heaven for Mary until I actually started studying that. So it was actually kind of a surprise to me, too.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah. So where should we start in our own thinking about the Queen of Heaven? I mean, we’re going to set aside the Catholic versus Protestant debate because obviously that’s not in the mind of the original Old Testament writer.

**PH:** Yeah.

**MH:** Yeah, to say it anachronistically at best. Where should we start?

**PH:** Well, you know, I think when we look at the issue, obviously if you’re reading the English... I haven’t been able to find any English translation that

doesn't translate Jeremiah 7, Jeremiah 44 (those are the chapters)... You have 7:18, and you also have a couple verses in Jeremiah 44 where you have this mention of the Queen of Heaven. You have verse 17, 18, and then also in 25. So it's just mentioned a handful of times in the whole Bible and they're all found in Jeremiah, but if you're reading the English translations of Jeremiah, all of them are just going to translate it as "Queen of Heaven."

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**PH:** But as I started studying this, I realized, well, the Masoretic text, which we usually treat as a very viable source of the Old Testament, doesn't actually read "Queen of Heaven" and that was surprising to me because as I was looking through all of the English translations, every single one is translated "Queen." So usually when you're reading the commentaries or anything like that... Or even, I was looking at Robert Alter's translation of the Old Testament recently and just looking at some of his notes on this, and everybody's going to translate it as "Queen," but in reality, if you're looking at how it's pronounced and just, I think, I don't know if... Well, if you think about the pronunciation in Hebrew, *malkah* is the word for queen and then if it was going to be construct, it would be *malkat*. So you hear like *malkat shamayim*, or whatever. But as we read it in the Masoretic text, it's actually *melakah*, or the construct form would be *meleket*, and so on... It's quite different.

**MH:** Yeah, it is.

**PG:** And a lot of scholars looking at that say, well, that would actually be a variation of the Hebrew form for "work" or "business," or it can even be used for generic objects. So it's interesting because the main evidence from the Masoretic text is that this should be translated as "work of heaven" not as "Queen of Heaven," but the problem is that almost every Greek translation we have translates some form of Queen of Heaven, or some translations would say "Host of Heaven."

**MH:** Do you think the pronouns play a role in this as well? Like in Jeremiah 7, you have them making cakes for the Queen of Heaven and they pour out drinks to other gods. So it gives it a deity feel. And then in Jeremiah 44, you get these feminine pronouns: "Pour out drink offerings to *her*."

**PH:** Right.

**MH:** I'm not sure you could translate it "Pour out drink offerings to *it*," as well, but do you think pronouns have influenced this?

**PH:** I do think so and, in fact, one of the interesting things about pointing out that difference between Jeremiah 7 and Jeremiah 44 is the Septuagint actually

translates in Jeremiah 7... It actually translates the word here *stratia*—the word for army or troops or host.

**MH:** Mm hmm.

15:00

**PH:** But then in Jeremiah 44 it translates it as the word for “king”—*basilica*. So it’s interesting because even though you have the same phrase in Jeremiah 7, the LXX is saying, “Well, this should be translated a little more broadly as...” And I think that does relate. Either we’re dealing with some variant tradition in the Septuagint, or the translators are working on that and saying, well, the context here might be a little different. And so I do think it complicates things a little bit when we look at that.

**MH:** For those who are listening, what Peter’s talking about is that you have variant spellings in the Hebrew Bible. And we can talk about this a little bit, but it’s not going to be something that translates well to an audio podcast,. But the word *meleket* has four consonants in it, and that’s actually a variant of another Hebrew word that has a fifth consonant in it that’s silent. So it’s the one with the fifth consonant that could be translated as “work,” where again... in the ways that Peter suggested. So scholars aren’t necessarily sure (because it’s not the normal spelling for “queen”) exactly what to do with this as it’s pointed. In other words, when I say pointing, I mean those are the vowels that the Masoretes (the scribes) gave the text. If you took the vowels out, you could get the normal spelling if you repointed it—if you put your own vowels in to “correct” the text. You could get *malkat* and there you’d have a clear reference to “queen,” but you don’t have that in the Masoretic text. I mean, how common is this sort of thing?

**PG:** Well, I think... I mean, you described it perfectly. The issue is you have the consonantal letters here.

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** But the big question is the pointings—the vowel pointings the Masoretes had...

**MH:** Do we get rid of the vowels, yeah.

**PG:** Yeah, exactly, and those are added much later. And so I mentioned Robert Alter’s translation. One of the things he said which was kind of, I don’t know... I thought maybe he said it a little too strongly perhaps, but he basically said it’s almost without question that what we have here is the Masoretes adding vowel pointings in order to alleviate Israel from having worshipped a Pagan deity or something like that. And I started thinking. So in his view (and some scholars back him up on this, too) is they say, “Well, the Masoretes are just trying to save Israel’s reputation, because how insulting for them to say...”



**MH:** Save face, yeah.

**PH:** "...that they were worshiping the Queen of Heaven." So they take the consonants and they reposit that. And that same thing does happen (and we'll talk a little later about this, too)... It does happen periodically where the Masoretes will reposit things in order to kind of get across a different image instead of just taking an opposing deity's name or something like that.

**MH:** So again, for the sake of our audience, this is... You have to remember the Hebrew text was originally only consonants, and the vowels were added later in late antiquity in the Middle Ages. So there is this possibility that it could be legitimate just to get rid of the vowels and stick with the consonants. And if you do that, "Queen of Heaven" is a very comprehensible, understandable reading here. But if you go with the vowels that the Masoretes gave us, it is a little confusing. It doesn't make a whole lot of sense.

**PG:** Right, I would say...

**MH:** Go ahead.

**PG:** Well, I was just going to say, too, one of the things that people will try to do if they see it as "work of heaven" is they'll appeal to... There's a 7<sup>th</sup> Century Aramaic Targum which translates this phrase as the "stars of heaven."

**MH:** Mm hmm.

**PG:** And so they'll say, well, that clearly is backing up this reading as this more generic term of "work of heaven" instead of "queen," but the problem is it's a 7<sup>th</sup> Century Targum.

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** And that's the Targum of Jonathan of the prophets. So if you look at the Vulgate, the Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotian, which are different variations of the Greek translations. Different... If you want to use an illustration, it is kind of like the ESV, NASB, whatever. They're just different Greek translations.

**MH:** Of the Septuagint, yeah.

**PG:** Yeah, and as we look at those translations, almost all of them... Well, in fact, all of them do translate it as "Queen of Heaven," so I don't know. Even though it's a possible translation to say it's the "work of heaven" generically, it does seem (to me, at least) that it's a very, very high likelihood that we're reading "Queen of Heaven" instead of "work of heaven."



**MH:** Did you ever drill down into the stars option? Because that really intrigues me because I'm sitting here thinking, "*Kokavim* [stars]... Where's the "o" vowel?" Because a lot of times the scribes will take vowels off a different term and then slap it onto the consonants, and that's supposed to be shorthand that you kind of know what they're doing—taking a consonantal word and taking the vowels from a different word.

**PG:** Right. Mm hmm.

20:00

**MH:** The scribes would know what's going on there to sort of label or pejoratively mark a work in a certain way. But you don't get the "o" vowel here.

**PG:** Right.

**MH:** You don't get it with *shamayim*, I mean, heaven—*tsevaot*, you don't get the "o" vowel there for "host". I mean, did you ever happen to do any drill-down under the stars angle? Like why did some of the ancient versions opt for that?

**PG:** Yeah, I was trying to find like a more strengthened connection, I guess, between that, but the best that I could find in looking through this was that you have basically this assumption that a lot of the gods that Israel's worshipping are related to the astral deities in Assyria at that time. In fact, Amos 5:26 is often brought in at this point.

**MH:** Oh yeah.

**PG:** Because in Amos you basically have Israel being said to worship. (*Sikkuth* and *Kiyyun* are the names there that are given.)

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** And those are probably what they call like dysphemisms, like they're taking the Hebrew word *shiqqutz* (detestation) and applying it to these common words.

**MH:** Yeah, that's a good illustration. Like *shiqqutz* (that which is detestable), taking the "i" and the "oo" from *shiqqutz* and then taking those vowels and putting them on the consonants that you have in front of you. And again, the people in the scribal class are going to know what the scribes are doing. They're deliberately poking fun at or making "detestable" (in this case, this set of consonants—this word that they're dealing with)... And they do it as a slap in the face to whatever deity that they happen to be shooting at.

**PG:** Yeah, and one of the things, I think, when just trying to make the connection to the Aramaic Targums and why they might be making that connection is because if that's kind of the tradition that they're drawing upon... Okay, if Israel is

connected with these astral deities, which are specifically named, then if we're going to take this understanding of "work of heaven," well this idea of "work of heaven" would naturally be those works or things that are in the heavens, which would be the stars.

**MH:** Yeah, the stars, yeah.

**PG:** Which, as you pointed out multiple times on the podcast, that's very typical deity language, and so that would be a pretty easy connection to make, I guess, in the Targums.

**MH:** Well, if we take a more traditional approach and we go with "Queen of Heaven," is there any indication of which Ancient Near Eastern queen or goddess might be in view?

**PG:** Yeah, that's... And well, what started me on this...

**MH:** Do you have a dog in this fight?

**PG:** Yeah, it's interesting because when I started off, I was like, "Just give me the answer." What is the answer so I can get back to this student, you know? I just needed to know the answer, but as you start researching it and studying it, you realize it's more of just... If you want a free article to publish, you just publish on the "Queen of Heaven" because nobody really knows. There's a lot of hypothetical conjecture and there's some good points made, but there's a lot of unknowns. But I mean, there are basically three. I know there are more that are listed, but the three biggest views are Anat, Ishtar, or Astarte, and basically Ishtar and Astarte are the same. Most scholars would say that they have more overlap. They're the same, but the Ishtar is the Mesopotamian goddess and Astarte is and Canaanite Phoenician representation of that—the West Semitic version. So really, I guess you could say you have two main views: you have Anat or Ishtar. That's usually how it's described. But admittedly, I think that those are... I don't know. Ishtar (and we could talk about this, too), but Ishtar and Astarte, I think, even though they have a lot of overlap, they probably... I think they could be viewed as the same deity, but at the same time, I don't think when gods are being incorporated into other cultures, they take them on a one-for-one correspondence, if that makes sense.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah, well, let's go through the options. I mean, I've looked enough at this where you could build a decent case for any of these.

**PG:** Right.

**MH:** If you go through them one by one, what is the argument for Anat?

25:00

**PG:** Yeah, so Anat, basically, is a very, very old deity. We have records of Anat being worshiped in the Amorite kingdom at Mari, which is dated to the very early 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium. So a lot of scholars say that Anat was probably worshiped even in the 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium. So the Ugaritic literature gives us a lot of information on Anat. That's where we get most of it. In the Baal epic, for example, Anat is pictured as a dangerous warrior, somebody who takes great joy in killing people. She is this fierce huntress, as it were. In fact, while I was studying...

**MH:** She's a bad Wonder Woman.

**PG:** Yeah, exactly. In fact, I took... I'll read just a couple lines here from one of the epics from Pritchard's Ancient Near East text because it's... I don't know, it just kind of gives you chills as you think about how she is described. But this is how she's described:

Much battle she does and beholds her fighting contemplates Anat. Her liver swells with laughter and her heart fills up with joy. Anat's liver exalts, for she plunges knee-dip in knight's blood, hip-deep in the gore of heroes.

So not exactly the description that you typically like to describe anybody with, much less a female, but this is who she was represented to be. And so all these Ugaritic texts present her as being war-like, bloodthirsty, I mean, she is...

**MH:** I have to chuckle a little bit because I remember sitting in grad school one day, and my advisor was Michael Fox.

**PG:** Oh, okay.

**MH:** His specialty was wisdom literature. And I don't know how we got on it, but we were talking about Assyrian deities and what not. But he actually took the time to sort of take a jab at feminists' interpretation, because the mythology of feminists' Biblical interpretation is that if the female figures were elevated, you'd get a kinder, gentler, Ancient Near East deities, just like the Assyrian deities. [laughter]. It's like, no, not so much.

**PG:** Oh, yeah, that's, yeah... I think it was surprising to me. I guess whoever was supposed to be running the family-friendly censor in running these epics and legends was taking days off. This is not exactly the PG kind of descriptions that we're looking for. So yeah, anyway...

**MH:** What favors Anat, as far as Queen of Heaven?

**PG:** So there are some descriptions of Anat in the Ugaritic literature that would be similar to Queen of Heaven, and so a lot of people look at that. She is known as the "mistress of dominion" or the "mistress of the highest heavens," and so

she's also referred to as, really, the consort of Baal, and she has this very high position in the Baal religion. So a lot of people say, well, she fits the role as far as being a very high goddess in deity. She has titles which are similar. I think being a "mistress of highest heavens," a lot of people make that connection saying, "Well, you know, Queen of Heaven, mistress of the highest heavens—that's definitely similar." There's also connections from... One of the things... Those who push the Anat theory (which I should say, too, is probably in scholarly circles, it's not as popular as Ishtar, but there are definitely people who represent it)... And one of the primary pieces of evidence to try to make the connection is that there are 5<sup>th</sup> century documents found in the Jewish colony at Elephantine. And basically, what those documents include are references to Anat-Bethel and Anat-Yahu, and so you have people who, in writing on this issue, they talk about how those titles are... In their mind, that it's obviously a reference to Anat being prevalent there. And they would argue that this shows that Israel was very much aware of Anat during the 5<sup>th</sup> century. And if Jeremiah is writing around 600 B.C. in Jeremiah 7 and Jeremiah 44, then that would be roughly equivalent. So you have awareness and worship of Anat in a Jewish colony at Elephantine, and so that could be viewed as evidence that Israel in Jerusalem is also partaking of this cult.

30:00 **MH:** Yeah, just more less exported it down there, down the Nile. Yeah.

**PG:** Exactly.

**MH:** What are some other options?

**PG:** Yeah, so the main option... So Anat, like I said, I think that that's probably the minority view. But the major view is going to be Ishtar or Astarte, depending on how you're going to define that. So Ishtar is the principle deity in the Mesopotamian religious sphere. She's worshiped by both the Assyrians and Babylonians, so usually you'll see it hyphenated like the Assyrial-Babylonian deity Ishtar or whatever. And so Ishtar is actually pretty famous. And one of the interesting things... You know, I should make a side note here, too, since we just not too long ago had Easter. Like, a lot of people see a connection between Ishtar and Easter and how you should never celebrate Easter as Christians or whatever, and I don't know. I don't really want to get into that. You probably could do a whole episode on those things. But keeping it in the Ancient Near Eastern context, Ishtar basically is very much an equivalent of Anat. Like they aren't equated by scholars usually, but they have similar overlap in being the god of war, god of love. So Ishtar has a similar kind of role to play. And she is probably (well at least in the Ancient Near East) most famous because of her role in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*. Basically she... Gilgamesh in the Epic basically is propositioned by her. She says, "Hey, you and I should, you know, be a thing. We should be a pair." And Gilgamesh kind of spurns her, so then she tries to kill him, essentially, and so it's... Yeah, not... Again, not too flattering a depiction

there, but she basically has a similar violence streak to Anat. And because of her place in the Mesopotamian pantheon, she is heralded by a lot of people as being the option for what Queen of Heaven... In fact, I'll just throw out a random percentage. I would say it's probably 3 out of every 4 scholars would probably hold to Ishtar, just because it seems... One of the biggest evidences they actually put out for that is in these descriptions of Jeremiah, you see this reference to the making of cakes for the Queen of Heaven. And what is pretty much a slam-dunk connection there would be the word there for "cakes" is unique, and most scholars are very comfortable with saying that this is an Acadian loan word, which Hebrew is using. So in these Mesopotamian religions... The Babylonians obviously would be speaking Acadian and using that language. So for Jeremiah to be using an Acadian loan word for these cakes to communicate this worship of the Queen of Heaven, for a lot of people is like the decisive marker, saying, "Well, it's obvious Jeremiah is saying that they are making this kind of cake for the god." And although we don't really have exact details about what those cakes would be, a lot of people hypothesize they would be made in the image of the goddess, kind of a naked figurine or something like that to celebrate. And there have been archeological finds in Israel about goddesses found in different locations throughout Israel. So that's definitely a part where people will push that connection between the Akkadian loan words and the Queen of Heaven there. Obviously, they'll also just connect, saying, well, Ishtar is the most famous of the goddesses in this Mesopotamian religion so it would be natural for Israel to incorporate that into their religion, as it were.

**MH:** As opposed to a minor goddess.

**PG:** Exactly. It's kind of like, you don't want to sign up to be on the minor league team. You want the big shots.

**MH:** Now the Acadian term that is used here (the loan word anyway), does that show up in ritual texts in Mesopotamian material for Ishtar?

**PG:** So not specifically for Ishtar. And that, to me, kind of discounts the evidence a little bit, because it does show up in cultic settings. Like in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, this word (*kamanu*) is used in a cultic setting talking about a specific type of cake that's used in worship, but it's not specifically related to Ishtar.

**MH:** It could be wider.

**PG:** Exactly.

**MH:** Yeah.

35:00 **PG:** Exactly, so it's obviously... Well, in Jeremiah we didn't even need Ancient Near Eastern comparisons to tell that this was a religious cultic context, but the

point is that it's not an exact tie-in. Even though if we'd like it to be, it's not an exact tie-in to Ishtar.

**MH:** Astarte. Where does she get some votes?

**PG:** Yeah, so I mean, I guess the biggest thing for her is, obviously, being the well-known Canaanite goddess. So with these incorporations of gods and goddesses, which to me...

**MH:** They're closer.

**PG:** Yeah, and I would say for most people, if you're... Well yeah, if you're in Ancient Near Eastern Israel and you're going to incorporate a god, like do you try to get the furthest god away, or something that's just right next door? It just seems, even as we see Israel and their struggle with the Canaanites that are in the land, it seems to be a very local struggle, where the Israelites are being influenced by the Pagan and foreign deities that are present in their land. So even though Ishtar and Astarte are basically the same goddess, at least far as their role is concerned, I do think that when Israel is looking at this, I think they're probably... If they are looking to *one* god or goddess, they're probably having in mind Astarte because she's, again, very much linked with Baal in a lot of these extrabiblical texts. In fact, I should say, too, she's the only one of the options that is... Well, if you discount... There are some place names for Anat, but part of the debate about that is that Anat seems to be more broadly used. Like it seems to be a personal name in some locations in scripture or a geographical location. So it doesn't have to only be related to Anat, the god. And the consonants there in Hebrew (the *ayin*, *nun*, and *tav*), those are very common consonants, so there could be other... Just because Anat is mentioned in scripture doesn't mean that it's related to the god or the goddess. But with Astarte, she is the main goddess that's actually mentioned in scripture, although if you read through the Old Testament, you're not going to see that name. In fact, you'll see it under Ashtaroth or Ashtoreth instead of Astarte, but it is the same god, and so obviously the Old Testament is having a reference to her.

**MH:** Why is that? I mean, why is Astarte read as Ashtaroth or Ashtoreth?

**PG:** Well, this actually kind of relates to what we were talking about a little earlier is that... And this... See it's funny how the little projects we work on teach us a bunch of things, because I had never been aware of the word "dysphemism" before, and it's just such a cool word. Now I just try to say it once every day before I go to sleep [laughter]. But we're all familiar with a euphemism. Like maybe one of the ones that I remember learning right away was that Saul covering his legs...

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** ...when he's in the cave. Well, that's a euphemism, trying to say something that's maybe slightly shameful or derogatory in a better way. You know, he's going to the bathroom so he's covering his legs. Well, that's a better way to say it. That's a euphemism. But a dysphemism would be to say something in a worse way, and so that's what often happens in scripture. And you mentioned that, and we had talked about that with Amos 5:26. And I think I haven't found anybody who disagrees... It's pretty common that the same thing is happening with the Ashtareth or Ashtoroth here, is that you have Astarte which are the same consonants, but you have the changing of the vowels so that you use the same consonants, but you're changing the vowels to match with a Hebrew term *bosheth*, which is the word for "shame."

**MH:** Yeah, the "o" and the "e" vowel, yeah.

**PG:** Exactly. So now whenever you, as an Israelite, are pronouncing the Ashtareth or Ashtoroth, you're reminded that this is shameful because you're using those vowels which correspond to the word for "shame" for this deity.

**MH:** Yeah, it's like... Well, another common one is "Mephibaal." You know, the second half of his name is Baal, but that becomes Mephibosheth.

**PG:** Exactly.

**MH:** The second half of that is [audio breaks up] consonants with the vowels in that word. Well, that's really interesting. I mean how common do you think this is as far as the use of dysphemisms? It sounds to me like you've been pulled into the topic a little bit.

40:00

**PG:** Yeah. Well, it was interesting because I started going... Yeah, I mean, it probably could be its own podcast episode. You gave one example, but there are actually quite a few examples. Maybe the best example (at least I think) is with Saul's son who starts reigning. His name is given in 2 Samuel. So after Saul and Jonathan die, then his son, Ishbosheth, in 2 Samuel 2 reigns, but we find out in Chronicles that his name is listed as Eshbaal. So Eshbaal, which means "man of Baal" is actually in Samuel, but he's called "man of shame"—Ishbosheth. So same kind of thing. So it seems to happen quite a bit in names. And of course, the question is, who is doing this? Is it the Masoretes who are doing this or does the tradition go back even prior to the time of Christ? So unfortunately, we don't have exhaustive evidence, we just have some of the Dead Sea Scrolls and things like that. But it seems pretty prevalent, though. And the question is, when does this tradition go back? But it definitely... In the text that we have, it definitely shows up at least... I would say a fair bit, if we want to say it that way.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah. Now going back to the Queen of Heaven in these Jeremiah passages, is there anything in the passages themselves, maybe suggestions as



to what kind of vows are being made or how the cakes are used? Is there anything ritually that people have tried to latch onto to make their argument as to who the Queen of Heaven is?

**PG:** Well, I don't think anything in the near context would necessarily push people one way or the other. The cakes are the biggest thing. I mean, pretty much every commentator is going to key in on that and the use of the Acadian and then bring in the Ancient Near Eastern context, although I will say a possible connection for Anat would be in Jeremiah 44. If you think through what's going on there, we're told that the word of the Lord comes to Jeremiah concerning all the Judeans who live in the land of Egypt. And so one of the things about Anat is that as a Canaanite goddess, she becomes incorporated into Egyptian worship. So we do have... For example, at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> millennium (even in 1200 B.C.), we have figurines of an Anat inscription found at Beit She'an in Israel, which was an Egyptian outpost during Rames' reign. So some people would look at that in the broader context of Jeremiah and maybe a connection with Egypt saying possibly that's a stronger link than toward Anat, because even if Anat is passing out of vogue in Israel, for example (which is almost certain because there's hardly any evidence of Anat in Israel in the 1<sup>st</sup> millennium during the time of Jeremiah)... That's one of the big strikes against that view. But in just understanding that there's a connection with Egypt at that point... I mean, you even have... During the time that Jeremiah is prophesying, you have Egypt under Pharaoh Necho going up to fight Babylon, and Necho installs Jehoiakim. And so there's obvious Egyptian influence. And if Egyptians are able to hold onto Anat, then perhaps that's influencing them. So that's also another evidence that people might bring up that way, but again, it's circumstantial and so it's kind of difficult to say for sure.

**MH:** Yeah, because you could see on the other side that they were... You could see Israelites trying to kiss up to a Babylonian because that's who they're being threatened by—Babylon. So they're trying to make friends in high places, maybe save themselves or have the conquest not be as bad as it looks like it's going to be and all that stuff. So all of that would be circumstantial as well.

**PG:** Right, exactly.

**MH:** Is there anything in any of the Jeremiah passages that we haven't touched on yet that sort of for you prompts you to land somewhere? Like which of these views do you personally lean toward?

45:00

**PG:** Yeah, well, you know it's interesting because when I first studied this, I was bouncing all over. I think I landed on every view possible, plus like a couple additional ones. But as I was really starting to work through it, one of the things that kept coming back to me with these complicating factors is first, with the things that we are talking about, there's definitely significant overlap and

influence between Ancient Near Eastern cultures. So like everyone says, Ishtar and Astarte are basically related, they are equivalent, and so that's the foregoing opinion. But at the same time we recognize that when gods are incorporated into other cultures or there are connections, that doesn't mean they're equivalent. I think the same kind of thing happens with the Greeks and the Romans. I mean, this is pretty common, where even though you have Rome incorporating a lot of this Greek deistic culture (you know, Jupiter being linked with Zeus, etc.), they're not the same god. They're related, certainly, but there are definitely differences. And so, as I was thinking about those complications, I don't think it's... I guess immediately from the outset, I'm already leaning toward the fact that even if Israel is incorporating these other deities, it's difficult for me to see them doing it the same way as their Ancient Near Eastern contemporaries, if that makes sense.

**MH:** Mm hmm, yeah.

**PG:** And so that was already on my mind. And then there were actually a couple passages outside of Jeremiah which influenced me—in Judges. And in Judges 2:13, the scripture uses an interesting phrase there to describe Israel's apostasy, and it says they abandoned the Lord and they served the Baals and the Ashtaroth. And what's interesting about that is you can hear the plural in the Baals, but what's also important is that the Ashtaroth in Hebrew (the feminine plural is in the "ote" ending there, as you're well aware)...

**MH:** Yeah.

**PG:** And so I see that and there are two references to plurals there. And that caused me to start thinking about this, and I know a lot of people take this verse and they'll... There is an Acadian parallel, where a lot of times when the Acadian literature will introduce gods and goddesses, it will use a phrase "*ilani u ishtarati*" and you can hear the "Ishtar" there. It basically is a plural form of Ishtar and it's meant to be a generic form of plural goddesses. And so some people say, "Oh, well that's just what's going on here in Judges 2:13. You have just a general reference to the gods of the other cultures and goddesses."

**MH:** Yeah, this is the way you would do it just as a general reference.

**PG:** Right and that may be the case, certainly. But at the same time, I think when I was reading Daniel Block's commentary on Judges, he mentioned that may be the case, but there is also the very distinct possibility that, especially during the time of the Judges, you have different variations of Baalism or the worship of Ashtoreth in these different segments and regions. In fact, we see the differences even in the book of Judges. Even amongst the tribes of Israel, there are these divisions and different ways of doing things and conflict. And so, I don't know. I'm not convinced that everyone's going to do everything the same way.

And so that kind of convinces me that maybe there's kind of a hybrid way to do things in understanding the incorporation.

**MH:** You're thinking they used the plural to be nonspecific.

**PG:** Exactly, to kind of communicate the idea that there are variations within this in the different regions. Like, yes, Israel as a whole served the Baals, but it wasn't just one Baal. It was the Baal of Naftali or the Baal of Judah and the Baal... And so there were different ways that the tribes worshiped and communicated this affiliation. So if that's true... It's just hypothetical here, obviously, but if we ask, well, who is the Queen of Heaven, then it may be a god like...

**MH:** It might be a variant.

**PG:** Yeah, exactly. It might be Anat. It might be Astarte, But at the same time, what's to prohibit Israel from picking and choosing and kind of creating... I don't know, maybe like a Build-A-Bear approach. You just take whatever kind of things that you want from a deity and compile it together and worship that way. And surely there's influence from their surrounding culture, but it's also possible that as they're doing this, they're incorporating their own secular... Secular is the wrong word with that, but their own paganistic flare or deviation—a syncretistic flare to worshiping Yahweh.

**MH:** Mm hmm, mm hmm.

**PG:** Or to the Queen of Heaven in this instance.

50:00

**MH:** Yeah. Yeah, I don't really have a dog in the fight, either, as far as this because I think you can make a reasonable case for any of these options. One more question. One last question. Do you see any merit at all to taking this passage or any of these passages and making them part of the Catholic/Protestant debate? [laughter]

**PG:** Well, I think it would be... What's the strongest way to say this? I don't know. It would hermeneutical suicide to try to do that.

**MH:** Yeah, yeah.

**PG:** But I'm sure somebody does so...

**MH:** Well, they do. I mean, that's usually the context where I get the question. Somebody's angling for, hey, here's some good passages that I can use to tar and feather Mary in Catholicism, when that's really so far out of the picture—what

Israel's doing and what any of these possible deity references might be. It strikes me as odd, but I know why people do it.

**PG:** Right.

**MH:** Well, thanks for coming on the podcast for this episode. This was interesting and I'll be glad to have sort of a go-to episode. The next time I get the question about the Queen of Heaven I'll just say, "Hey, go listen to this episode." So that's really good for our audience to have some of these things in place so that they can just reference it for themselves and for other people.

**PG:** Well, thanks so much for having me on the podcast. It's been great to be with you all.

**MH:** Yeah, absolutely. Thank you.

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**TS:** Alright, Mike, well, I didn't expect that topic. That was a pretty fresh topic. I imagine the Catholics will be upset with us on this podcast.

**MH:** Well, no, I don't think we gave Catholic opponents any ammunition here. It's a little... It's a pretty odd thing to do to take a passage out of Jeremiah that's probably a Canaanite or Babylonian deity and, like I said, "tar and feather" what they believe about Mary with that. So I don't think they get any ammunition out of Jeremiah, even though we might disagree about Mary.

**TS:** Yeah, okay, well, that's good because they're mad at me enough as it is about the whole communion thing. I got several friends that I always get mad at them for not letting me have communion with them.

**MH:** Well, there you go.

**TS:** It gets me going. So alright.

**MH:** Yeah, what can you do?

**TS:** Alright, Mike, well, that was a good one. We're going to do a Q&A next week. We want to thank Dr. Peter Goeman for coming on. And with that, I want to thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.

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