

DO WE HAVE A MOTHER IN HEAVEN?

by Kevin L. Barney

One of the more distinctive doctrines of Latter-day Saint (LDS) Christians, which is not shared by other Christians, is the belief that, in addition to having a Father in Heaven, we also have a Mother in Heaven. It should be noted immediately that, although we Latter-day Saints believe in the existence of a Heavenly Mother, we neither overtly worship her nor pray to her. Perhaps the closest contemporary Christendom comes to this LDS belief in a Mother in Heaven is the Mariology of Roman Catholicism; yet that parallel, while ultimately stemming from a common source, is not very close at all. The LDS concept of a Mother in Heaven is unique within Christianity. The purpose of this paper is to explain why the LDS believe in a Mother in Heaven. We shall begin with a description of the doctrinal setting for this belief, and some brief historical background. The majority of the rest of the paper will describe ancient Israelite belief in a Mother in Heaven, including possible scriptural allusions to this belief, as well as the ways in which that belief was transformed over time. Finally, we will examine how the historical and scriptural evidence marshaled by modern scholars squares with LDS belief and practice.

THE DOCTRINAL SETTING

In order to appreciate LDS acknowledgment of a Mother in Heaven, the reader must first understand several points of our belief system that, taken together, point toward her existence. These include the following:

- Each of us has a spirit that has an existence apart from our physical bodies.
- These spirits were not created from nothing (*creatio ex nihilo*) at our physical birth, but preexisted our entrance into this world.
- We are the spirit children of God.
- Just as our physical bodies were begotten and born by earthly parents, our spirits were begotten and born by Heavenly Parents.

- As offspring of God, we have the potential to become like Him.

That we are thus the children of God is expressed in numerous biblical passages, such as Romans 8:16–17:

The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God: And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may also be glorified together.¹

Aside from all doctrinal and scriptural inferences, the primary reason we believe in a Mother in Heaven is that her existence was revealed to the Prophet Joseph Smith. Subsequent prophets have also endorsed this teaching. In the next section we shall briefly describe the modern revelatory background to the doctrine.

SOME HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The earliest references we have in LDS history to belief in a Mother in Heaven stem from events that took place in 1839. Joseph Smith, the founding prophet of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, consoled Zina Diantha Huntington upon the death of her mother on July 8, 1839 by telling her that not only would she know her mother again on the other side, but “more than that, you will meet and become acquainted with your eternal Mother, the wife of your Father in Heaven.” When Zina in astonishment asked “And have I then a Mother in Heaven?” the Prophet replied, “You assuredly have. How could a Father claim His title unless there were also a Mother to share that parenthood?”²

The Prophet Joseph taught this same concept to Eliza R. Snow, who in 1845 memorialized the idea in a poem originally entitled “My Father in Heaven.”³ This poem became the text for a beloved⁴ Mormon hymn called “O My Father” (Hymn 292 in the current Mormon hymnal), which reads in part as follows:



*In the heav'ns are parents single?
No, the thought makes reason stare!
Truth is reason; truth eternal
Tells me I've a mother there.*

*When I leave this frail existence,
When I leave this mortal by,
Father, Mother, may I meet you
In your royal courts on high?*

Wilford Woodruff, fourth president of the LDS Church, designated this text a revelation.⁵ In its simplicity of personal expression it remains to this day the most poetic and moving LDS articulation of the doctrine of a Heavenly Mother.

While it has sometimes been thought that Eliza R. Snow by this poem originated the idea of a Mother in Heaven, the concept clearly predates the song and goes back to Joseph Smith himself as its originator. For instance, in another hymn text composed for the dedication of the Seventies Hall in Nauvoo, Illinois in December 1844 (prior to the publication of “My Father in Heaven”), W. W. Phelps wrote this couplet:

*Come to me; here's the myst'ry that man hath
not seen:
Here's our Father in heaven, and Mother, the
Queen;*⁶

The idea of a Mother in Heaven was widely discussed in the early to mid 1840s in Nauvoo based on the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith.

In 1909, the First Presidency of the Church under Joseph F. Smith, in a statement on the origin of man, expressed that “man, as a spirit, was begotten and born of heavenly parents, and reared to maturity in the eternal mansions of the Father,” as an “offspring of celestial parentage.” The statement goes on to teach “all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother, and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity.”⁷ Although this is one of the more “official” statements of the doctrine, LDS belief in a Mother in Heaven has remained constant from the time of Joseph Smith to the present. For instance, Gordon B. Hinckley has stated: “Logic and reason would certainly suggest that if we have a Father in Heaven, we have a Mother in Heaven. That doctrine rests well with me.”⁸ Most recently, the First Presidency and Council of the Twelve issued a proclamation on the family, which reads in part as follows:

All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved spirit son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny. Gen-

der is an essential characteristic of individual premortal, mortal, and eternal identity and purpose.⁹

BUT WHERE DOES THE BIBLE SAY WE HAVE A MOTHER IN HEAVEN?

The Bible does not say, directly, that we have a Mother in Heaven. That she exists is in large measure an inference. Because of this dearth of scriptural information, while we Latter-day Saints acknowledge her existence, we have little doctrine or worship surrounding her.

One of the scriptures supporting this inference is Genesis 1:26–27:

And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over [the animals]. So God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them.

The parallelism of verse 27 strongly implies that the image [*tselem*] of God is both male and female. The Hebrew word *tselem* (rendered “image” here) was used of statues and paintings as resembling their models, and the word *demuth* (rendered “likeness” here) was used to refer to a resemblance, similitude or pattern, as a son is in the likeness of his father (see Genesis 5:3). Certainly there have been attempts to spiritualize the meaning of this passage. Nevertheless, the most natural way to read it is as follows: if humankind [*adam*] was created, both male [*zachar*] and female [*neqebah*], in the image of God, then the image of God must be both male and female (in much the same way that humankind, which was modeled after God, is male and female). One conceivably could account for this scripture by seeing God as a dyad (that is, as incorporating both male and female within himself/herself), as some Gnostics did; but if that were true, why did not God create each of us as hermaphrodites, as both male and female within ourselves? Viewing God as masculine only, or as a philosophical principle without any gender whatsoever, fails to conform to the picture of God portrayed in this verse.

In any event, LDS doctrine is not based solely on the Bible, but on a much wider array of revelation from God, including modern scriptures and the teachings of modern prophets. Furthermore, Latter-day Saints believe that the Bible as preserved today is not perfect, but reflects many centuries of editorial tampering.¹⁰ There is reason to believe, as we shall see below, that in a certain period of Israelite history a conscious effort was made to edit references to a Heavenly Mother out of the Bible.

ASHERAH, WIFE OF EL AND ISRAELITE GODDESS

As a result of document discoveries made in the 20th century, we now have a much clearer understanding of the beliefs of the Hebrews concerning God during the age of the patriarchs (and the relation of those beliefs to their Canaanite precedents). The monotheism we associate with Israel did not arise in full flower from the beginning; rather, it was probably not until the Exile that the Jews understood there to be only one God. At the first the Hebrews worshiped a small pantheon, consisting of the high God El, his wife Asherah, their sons Yahweh and Baal, and the other (unnamed) sons of the Gods. This original understanding of God developed over time until it reached the point of belief in Yahweh alone characterized by later Israelite theology. Baal was a very similar God to Yahweh and so was excluded from the pantheon very early to make way for Yahweh's claims. El was more complementary to Yahweh in his characteristics, so he was merged into Yahweh (resulting in the compound name Yahweh Elohim, translated "the LORD God" in the KJV). The other sons of the Gods became the angels; still divine beings, but a lower class of being than the dominant Yahweh.

The understanding of Asherah changed over time in response to these developments. She was originally the wife of El (her title Elat, "Goddess," is simply the feminine form of El) and the mother and procreatress of the Gods. When El was merged into Yahweh (around the 10th century B.C.E.), Asherah came to be viewed as the consort not of El, but of Yahweh. For instance, an inscription at Kuntillet 'Ajrud dating to roughly the ninth to eighth centuries B.C.E. states "I have blessed you by Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah" [*brkt 'tkm lyhwh shmrn wl'shrth*].¹¹ Eventually, the functions of Asherah were also absorbed into Yahweh; then, in an effort to put a stop to any independent worship of her, reformers linked her polemically to (the now thoroughly discredited) Baal, despite the fact that such a linkage does not seem to have had any historical basis. This reform movement against the worship of Asherah took place from the 8th to the 6th centuries B.C.E., and by the time of the conclusion of the Exile the worship of Asherah *as such* had been stamped out.

The word "Asherah" appears about 40 times in the Old Testament, usually mistranslated in the KJV as "groves" (following the mistranslations of the Latin Vulgate and the Greek Septuagint). It is sometimes difficult to tell whether Hebrew references to *'asherah* mean the Goddess directly or her cult object. Although scholars are not completely certain what this object was, most believe it to have been a wooden pole (perhaps stylized),

representing a sacred tree (i.e., the Tree of Life). Since it was made of wood, no actual examples of such an object have survived. The pole may have originally been a legitimate symbol associated with the temple, but it appears that, as was the case with the Nehushtan (serpent pole) made by Moses, over time the people came to worship the object idolatrously. This garbling of her divine associations and corruption of her worship resulted in the necessity of the reformers suppressing that worship.¹² We should understand, however, that the negative references to Asherah in the Old Testament all stem from this period of reform; there appears to have been an earlier worship of Asherah not marred by idolatry that was widely practiced and normative among the Hebrews.

SOME POSSIBLE POSITIVE ALLUSIONS TO ASHERAH IN THE BIBLE

Although the reformers did a good job of removing any positive references to Asherah from earlier periods of Israelite history, if one looks carefully at the Hebrew text there are a number of such allusions that seem to have escaped their blue pencil. We will briefly describe some of these passages below:

1. KJV Genesis 21:33 reads: "And Abraham planted a grove in Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of the LORD, the everlasting God." A more literal rendering of the Hebrew would be "And Abraham planted a tamarisk tree at Beer-sheba, and called there on the name of Yahweh El Olam." Note the combination of the divine names Yahweh and El (together with Olam "eternal," an epithet of El). No direct mention of Asherah is made in the verse as it exists today, but this planting of a sacred tree by the patriarch Abraham seems most likely to have been an act in her veneration.
2. KJV Genesis 30:13 reads: "And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher." It has been suggested that what she really said was not "happy am I" (literally "by my happiness") [*be'oshri*], but rather "by Asherah" or "with Asherah's help" [*be'asherah*] (Asherah being a goddess of fertility). Invocations of the name of a god in childbirth were common, and the normal form of such an invocation is with the *b-* prefix Leah uses here. Leah had similarly exclaimed "by Gad" or "with Gad's help" upon the birth of her son (through her handmaid Zilpah) Gad (Gad was the god of luck worshipped in Canaan and Phoenicia). On this theory, the name of Leah's son Asher would be the masculine form (without the feminine *-ah* ending) of the name of the Goddess.¹³

3. In Genesis 49, in Jacob's blessings to his sons, we see an invocation to Yahweh in verse 18, followed by an invocation to El in verse 25 (including the common El epithet Shaddai, "almighty," used in parallel with El). At the end of verse 25 there is a reference to the blessings of Breasts-and-Womb, which was known as an epithet of Asherah.¹⁴
4. If we may anticipate our argument below, Asherah was eventually recast as the personification of Wisdom in the first part of the book of Proverbs. It has therefore been suggested¹⁵ that there is an intentional word play on the name of the Goddess in an *inclusio* we find in Proverbs 3:13–18. An *inclusio* is a type of distant parallelism between material at the beginning of a section of text and that at the end of the section, thus framing or bracketing the material in the middle. These six verses form a discreet block of text. In verse 13 we have the terms "happy" (a word that is very similar to Asherah in Hebrew) and "Wisdom" (the designation of the Goddess as she was transformed, as discussed below). Five verses later in verse 18 we have the expression "a tree of life," a characteristic of Asherah paralleling the word "Wisdom" from verse 13, and the word "happy" again, matching the word "happy" in verse 13. As the parallel elements are given in an inverted order, this particular *inclusio* is chiasmatic in nature. Represented graphically:

- A. happy [v. 13; *'ashre*]
 B. Wisdom [v. 13; *chokmah*]
 [Framed material in
 verses 14 through 17]
 B. a tree of life [v. 18; *'ets chayyim*]
 A. happy [v. 18; *me'ushshar* (from the
 same root as *'ashre* above)]

That "Wisdom" appears in parallel with "a tree of life," long-associated with Asherah, tends to suggest the association of Wisdom with Asherah. The word play on the name Asherah in the Hebrew word "happy" tends to confirm that association.

5. RSV Isaiah 13:6 reads as follows:

And though a tenth remain in it, it will be burned again, like a terebinth or an oak, whose stump remains standing when it is felled. The holy seed is its stump.

The reference to "a tenth" appears to be an allusion to Judah, which was not taken as part of the Assyrian conquest. This tenth would not entirely escape, but would be punished also (i.e., in the Babylonian captivity). Yet even then a righteous remnant would remain, from which Israel could once again grow and flower. Thus, the end of the verse reflects the common Isaianic notion of a re-

turning remnant, such as we see in Isaiah 7:3, where we learn that Isaiah had a son symbolically named Shear-jashub ("A Remnant Shall Return").

Although the general meaning of the passage seems clear enough, the text itself is obscure and appears to have been corrupted. Many scholars believe the relative particle *'asher*, translated "whose" in the text above, originally to have been a reference to Asherah. These scholars would emend the end of the verse to read something as follows: "like the terebinth [of the goddess] and the oak of Asherah, cast out with the pillar of the high places." (So, for example, the RSV annotation and the NEB.) That is, Judah would be cut off and burned the way a sacred tree or an Asherah pole was during the reform period. These scholars would simply delete the last sentence, "the holy seed is its stump," and thereby remove the concept of the return of a righteous remnant from this verse.

If these scholars are correct in seeing here an allusion to Asherah, and if they are incorrect in deleting the last line, we have a plausible explanation for why the corrupted text arose. On this reading, the prophet was indeed using the cutting down of an Asherah pole or a sacred tree as an illustration of the captivity of Judah by Babylon. He goes on, however, to argue that the stump of a sacred tree was still considered holy and could regenerate into a new tree. As a reform prophet, Isaiah would not have used this imagery to support Asherah worship; rather, he appears to have been using common Israelite beliefs about Asherah worship to make a point about the ultimate return of a righteous remnant of Israel. Later scribes, apparently offended that the prophet would have used Asherah worship, even in a literary fashion only, to illustrate a positive prophecy of the return of Israel, modified the text so as to avoid this association.

6. RSV Hosea 14:8 [Hebrew 14:9] reads as follows:

O Ephraim, what have I to do with idols? It is I who answer and look after you. I am like an evergreen cypress, from me comes your fruit.

The line rendered "It is I who answer and look after you" in the RSV reads *ani 'aniti wa'ashurennu* (the "you" of the RSV is literally "him" in the Hebrew, referring to Ephraim). The meaning of the line as it stands is obscure. Many scholars suggest here a conjectural emendation to *'ani 'anato wa'asherato*, meaning "I [Yahweh] am his Anat and his Asherah," which would then restore the parallelism of the first two half-lines in the verse. Even if one does not follow these scholars in emending the text, there would appear at the very least to be a word play on the names Anat and Asherah in the

Hebrew text as it exists. That there is such an allusion to Asherah here can be seen particularly in how Isaiah 27:9, which is based on this passage, makes explicit reference to *'asherim* "Asherah poles."¹⁶ True, the prophet here is arguing against Asherah worship as part of the reform movement. But he does so gently, by having Yahweh take over her characteristics. Yahweh tells Ephraim that he (Yahweh) will fulfill the historic role of Anat/Asherah in the future for Israel. Yahweh states that he is like a sacred tree (as is Asherah), and that the source of fertility is not Asherah, Goddess of fertility, but Yahweh himself. While perhaps not a positive allusion to Asherah, this passage does illustrate the way in which Yahweh co-opted her functions during the reform period.

7. In Ezekiel 8:3 we read "and the spirit . . . brought me to Jerusalem, to the door of the inner gate that looketh toward the north; where was the seat of the image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy [*sml hqn'h hmqnh*]." (See also verse 5.) This image is generally accepted to have been a statue of Asherah that at one time was present in the temple. The expression "image of jealousy, which provoketh to jealousy" makes little sense. It has been suggested that the real designation of this figure was *sml hqn'h* "the image of the creatress," consort to Yahweh, who is called "creator [*qnh*] of heaven and earth" in Genesis 14:19. If this suggestion is correct, then "image of jealousy" *sml hqn'h* is a word play used to avoid mentioning the (at that time) unmentionable "image of the creatress."¹⁷

LADY WISDOM

As we have seen, by the conclusion of the Exile the reformers managed to do away with Asherah worship *as such*. But worship of the Goddess did not disappear altogether; she was merely transformed into other guises. Perhaps the most successful of these transformations as far as the Biblical text is concerned was the personified Lady Wisdom we find in Proverbs 1–9.¹⁸ Many scholars see here a reworking of the Asherah of old. Consider in particular Proverbs 8:22–31:

The LORD possessed me in the beginning of his way, before his works of old. I was set up from everlasting, from the beginning, or ever the earth was. When there were no depths, I was brought forth; when there were no fountains abounding with water. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills was I brought forth: While as yet he had not made the earth, nor the fields, nor the highest part of the dust of the world. When he prepared the heavens, I was there; when he set a compass upon the face

of the depth: When he established the clouds above: when he strengthened the fountains of the deep: When he gave to the sea his decree, that the waters should not pass his commandment: when he appointed the foundations of the earth: Then I was by him, as one brought up with him; and I was daily his delight, rejoicing always before him; Rejoicing in the habitable part of the earth; and my delights were with the sons of men.

Here Wisdom [*chokmah*] is not part of the created order;¹⁹ rather she preexists and assists Yahweh in the creation.

THE FURTHER TRANSFORMATION OF ASHERAH

Asherah worship was transformed in numerous other ways as well and thereby kept alive, although under different names and guises. In some circles she came to be associated with various other goddesses, such as Anat-Astarte. She was also seen as the feminine figure of the two cherubim atop the Ark of the Covenant in the temple. Otherwise, she was transformed in one of two broad ways. First, there was a tendency to associate her with some important human mother figure. Therefore, some saw Eve and, later, Mary, as divine representations of the Hebrew Goddess. The other way in which she was transformed was to see her as a spiritualized agent or characteristic of Yahweh. Over time, as the Hebrews began to conceive of God less and less in anthropomorphic terms and more and more as an abstraction, the need for personified mediating entities between God and man increased. These entities were originally conceived of as Yahweh's attributes or emanations (sometimes called *hypostases*), but they eventually developed into angel-like beings who act within the physical world and serve as intermediaries between God and man. Wisdom falls under this category, as does the understanding of Yahweh's Shekhina, or divine presence.²⁰

A third illustration of this type of transformation relates to Yahweh's spirit [*ruach*]. We have seen in Proverbs 8 that Wisdom was present with and assisted Yahweh in the creation. Proverbs 8 thus reflects numerous parallels to Genesis 1. Where in the creation account did the author of Proverbs see Wisdom as present and assisting God in the creation? In KJV Genesis 1:2, we read "and the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." The Hebrew word translated "moved" here is the participle *merachepheth*, from the verb *rachaph* "to hover." A better translation would be something like "was brooding upon the face of the wa-

ters” (as in Abraham 4:2). Although metaphorical, we can see here that the spirit was conceived of in feminine terms, here described in a way appropriate to a mother hen brooding over her young. Some early Christians conceived of the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit, as a mother figure (thus forming a Trinity of Father, Mother and Son).²¹ Although Latter-day Saints would reject this understanding of the Holy Spirit as Mother (since they accept something very like the original conception of a Heavenly Mother, such a developed conception is for them unnecessary), we do acknowledge that it was held in certain early Christian circles.

CONCLUSION

We should be clear that we do not believe in a Mother in Heaven just because of the 20th century scholarship concerning the Israelite Goddess. The vast majority of Latter-day Saints have never even heard of Asherah and do not know that this scholarship exists. Our belief in a Heavenly Mother is based directly on the teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. We do, however, see the recent Asherah scholarship as supporting this principle as taught by the Prophet.

We should also be clear that we in no way would support the idolatrous practices that came over time to be associated with the worship of the Goddess. The growth of such idolatrous practices made it necessary for the deuteronomic reformers to suppress her worship. This suppression then led to non-idolatrous variations on her veneration, such as the personified Lady Wisdom of Proverbs 1–9. As a matter of formal practice, Latter-day Saints do not have any specific ritual directed to our Heavenly Mother.

This booklet has been written to help those who are perplexed by this particular LDS doctrine to see that there are excellent reasons to believe that it might really be a restoration of the earliest Israelite belief. Since this doctrine as taught by the Latter-day Saints is based on neither political expediency nor New Age syncretism, the real issue at hand is whether Joseph Smith, who restored this belief in a Mother in Heaven, is a prophet of God. We testify that he is. We invite the reader to study the Prophet’s revelations, in particular the Book of Mormon, and then to pray to God the Father in the name of his son, Jesus Christ, to know whether these revelations are from God.

FURTHER READINGS

Patai, Raphael. *The Hebrew Goddess*, Third Edition. Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990. The tip of a very large iceberg of recent scholarly studies on the Goddess of Israel; particularly good on tracing Jewish transformations of Asherah worship.

Peterson, Daniel C. “Nephi and His Asherah: A Note on 1 Nephi 11:8–23,” in *Mormons, Scripture, and the Ancient World*. Provo: FARMS, 1998. Both an exegetical note on a passage in the Book of Mormon and an extended summary and synthesis of the extensive recent Asherah scholarship from an LDS perspective. A condensed and popularized version of this article appears in the *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 9/2 (2000), 16–25.

Petty, Richard J. *Asherah: Goddess of Israel*. New York: Peter Lang, 1990. A good, recent overview of the evidence, including an examination of all forty references to Asherah in the Bible.

Wilcox, Linda P. “The Mormon Concept of a Mother in Heaven,” in *Sisters in Spirit*. Urbana, Ill.: University of Illinois Press, 1987.

NOTES

1. See also Num. 16:22; Deut. 14:1; Job 32:8, 33:4; Ps. 82:6; Eccl. 12:7; Isa. 42:5; Mal. 2:10; Matt. 5:48; Acts 17:29; Eph. 4:6; and Heb. 12:9.
2. Susa Young Gates, “Eliza R. Snow Smith,” *History of the Young Ladies’ Mutual Improvement Association of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints from November 1869 to June 1910* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1911), 15–16.
3. *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 November 1845), 1039.
4. For instance, in 1855 the *Deseret News* noted that this song was the favorite of Brigham Young, second president of the Church. See Jill Mulvay Derr, “The Significance of ‘O My Father’ in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow,” *BYU Studies* 36:1 (1996-97), 85-126, at 98.
5. Wilford Woodruff, “Discourse,” *Millennial Star* 56 (April 1894), 229.
6. W. W. Phelps, “Come to Me,” *Times and Seasons* 6 (15 January 1845), 783.
7. First Presidency (Joseph F. Smith, John P. Winder and Anthon H. Lund), “The Origin of Man,” *Improvement Era* 13 (November 1909): 80.
8. Gordon B. Hinckley, “Daughters of God,” *Ensign* 21 (November 1991), 100. President Hinckley goes on to caution Latter-day Saints about praying to Heavenly Mother, which

is not an LDS practice: “However, in light of the instruction we have received from the Lord Himself, I regard it as inappropriate for anyone in the Church to pray to our Mother in Heaven.”

9. The Family: A Proclamation to the World, paragraph three.

10. See a forthcoming paper in this series, entitled “Do Mormons Believe the Bible Has Been Corrupted?”

11. John Day, “Asherah,” in David Noel Freedman, editor, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 1:483-487. This article is a summary version of Day’s longer study, “Asherah in the Hebrew Bible and Northwest Semitic Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 105:3 (1986), 385-408. There are a couple of similar inscriptions referring to “Yahweh of X and his Asherah.” The reference to “Asherah” in these inscriptions may be specifically referring to her cult object (discussed below), since proper names in Biblical Hebrew normally do not take a pronominal suffix (the “his” in the English translation). If so, then the reference to the Goddess as consort of Yahweh is indirect, but is nevertheless present.

12. See the comments of Daniel C. Peterson, “Nephi and His Asherah,” 218–19. For the full citation, see “Further Readings.”

13. W. L. Reed, “Asherah,” in *The Interpreter’s Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1982), 1:251; Raphael Patai, *The Hebrew Goddess*, 296–97, note 15. For the full citation, see “Further Readings.”

14. Mark S. Smith, *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 16.

15. Smith, *Early History of God*, 95.

16. Day, “Asherah.”

17. Margaret Barker, *The Great Angel: A Study of Israel’s Second God* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1992), 54.

18. See, for instance, Bernhard Lang, *Wisdom and the Book of Proverbs: A Hebrew Goddess Redefined* (New York: Pilgrim, 1986).

19. Bruce Vawter, “Prov. 8:22: Wisdom and Creation,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980), 205-16.

20. See in particular Patai, *Hebrew Goddess*, 96–111, 155–160, 202–220 and 282–294.

21. Elaine H. Pagels, “What Became of God the Mother? Conflicting Images of God in Early Christianity,” *Signs* (Winter 1976), 293–303.

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