

Naked Bible Podcast Transcript

Episode 453

1 Samuel 7

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Episode Summary

1 Samuel 7 is about Samuel's emergence as the nation of Israel's spiritual and military leader (i.e., a judge). The contrast with the house of Eli is again palpable. The main focus of this emergence is a revival in Israel and the subsequent conflict with the Philistine where, after a long absence, God fights for Israel certifying Samuel's status. This episode comments on these items along with focusing on "the Baals and Ashtaroth" Israel must forsake. Some discussion is also given to the term Asherah (plural: Asherim).

Transcript

TS: Welcome to the Naked bible Podcast, Episode 453: 1 Samuel 7. I'm the layman, Trey Stricklin, and he's the scholar, Dr. Michael Heiser. Hi Mike! How's it going?

MH: Well, not too bad. We're recording this on the day after Thanksgiving, so hopefully everyone had a good Thanksgiving. I know we did.

TS: Yeah, I did just come out of my food coma. We still have leftovers, so I expect to induce another coma after this recording. [MH laughs] It will probably put me down for a couple days. I'm looking forward to it.

MH: Do you have any other traditions? You're not doing Black Friday shopping, are you?

TS: No, no, no, no, no... No Black Friday. I'm more of a Cyber Monday guy. If I can sit at my desk and buy something, that's more my speed. But no, we don't do any of the shopping.

MH: I didn't even know there were Cyber Mondays. Tells you how out-of-the-loop I am!

TS: Yeah. Shopping's not a tradition for us.

MH: Yeah, it died at our place two years ago. The girls used to be real into it and crazy stuff, but not so much anymore.

TS: I guess if you need the stuff that's on sale it's good, but it seems like just a bunch of stuff I don't need, so it's just pointless. I don't know, Mike. But hey, what IS good shopping is Logos. You've gotta get some Logos. Logos is graciously sponsoring us again for the next three episodes.

MH: Oh good!

TS: Absolutely! So we briefly want to talk about Logos 10. Nothing beats digging into the Bible with software like Logos 10, specifically their new version. I think it just came out this year, Mike. Do you know if it just came out?

MH: Yeah, it's not very old. The new version has recently dropped. I don't think it's been a year.

TS: Yeah, so they're wanting everybody to upgrade. If you're wanting to go beyond Bible reading and have a deep study of scripture, Logos 10 is where you want to be. If you want to prep a sermon or understand a passage, even start a reading plan, Mike! You can do anything and everything. And you always talked about how we need theological tools like this that go deeper than you can by yourself.

MH: Yeah, you want an electronic desk buddy that reminds you to read through your New Testament Dictionary series from Intervarsity that I'm always harping on? There you go. You just plug that thing in and it will pop up every day reminding you to read. So you can put anything in there you want. It's a nice feature.

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Well, Mike, we're back in 1 Samuel with chapter 7.

MH: Yep, we are in chapter 7. That will be the content of our episode today. When we get past chapter 7, I think I'm going to group chapters 8 through 10 and do a couple parts on it because it's about the whole issue of kingship—was it right to want a king or not? So on and so forth. So that's going to take at least two parts. But for today in 1 Samuel 7, we have to ask, of course, what the chapter is about. But I'm going to read it first, as we've been doing. It's not too long, so we'll take a stab at reading it. This is right after the Philistines have figured out they need to get rid of the ark of the covenant.

And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the LORD and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the LORD. ² From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the LORD.

³ 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." ⁴ So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth, and they served the LORD only.

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⁵ Then Samuel said, "Gather all Israel at Mizpah, and I will pray to the LORD for you." ⁶ So they gathered at Mizpah and drew water and poured it out before the LORD and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD." And Samuel judged the people of Israel at Mizpah. ⁷ Now when the Philistines heard that the people of Israel had gathered at Mizpah, the lords of the Philistines went up against Israel. And when the people of Israel heard of it, they were afraid of the Philistines. ⁸ And the people of Israel said to Samuel, "Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us, that he may save us from the hand of the Philistines." ⁹ So Samuel took a nursing lamb and offered it as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. And Samuel cried out to the LORD for Israel, and the LORD answered him. ¹⁰ As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

¹² Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen and called its name Ebenezer; for he said, "Till now the LORD has helped us." ¹³ So the Philistines were subdued and did not again enter the territory of Israel. And the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines all the days of Samuel. ¹⁴ The cities that the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

¹⁵ Samuel judged Israel all the days of his life. ¹⁶ And he went on a circuit year by year to Bethel, Gilgal, and Mizpah. And he judged Israel in all these places. ¹⁷ Then he would return to Ramah, for his home was there, and there also he judged Israel. And he built there an altar to the LORD.

So that's the content of chapter 7. What's the chapter about? Well, it should be apparent that it's about Samuel's rise as both a spiritual and military leader—in other words, a judge. He becomes Israel's judge. It says several times in the passage that "he judged Israel" in such and such a place and in such and such a manner. So it's really about Samuel's growth. And there's a 20-year period in there that is sort of encapsulated in verse 2. But he becomes Israel's judge—Israel's figure—both militarily and spiritually. Unlike the house of Eli, Samuel begins revival in Israel and delivers the people from Philistine bondage. So this transition (or what should have been a transition) to this set of conditions (and in some ways really were throughout Samuel's own lifetime)... But you can already tell it was sort of meant to have a king transition into this, where you have both a spiritual and a military leader—or so you might think.

We're going to tackle this next time about the nuances between "should they have asked for a king or not?" You could apply some of the same questions to "should they have had judges or not?" But we'll get to that next time because it is kind of a lingering question, and I think some of the answers might surprise you.

As far as the broad (or wide) context of 1 Samuel 7 (Samuel's rise to this status), chapter 7 directly continues and certifies the contrast with the house of Eli. That should be no surprise. Chisholm writes:

This positive portrait of Samuel continues the contrast with Eli's house so evident in chapters 2–4. Israel's defeat was closely linked with the death of Eli and his sons. The text even seems to indicate that it was their sin that brought about the loss of the ark (see 4:4). But Samuel is linked with the military success and renewed security that his mother anticipated in her thanksgiving song (2:10). This contrast between Samuel and Eli is facilitated by the fact that both Israel's earlier defeat and the victory described in chapter 7 occur at places named Ebenezer... Samuel's victory also foreshadows greater victories to come under the king he will anoint. Since his victory shows that he enjoys God's favor, it contributes to his credentials as the one who will anoint kings and eventually elevate David over Saul.

We have this kingship nuance, but this contrast nuance with the house of Eli continues on. It's kind of beating a dead horse at this point, but we're going to transition here shortly with the request for kingship (that we'll talk about next time).

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Secondly, the chapter takes us directly into Canaanite religion. So that's the second wider context. The Israelites have been worshipping (and these are both plurals) the Baals and the Ashtaroah, so two groups of something. Scholars theorize that the plurals either indicate local manifestations or local idols or cult centers of the god Baal and the goddess Astarte, or that the plural phrasing is a way of expressing the idea that Israel is guilty of worshipping a wide range of Canaanite deities. Most scholars are going to opt for that first option—that it's localized centers of Baal worship, localized centers (again, plural) of the worship of Astarte, which is the singular behind the plural Ashtaroah. Chisholm again writes:

The Song of Deborah depicts the Lord as sovereign over the storm as he defeats the Canaanite armies (Judg. 5:4–5). The Gideon account, along with its sequel about Abimelek, contains a strong anti-Baal polemic, showing how Baal is unable to fully avenge Gideon's (Jerubbaal's) attack on his altar.

So Chisholm's point is that the Baal polemic has begun in the book of Judges and is going to continue here in the book of 1 Samuel. He writes:

Hannah celebrates the Lord's ability to give fertility (1 Sam. 2:1–10) in terms that echo the Baal myths. This polemic against Baal culminates in 1 Samuel 7, which records how the Lord thunders in battle against his enemies. The Lord's self-revelation in the storm is particularly significant and appropriate here because the Israelites, in response to Samuel's exhortation, have just thrown away their Baal idols and renewed their commitment to the Lord (7:2–4).

Baal was a storm deity (and we'll pick up on this a little bit later as well). When you get this storm language of Yahweh's activity in the chapter, that's a slap in the face to Baal, because he's the one that's supposed to be in control of all that. And it turns out, well, he's not.

A third wider aspect of this is the chapter sets up the transition to the monarchy. I'm going to quote from Cartledge here in his commentary on 1 Samuel. He writes:

This unit of text stands alone and is significant for several reasons. The ark narrative ends with 7:1, and the account of Israel's transition to a monarchy begins with 8:1. Thus, the pericope serves as a transition piece [MH: in other words, the whole of chapter 7 is a transition], but its primary purpose is to cast Samuel in the mold of Israel's pre-monarchic judges. The text portrays Samuel as

exceedingly competent in priestly, governmental, and military roles. As such, it supports the later vein of thought that Israel's demand for a king was unnecessary...

Catch that point again. You can tell where Cartledge is at on "should they have asked for a king?" He would say it was unnecessary because judges could do this. Again, we'll have to wait until next time to get fully into it. Continuing with Cartledge:

The text invites reflection on Yahweh's ability to protect and guide Israel without a royal intermediary, thus leading the reader to understand Samuel's dismay in the following account when the people demand a king.

Or not. That's just one perspective.

As far as specific nuggets in the chapter itself, there is, of course, Samuel's rise and the revival of the nations. So that would be our first observation.

The Philistine threat didn't simply vanish as Samuel grew up. It didn't end with the ark incident. 1 Samuel 7:1-2 describes a 20-year period of Philistine oppression—the period between the death of Eli and his sons (the incident of the ark in Philistine hands) and the full accession of Samuel. Samuel was growing up during this period. And the fact that it took twenty years to see a decisive Israelite military victory over the Philistines indicates not only the dearth of leadership throughout Israel, but also that Israel was paying for its sins. It was during this period that they were worshiping the Baals and the Ashtaroath. Eventually, Israel begins to seek the Lord and Samuel is the mediator. When Samuel asks in verse 3, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart..." Returning is an act of repentance. So they have to begin doing that somewhere, and when Samuel detects that in the nation, he gets involved. But Yahweh's deliverance and blessing would come only over time. There was no instantaneous revival or repentance. It was gradual over this period.

Now Hoffner writes in his commentary of verses 1 and 2... In those verses' comments about the ark, he adds this thought:

By Yahweh's choice, the ark continued to reside in the Canaanite city of Kiriath-jearim in the neutral zone. The Israelites were not yet spiritually fit for Yahweh's ark to dwell among them, and they would not be until David brought it up to

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Jerusalem. Repentance and reform of their lives was needed, and this was the task of the prophet, priest, and judge Samuel.

Now eventually, all the house of Israel (the text says) begins lamenting the lack of Yahweh's presence among them. The ark was in Kiriath-jearim. It's no longer in Shiloh. Shiloh had lost the divine presence and so there was no central worship center. Remember, the rest of the tabernacle was mostly likely there, so the ark and the tabernacle were now separated. This was an unfortunate circumstance. Even if the earlier years had meant suffering under the corrupt house of Eli, at least they had both the tabernacle and the ark there.

Samuel discerns the wide change of heart in the people and so issues a call (1 Samuel 7:3-4). But it's one thing to want restoration of a relationship with Yahweh and to have one. First they had to turn from the gods they were guilty of worshiping. So they had two tasks: they had to remove the images and idols (pagan deities in the land) and they had to turn their heart toward the Lord exclusively.

So here we have (in my view) another illustration of the believing loyalty pattern once again. One cannot just say words without wanting the Lord, without showing one's loyalty, without one having made a decision to worship only the Lord. I mean, those two things have to be married. You have to act on what it is you say you believe. So I think this is another good illustration of it. Hoffner writes:

If the command "remove from among you" were to be fully implemented, it would require the conquest of the Canaanite cities that remained on the fringes of the tribal territories, including Kiriath-jearim, where Israelites like Abinadab lived alongside Canaanites. But apparently Samuel had a more limited, realistic goal in mind: removing all traces of pagan worship from the communities presently under Israelite control. This holds an important lesson for Christians today. Our social goals may include bringing the laws of our lands into harmony with biblical standards, but in order to have the spiritual power to accomplish this end, we must first give attention to the injustice and dishonesty in our own households and church communities.

I thought that was well-said, so I decided to include it. I don't know what eschatological stripe Hoffner was. He was a Hittite scholar at the University of Chicago for many years. He was an evangelical, but beyond that, I don't know where he was at eschatologically. He might sound post-mil, who knows? But I

think it's still worth pointing out that we have to be consistent in the house of the Lord first and then in your own communities.

The second observation/nugget here... Let's talk about the Baals and the Ashtaroth. And, honestly, we're going to spend a good amount of time on this because it's kind of confusing. It's confusing because the biblical data aren't consistent on it. And the biblical data outside the Bible aren't consistent on it either [laughs] as to what these terms meant. Because there's a wide range of things that could be in view, but we just don't exactly know which things are in view when.

So both of these terms deserve some commentary. The term "Baal" is an epithet that became recognized as a proper name. So *ba'al* initially meant lord or master and eventually becomes a proper name for the god Baal. This was the chief epithet of the Canaanite storm god Haddu or Hadad. Hence, you'll find Baal-Hadad in certain texts, both biblically and outside. One could refer to the same entity by either Baal or Haddu/Hadad and people would understand who was the referent. Most scholars see the plural as referring to localized Baal cults throughout the land scattered here and there. We commented on that earlier.

Biblical "Ashtaroth" here in 1 Samuel 7:3-4 is also a plural form. If you had taken Hebrew, you would know that instantly because of the way the noun ends with the "oth." This is also a plural form. The singular in Canaanite would be *ʿashtart*. In Greek, that is *astartē*. But the Masoretic Hebrew Bible lemma in the singular is neither of those. It's *ʿashtōret* instead of the expected *ʿashteret*. There is a scribal polemic at work here against the great Canaanite goddess in changing the vowels. So what we have here is the same set of consonants, but the scribes in the Hebrew Bible changed the vowels to an o and an e, so they get *ʿashtōret* instead of the expected *ʿashteret* in Hebrew. As McCarter notes in his Anchor-Yale commentary:

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Masoretic *ʿashtōret* instead of *ʿashteret* is probably a deliberate misvocalization to suggest *bōshet*, "shame." That is, the long "o" followed by "e" in the Hebrew word for "shame" was inserted into the consonants of the goddess name to produce *ʿashtōret* in the singular. The plural that shows up in the running text here again refers to local cults of Astarte.

So the scribes had so much contempt for *ʿashtōret* that they actually changed the vocalization of the name so that it would reflect the vowels that belong to the

Hebrew word for shame. It's something very subtle, but it's kind of interesting to point out that they would do that.

The term *ʿashtart* or *ʿashtōret* (in its plural *ʿashtarot*) is not the same lemma, though, as *asherah* and its plural *asherim*. Those are two different terms—two different words. So *ʿashtart* is not *asherah* and *ʿashtōret* is not *asherim*. I'm going to read a little bit from DDD on Astarte. Nicholas Wyatt wrote this article. He says:

The divine name Astarte is found in the following forms: Ug *ʿttrt* ('Athtart[u']); Phoen *ʿštrt* ('Ashtart'); Heb *ʿAštōret* (singular); *ʿAštārôt* (generally construed as plural); Eg variously *ʿsṯrt*, *ʿsṯrt*, *isṯrt*; Gk *Astartē*. It is the feminine form of the masculine *ʿttr* ('Athtar', 'Ashtar') and this in turn occurs, though as the name of a goddess, as Akkadian →Ishtar... The etymology remains obscure. It is probably, in the masculine form, the name of the planet Venus, then extended to the feminine as well... Both god and goddess are probably, but not certainly, to be seen as the deified Venus. This is indeed the case, since if the morning star is the male deity (cf. Isa 14:12), then the goddess would be the evening star: as she is in Greek tradition... The goddess Ashtart is mentioned 46 times in the Ugaritic texts, but appears relatively rarely in the mythological texts.

So maybe not a secondary character, but not as important as you might think, since she's absent from the mythological texts. Judith Hadley, who did her doctoral work on Asherah summarizes things as follows. She writes:

ANE [Ancient Near East] Asherah (*Aṯiratu/Ašratu/Ašertu*) in the second millennium was worshiped from Asia Minor to Mesopotamia. In Ugar. myths she (*ʿttrt*) was wife of El and "mother of the gods." [MH: that will become an important thought later; to some it is, anyway] She was the goddess (Elat) of Tyre and Sidon. She is *ʿtīrat ym*: Asherah of the sea. Cf. Akk. *ašratum*, consort of Amurru.

In the first millennium references to her are found only on the fringes of the culture area, especially in Arabia.

That is also important. It's not like you find lots of inscriptions to Asherah inside Canaan or inside Israel. It's on the fringes of the culture, especially in Arabia.

It is generally held that the Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qôm inscriptions [MH: and I'll mention those a little bit subsequent to this] refer to some cultic object associated with Yahweh, and not exclusively—as some still maintain—his consort.

Let me just stop there. There are a few inscriptions on the biblical periphery... It's not in the Bible, but these are extrabiblical inscriptions that include the line that you could translate "Yahweh and his Asherah." So the question is, is that a cult object that some people were worshiping Yahweh with? Is it a cult place? Or is it the goddess Asherah, as though Yahweh had a wife? We'll get to that in a moment.

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OT Most scholars accept that the word is used as the name of the goddess in 1 Kgs 15:13 (= 2 Chron 15:16); 1 Kgs 18:19; 2 Kgs 21:7; 23:4 (perhaps 7); and the textually doubtful Judg 3:7 (possibly Astarte). All references in the OT, whether to goddess or to the cult object [MH: whichever it turns out to be], are uniformly antagonistic.

That's an important thought, as well. So when you get to biblical religion, nobody likes Asherah. What they're doing on the fringes of biblical culture out there on the hinterlands where these inscriptions were found by archaeologists, who knows what's going on out there? But when it comes to the biblical faith, it's universally negative when it comes to Asherah.

The אֲשֵׁרָה (pole, Asherah) [MH: It's a pole, like a sacred tree, or a reference to the goddess herself] is also said to be used within the worship of Yahweh, but is never approved.

So there are biblical references to the Asherah (whatever it is) being part of Israelite worship. It's in the Bible, but it's never approved. It's never a good thing; it's always condemned.

The אֲשֵׁרָה was also at times described as being in the temple, either as a symbol in the worship or as the image of a "guest goddess" (2 Kgs 21:7; 23:6).

2 Kings 21:7 says this:

⁷ And the carved image of Asherah that [one of the wicked kings] had made he set in the house of which the LORD said to David and to Solomon his son, "In this house, and in Jerusalem, which I have chosen out of all the tribes of Israel, I will put my name forever.

So they actually had an Asherah in the temple sanctuary. Back to Hadley:

If [this is just] an image, she could only be the consort of Yahweh...

So Hadley's position is, if this was an actual idol of Asherah, then the idea of whoever is doing this would be that Yahweh and Asherah were a married couple, which would be familiar to lots of polytheistic systems in the ancient world.

If an image, she could only be the consort of Yahweh, even if Baal was also a “guest god” there [MH: a guest god in the Holy Place, as well, because there's evidence for that, too]. There is apparently no part of the Bible that accepts the poles (אֲשֵׁרִים) as legitimate cult objects, even though the pillars, מַצֵּבָה (matsēbah) are sometimes accepted (Gen 28:18; perhaps Hos 3:4).

In passages like Genesis 28:18, a patriarch would build a pillar or a standing stone to the Lord and have an offering there. That was allowed in the patriarchal period. But the asherah and asherim, you never have a positive verse about them, whereas the standing stones you do get occasional positive references to them. That was permissible, at least at one point in Israelite religion in biblical thought.

So what's the larger issue here? Well, I'm going to quote from Andre Lamaire in a *Biblical Archaeology Review* article on this issue. I think he has some good things to say by way of summary. He says:

New inscriptions from two different sites have reopened the debate about the meaning of asherah, a term often used in the Bible. Is it—or she—a goddess? Is it a holy place? Or perhaps a sacred tree? Or a pole? Or possibly a grove of trees? All these suggestions have been proposed at one time or another by scholars...

He writes later on:

It is well-known that in Israelite religion Yahweh replaced the great god El as Israel's God.

He's saying that because he buys into the evolutionary model—the idea that Israelite biblical religion evolved out of polytheism. I don't. That's what my dissertation was on. So if you believe in an evolutionary model, you're going to be looking at the data that way. My view is that this was always in competition—prophets in the biblical faith versus Canaanite religion or some syncretistic form

of Yahweh worship. It was always going on. There was an orthodox view of plural *elohim* and there was a heterodox view of plural *elohim*. Just the fact that you have plural *elohim* does not mean polytheism. We have to look a little more closely than that, especially when you get to texts that post-date when this wonderful culmination (this breakthrough to monotheism) supposedly occurred in the days of 2 Isaiah. There are plenty of texts that are later than that that have plural *elohim* in them, both within the Bible and outside the Bible, like in the Dead Sea Scrolls. So nobody's getting the memo. I think it's a very poorly articulated view, but anyway... Lemaire says:

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If Yahweh replaced El, it would seem logical to suppose that under Canaanite influence asherah replaced Athirat...

Athirat was El's wife in Canaanite religion. She was "mother of the gods." And he's right here. I'm sure in the minds of some, this is what they were thinking—that we're going to worship Yahweh and we're not going to worship El anymore. But we're going to worship Yahweh in a way that mimics Canaanite religion, which means we have to bring the goddess over as Yahweh's wife. It's a very natural thing to do without some prophet or priest telling you not to do it. So that part of what Lemaire is saying here is logical. I'm sure some Israelites in some places did that. After all, you do have these inscriptions about Yahweh and his Asherah. So they're doing something that would be heterodox in these places. Back to Lemaire:

...it would seem logical to suppose that under Canaanite influence asherah replaced Athirat, and that, at least in the popular religion of ancient Israel if not in the purer form of that religion reflected in the Bible, asherah functioned as the consort or wife of Yahweh.

Moreover, a number of Biblical texts seem consistent with this interpretation. In Judges 3:7, we read that during Joshua's time (c. second half of the 13th century B.C.) [MH: so he's a late-dater for the Exodus], "The Israelites did what was offensive to Yahweh; they ignored Yahweh their God and worshipped Baalim (plural of Baal) and Asherot (plural of asherah)." Here the asherot are worshipped in association with a god.

Interpreting asherah as a sacred tree or grove conforms very well with what we know generally about the cultic places of the ancient Near East (Egypt, Mesopotamia and Syria-Palestine). A sacred tree, or grove, or garden is frequently associated with a sanctuary or cult place (see for instance Judith 3:8).

Think of sacred space, like I discussed in Unseen Realm. It was often marked by trees, or groves of trees, or groups of trees, like an oasis or paradise. That's all Lemaire is saying here. This is a pattern that he is seeing, and so maybe this is the meaning of *asherah* and *asherim* and *asherot*—that it refers to a place or a grove of trees or something like that. Maybe that's the best way to understand it. So Yahweh's *asherah* would be his cult center somewhere, located in the land.

Nevertheless, it must be conceded that the references to *asherah* associated with Baal could point in the direction of an *asherah*'s being a goddess. But all the references to *asherah* in association with Baal are relatively late (in terms of when the Biblical text was actually written down)—that is, beginning in the late eighth century B.C.

Again, this tells you that he's a JEDPer, that he has that date as the late 8th century B.C. That's Andre Lemaire from Biblical Archaeology Review. Despite having to pick our way through the sections of his article, I think what he says is well taken. We would expect evidence in the Bible if Yahweh was not being worshiped properly... You would expect the prophets to complain about this consistently and to have something to say about what the people were actually doing out in the hinterlands. I'm going to go back to Hadley here. She's responsible for the short entry on *Asherah* in NIDOTTE (that's shorthand for the New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis), which I highly recommend. Hadley in NIDOTTE (and by the way, you can get that in Logos and there's no other way to use it, trust me) writes:

The biblical term *Asherah* refers to either the goddess or cultic object associated with the goddess [MH: so we've got that part already] – or a cultic object associated with [the worship of] Yahweh [MH: but it would be bad in the biblical prophet's eyes]. The reason for the Yahweh association is a handful of inscriptions from the biblical period that have a line in them that can be translated “Yahweh and his *Asherah*.”

Again, is the *Asherah* a cult object? Or you can also translate it “Yahweh and his *Asherah*” and think that *Asherah* is a goddess. There's actually a third way you could translate this: “Yahweh and *Asheratah*.” It's an alternative form of the divine name *Asherah* because of the way the word is actually spelled in these inscriptions. We don't need to get into ancient Hebrew epigraphy here. We're not in grad school. But there are a number of ways you could translate this and understand it. These two inscriptions are the ones that were found in Khirbet el-Qom and Kuntillet Ajrud. So you can get some pictures of the inscriptions and

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some of the artwork there that appears to depict Asherah or Asheratah (an alternative spelling of the same deity name).

But the best reliable discussion I have found of this whole issue is very long and very technical by someone fully informed by the data who is also an evangelical. It's in Rick Hess' book, *Israelite Religions*. But even though this discussion is aimed at a seminary level audience, I think it can still get too technical and assume some knowledge of Hebrew, due to the forms of the inscriptions that Hess goes into. Basically, it's a "no stone unturned" approach that you would get used to if you've read anything that Hess does. He's very thorough. But I wanted you to know that there is a book out here written by an evangelical Old Testament scholar that covers this material very well. It's not going to go off in la-la land (like on the internet) and start talking about how biblical (key thought here: biblical) religion originally had a goddess. It did not. There's no evidence for that. You have Israelites in the land during the biblical period doing whatever they darn well please religiously, and this is what 1 Samuel 7 says they need to repent of [laughs], and other passages that have the Asherim/Asherah involved in Israelite worship of Yahweh. This is heterodoxy. It's aberrant. It's not biblical faith. So you should be aware that this resource exists, and if you apologetics you might want to invest in it. But anyway, I'll just pull out a little bit of what Hess says here. He says:

If this is a symbol of the goddess [MH: his Asherah], as in the form of a wooden pole, it would be acceptable grammatically and would be supported by other attestations in the Bible. Thus Yahweh has a consort. At least one or two writers of this graffiti (from Samaria) [MH: right away "Samaria" tells you something; not exactly known for its orthodox worship in the Bible] had a view of their god that allowed for other deities, a perspective reflected as well in the prophets. My view assumes that this is the personal name of the goddess. In this scenario, the final -*h* consonant in the inscription's spelling of the name could be a second feminine ending (Zevit [2001]) or a vowel letter reflecting a final *a* vowel (Angerstorfer [1982]). In the latter case, the name is not Asherah but Asheratah. This is the preferred explanation, based as it is on comparative forms in Iron Age names of southern Palestine and on all other West Semitic occurrences of the deity's name from the second millennium and the Iron Age epigraphy of the first millennium BC.

This is actually what Hess did in his dissertation, and he's well-informed about these names and inscriptions (names in the Bible, names and inscriptions). This is where he did his doctoral work. So again, it's a good source. It's an evangelical source. Like I said, if you're doing apologetics you might want to invest in it so

you can get into more details. He continues:

Asherah, spelled as it is in the Bible (*ʾāšērâ*), is never found in extrabiblical texts of the monarchy in Israel. At Khirbet el-Qom and on ostraca from seventh-century BC Tell Miqne (= Ekron) the spelling *ʾšrt(h)* is always found. Thus I think the deity was Asheratah, identical to the Asherah of the Bible, only spelled slightly differently.

40:00

So that's his position. You could rabbit-trail on this thing forever, but if you ask, "What was it?" Scholars don't actually know. Was this an idol of a feminine form? Is that what the Asherah was? If it was an idol, we've already had some scholars comment as I've been reading through them... If that's the case, then for sure Asherah is being thought of as a goddess in these shrines where you find these inscriptions, and presumably, in biblical passages where the prophets (and here in 1 Samuel 7) are saying, "You need to destroy those things."

Now, it could be something more simple, as planting a tree. Or a fake tree. In other words, you take a log and you carve it and you stylize it. Some people have theorized that the association is phallic (it's an upright, erect penis) because it has something to do with Athiratu. She is mother of the gods, which is obviously a very overt fertility reference to the goddess there. She mothered all the gods who were fathered by El.

So if Israelites are bringing Canaanite religion over into their worship of Yahweh, it is conceivable that this could have had some phallic value, but by no means is that the only view. It could have just been a simple tree. You'll find artwork if you go over to Google... Google has a lot of garbage in its image search. If you go to search for Asherah, most of it's nonsense. It's modern-day speculation. But you'll occasionally find some ancient images of a tree and on either side of the tree you have an ibex or a goat or something like that. (I think it's an ibex.) And that's an Asherah symbol. So there you have just a sacred stylized tree that somebody could have carved or painted on a log or whatever. Scholars don't actually know what the Asherah/Asherim were, so you have all of these different guesses.

As far as the third nugget we can get out of 1 Samuel 7, we have the public confession at Mizpah and the battle at Ebenezer. I'm going to refer to Hoffner here. He writes:

Samuel was willing to call a convocation for public confession only after the Israelites had shown him that they were sincere and willing to take direct action to reject the worship of other gods... In vv. 8–9 a different verb (*קָרָא*, *za'aaq*) ["cry

out”; other than “pray” in v. 4] expresses Samuel’s prayer for the people, but the sense is the same. In demanding convincing proof of their true repentance followed by intercession for them, Samuel followed the pattern of Moses (Num 11:2; 21:7). Like Samuel with Saul (1 Sam 15), Moses also had to deal with pretended repentances in the case of the pharaoh (Exod 8:8–9, 28–30; 9:28; 10:17–18). Despite Eli’s stern but pessimistic warning in 1 Sam 2:25b (“If a man sins against another man, God may mediate for him; but if a man sins against Yahweh, who will intercede for him?”), if a person sins against God and then truly repents, there is always a divinely-chosen intercessor. In this case it was Samuel the prophet. Since the cross, it is Jesus, the Son of God, who intercedes for repentant sinners (Rom 8:34; Heb 7:25; 1 John 2:1).

No amount of time is specified between Samuel’s call for a national gathering at Mizpah and the subsequent Philistine aggression toward the gathering (see vv. 5–6 where people hear of the approach of the Philistine army). Most scholars think the Philistine response was quick. The occasion will put Samuel in the role of military leader, something common to earlier judges in the book of Judges. So in Samuel both the spiritual and military roles of judges are fused (not always the case in Judges – e.g., Deborah and Barak); this is the template for the Israelite king, and was the apparent plan prior to Exodus 4.

If you think back to our series in Exodus, we talked when we got to Exodus 4 about whether the Aaronic priesthood was a concession to Moses, to his weakness. And I’m still of the opinion that it was. I think the original plan was to fuse spiritual leadership and secular leadership (which you had in Moses), but because Moses was weak, God made a concession and let him have his brother be the priestly side of it. So if you haven’t listened to the Exodus 4 episode, you can go back and do that. But it strikes me as something similar here.

Now Hoffner launches into a discussion then about the various animals allowed for sacrifice and so on. We’re not going to worry too much about that. I want to look at the wording of 1 Samuel 7:10-11, which is kind of interesting. We read this:

¹⁰ As Samuel was offering up the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to attack Israel. But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were defeated before Israel. ¹¹ And the men of Israel went out from Mizpah and pursued the Philistines and struck them, as far as below Beth-car.

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Now Hoffner writes (and I think he speculates a little bit here, but I'm going to include it):

We are not told the words that Samuel used when he called out to Yahweh for help, but we are told that Yahweh “answered him... Yahweh thundered with a mighty voice that day against the Philistines.” The effect was confusion and panic among the Philistine soldiers. Unlike the first armed encounter recorded in 1 Sam 4, when the presence of the ark among the Israelites and their confident victory shouts merely steeled the Philistine resolve, the sound of Yahweh’s voice from heaven in the form of thunder here thoroughly demoralized them...

So Hoffner is assuming that this voice—this sound—is actual thunder. When Yahweh thundered against them, he thinks this was literal thunder, which could be. It could be. I'm just saying it might be a bit speculative but it's interesting to think about. Back to Hoffner:

Thunder and lightning on the battlefield were signs to the ancients that a deity was angry and dangerous. The military annals of the Hittite king Muršili II relate an encounter between the Hittite armies and the armies of the west Anatolian kingdom of Arzawa, in which the Hittite storm-god presaged a Hittite victory by striking the enemy city with a lightning bolt (Hittite *kalmišana*-)... Other examples could be drawn from ancient Assyrian texts, but the former examples are sufficient to illustrate the psychological effect of a thunderstorm on armies in the field. The Philistine reaction to Yahweh’s thunderous voice here was thus typical.

That's the end of the Hoffner quote. So the result of Yahweh's intervention here, whatever form it took, he is reclaiming the Judahite territory that the Philistines had. In verse 14, the cities the Philistines had taken from Israel were restored to Israel, from Ekron to Gath. Those Philistine cities were restored back, and Israel delivered their territory from the hand of the Philistines. And that's not going to last because when we get to the time of David (which isn't going to be that far away), they're still being threatened by the Philistines. But again, at least for the fallout of this battle, this is where the dust settles. Verse 14 says:

There was peace also between Israel and the Amorites.

Hoffner writes of this. He says:

These verses summarize the proximal results of the victory: For the rest of Samuel’s period of ministry as a prophet attached to Israel’s armed forces (i.e.,

“all the days of Samuel”), the Philistines no longer conquered Israelite territory.

You can read it that way, too. Even though they're still threatened by the Philistines when you get to the David and Goliath episode, the Philistines aren't taking any more territory. They're trying to regain, or just generally harass and oppress the Israelites. Back to Hoffner:

The text does not claim that during the rest of Samuel's *lifetime* this was so, nor that sporadic incursions may have taken place that did not last. The point is that Israelite armies that were dispatched and given prayer support (as was the case here) by the prophet Samuel were never defeated by Philistine armies. The contrast is not with what happened after Samuel's death, but what happened repeatedly and catastrophically during the reign of his immediate successor, King Saul... The statement that “there was peace also between Israel and the Amorites” means that Israel enjoyed reprieve not only from the external threat posed by the Philistines, but also from threats by indigenous (“Amorite”) enclaves of pre-Israelite peoples.

Remember the Amorites were some of those that occupied the land when Moses and Joshua got there.

God gave them rest from external and internal dangers. Although $\text{D}\bar{\text{i}}\text{l}\bar{\text{v}}\bar{\text{v}}$ (*shalom*) (“peace”) and words related to it sometimes mean “alliance,” there is no reason to assume such a meaning here, since no evidence exists for alliances between Israel and indigenous enclaves—at least not during Samuel's lifetime.

So that's important, too. Samuel would not have tolerated that sort of thinking—that sort of action—to ally oneself with the Philistines or the Amorites. The statement is that they're not fighting, they're not taking land, they're not losing land (so on and so forth), at least in the immediate aftermath of Ebenezer.

And that's a good place for us to end here with this episode. Next time we're going to talk about the issue of Israel's call for a king. We're going to take 1 Samuel 8-10 and lump them all together. I think we're going to do two parts on that. In the first part, we're going to spend the majority of our time on the specific question, “Should Israel have asked for a king?” How do we know they should have, or if it was okay or not okay? And then we'll take that into a part 2 about what actually happens in the whole situation. So we'll end there and next time we'll get into 1 Samuel 8-10.

TS: All right Mike, looking forward to chapters 8-10 next time. And we'll remind everybody real briefly, please go visit our sponsor at www.logos.com/nakedbible. There are several packages there for you to get, but we want to encourage everybody to upgrade to Logos 10.

MH: I would encourage everybody, too. Just get into a Logos collection. You don't have to spend a huge amount of money to get into the ecosystem and get upgraded to Logos 10. Then you can buy things like I quoted from today—the NIDOTTE. You can buy lots of different resources that will just revolutionize your Bible study.

TS: Sounds good, Mike. We're looking forward to next week. And with that I thank everybody for listening to the Naked Bible Podcast! God bless.