

Worksheet 4

Friday, February 27, 2026 6:20 PM

Heavenly Mother and the Sacred Authority of Women

Summary of the Lesson:

Stephen Pinker's theory of Truth Towers is introduced as a means to address individual's internal bias to new material.

Archaeology and epigraphy complicate the later biblical narrative of strict monotheism. Ninth and eighth century inscriptions from Kuntillet 'Ajrud and Khirbet el-Qom pair Yahweh with "his Asherah" both in formal blessing and validate feminine presence in the divine. But the biblical texts confirm that an Asherah object once stood within the Jerusalem Temple and that women priestesses wove priesthood textiles associated with her. Hundreds of Judahite pillar figurines suggest widespread domestic maternal devotion during the monarchic period. While Deuteronomistic reform movements condemned these practices, the material record indicates how Israelites did not view Asherah as a foreign intrusion but as part of their regular sacred worship. The evidence does not prove a fully systematized goddess theology within the Jerusalem priesthood, but it strongly supports the conclusion that divine femininity was embedded in Israelite religion prior to later theological compression.

Reflection:

Key Terms:

Truth towers: A tool created by Stephen Pinker to explain how human beings organize our beliefs and truths with the metaphor that individuals construct beliefs from the doctrines, experiences, assumptions, and interpretations are given to us already over simplified and stacked on top of one another like bricks. When one brick is being challenged, it feels as though the entire tower (meaning entire belief system) is being challenged.

Steel manning: The disciplined practice of strengthening an opposing position before critiquing it.

Intertextual: text that crosses over other scriptures topically

Theophanic: how man perceives God

Typology: classifying a pattern of type

Onomastics: the study of names

Significant Hebrew words and their meaning:

תְּהוֹם (Tehom): a feminine noun cognate with Tiamat

אָבֹא (avo / avo): I will come

בְּכָל (behol): everywhere there is a desire for God

הַמָּקוֹם (ha-maqom): this place

שֵׁם (Shem): means name

יִבְחַר (yihar / yivchar): means will He choose

שָׁמַע (shama'): to hear/obey

יָצָא (yatsa'): to go out

נָטַע (nata' / nata): to plant

Assignment:

Practice Steel manning

Take a position you disagree with and articulate it in its strongest, most coherent form - *as if you believe it.*

as if you believe it.

- Read opposing argument
- Rewrite without sarcasm
- Ask: What would have to be true for this to be reasonable

Graphic:

The Generative Mother in Ancient Cosmology Sumerian Traditions

	Figure	Description	Represents	Nature
Sumerian Traditions	Nammu	The Primeval Sea	Potential fertility, creative polarity	Generative
Babylonian Traditions	Tiamat	Maternal Figure	Threatening	Combative (later editorial Strata)

Graphic:

Genesis 1:2

“And the earth was without form, and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep. And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters.”

Hebrew		Key terms translated	Meaning
הָאָרֶץ הַיְתֵהָ וְהוּ וְבָהוּ	Veha'aretz hayetah tohu va'vohu	Ha'aretz- the earth (feminine noun) Hayetah- Perfect 3rd feminine singular, agrees in gender Tohu va'vohu- poetic double noun	The earth is desolated and scattered.
וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם	Vechoshekh al pene tehom	Al pene- construct phrase Tehom- feminine noun	Tehom is a cognate of Tiamat
וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם	Veruach Elohim merachefet al pene hamayim	Ruach- feminine noun Merachefet- Piel participle, feminine singular Elohim- ?	Kinetic wind activity. Spirit blows dynamically over water.

Reflections: Is there any further translations or definition for the phrase above you have found? How do these translations help clarify the biblical text and traditions? How does this new meaning make it more complicated?

Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence of The Divine Mother in Mainstream Israelite Worship:



Broken Pieces of a Ceramic Jar called *Kuntillet Ajrud* with the inscription at the top "Yahweh and his Asherah," dating back to 8th-century BCE

Image from Dr. Ze'ev Meshel and Avraham Hai/Tel Aviv University Institute of Archaeology.

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-artifacts/puzzling-finds-from-kuntillet-ajrud-a-drawing-of-god-labeled-yahweh-and-his-asherah-or-the-egyptian-god-bes/>]





Remains from a Tomb and Shrine dedicated to Yahweh dating back to 8th Century BCE.
[from <https://www.posenlibrary.com/entry/hamsa-hand-khribet-el-kom-makkedah-tomb>]



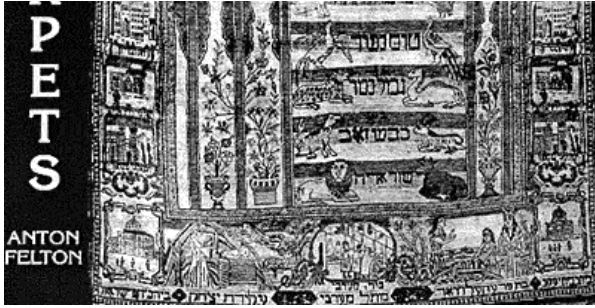
Hundreds of Judahite Pillars, figurines that accentuated the female form, were found from 8th-7th century BCE.
[from https://www.academia.edu/44856021/Popular_religion_in_ancient_Judah_during_the_8th_and_7th_centuries_BC_The_case_of_the_female_pillar_figurines]

Asherah Poles



Female material practices





Cedar of Lebanon



Cedar of Lebanon was used to build Solomon's temple due to its symbolic understanding within ancient Near Eastern sacred mountain traditions. The Temple was adorned with several types of symbolism relating back to the divine feminine. It was styled to resemble the garden of Eden.

[from https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cedrus_libani]

Reflection: Given all this historical evidence, what are your impressions of the temple? What do you think of the Epigraphic and Archaeological Evidence of The Divine Mother in Mainstream Israelite Worship?

The traditions:

Women in Israelite temple structures served as Temple Weavers and at the Sanctuary entrance. Both roles would have given women the authority to assume the role of priestess. There is evidence women were serving in every area of the temple, in roles equal to men, in verses 2 Kings 23:7 (describe women as critical in textile production) Exodus 38:8 and 1 Samuel 2:22 (describe women serving at the sanctuary entrance, employing terminology for service, or the highest priestly roles.) and lastly in Numbers 6 (which further demonstrates that women could enter consecratory states).

Graphic:

Three Female Prophets

Miriam ----> Miriam is called a prophet alongside Moses and Aaron and recognized as an Israeli leader sent by God

Exodus 15:20 (Interlinear)

וַתִּקַּח מִרְיָם הַנְּבִיאָה אֲחֹת אַהֲרֹן אֶת־הַתֹּף בְּיָדָהּ
וַתִּצְאֶן כָּל־הַנָּשִׁים אַחֲרֶיהָ
בְּתַפִּים וּבְמַחֲלֹת

Vattiqach Miriam han-nevi'ah achot Aharon et-hatof beyadah
Vattetse'na kol-hanashim achareha
Betuopim uvimcholot

And took Miriam the prophetess, sister of Aaron, the tambourine in her hand.
And went out all the women after her
with tambourines and dancing.

([Book of Exodus](#) 15:20)

Deborah -----> Deborah openly judges Israel, adjudicating disputes and directing military action, and the Song of Deborah preserves one of the earliest poetic witnesses to Israel's faith

Judges 4:4–5 (Interlinear)

וְדִבּוֹרָה אִשָּׁה נְבִיאָה
אִשֶּׁת לַפִּידוֹת
הִיא שֹׁפֵטָה אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל בְּעֵת הַהִיא

U-Devorah ishash nevi'ah
Eshet Lapidot
Hi shoftah et-Yisrael ba'et hahi

And Deborah, a woman, a prophetess,
the wife of Lapidoth,
she judged Israel at that time.

וְהִיא יוֹשֶׁבֶת תַּחַת תֹּמֶר דִּבּוֹרָה
בֵּין רָמָה וּבֵין בֵּית־אֵל

Vehi yoshevet tachat tomer Devorah
bein Ramah u-vein Bet-El

And she dwelt under the palm of Deborah
between Ramah and Bethel.

([Book of Judges](#) 4:4–5)

Huldah -----> Huldah validates the scroll that sparks Josiah reform. Interestingly enough, this reform invalidates Huldah's role and all female roles in the temple as a form of prophet authority.

2 Kings 22:14–15 (Interlinear)

וַיֵּלֶךְ חִלְקִיָּיָהּ הַכֹּהֵן
וְאַחִיקָם וְאַחְבֹּר וְשַׁפָּן וְעֵשָׂיָה
אֶל־חֻלְדָּה הַנְּבִיאָה

Vayelech Chilqiyahu hakohen
Va-Achikam ve-Achbor ve-Shafan va-Asayah
El-Chuldah han-nevi'ah

So Hilkiyah the priest,
and Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah
went to Huldah the prophetess.

וַתֹּאמֶר אֲלֵיהֶם
כֹּה אָמַר יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל

Vatomar aleihem
Koh amar YHWH Elohei Yisrael

And she said to them:
Thus says the LORD God of Israel.

([2 Kings](#) 22:14–15)

Graphic:

The Shifting Trajectory of the Text's Opinion on Temples

					Hebrew Terms Defined	Hebrew Terms
"You shall make me an altar of earth... in every place where I cause my name to be remembered." Exodus 20:24	----->	"You shall seek the place that the LORD will choose" Deuteronomy 12	----->	Insert Matthew 18:20 verse	[Insert Hebrew translation]	אָבואַ Means I will come בְּכָל means everywhere there is a desire for God
Covenant Code (Exod 20-23) allows several alters, suggests that places of worship should be localized among multiple cites.	----->	Deuteronomy insists on one sanctuary, combines all sanctuary into one place of worship.	----->	Matthew offers an example of intertextual theophanic typology. The text is reminiscent of the teachings in Exodus.	[Insert Hebrew translation]	הַמָּקוֹם means this place שָׁם means there יָבֹחַר means will Yahweh choose

The Story:

As per the recurring pattern, Lehi prophesies something ominous “in the first year of the reign of Zedekiah,” immediately following Josiah’s reforms and the Babylonian crisis. Lehi warns that Jerusalem will be destroyed because the people “would not hear” and had “rejected the prophets” (1 Nephi 1:19–20). God commands Lehi to take his family to the wilderness. Lehi changes tradition by using his exile to bring the sacred presence to his migrant household. Christ later on gives authority to any who will pursue it (John 7:17).

He condemns coercive religious leadership, teaching that dominion or compulsion is “not” of God (Doctrine and Covenants 121:36–37). New Testament leadership taught by Christ is persuasion, longsuffering, gentleness, and love unfeigned (D&C 121:41–42). Furthermore, believers are not commanded to accept doctrine passively. They are instructed to “prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21), to “try the spirits whether they are of God” (1 John 4:1), and to seek confirmation through the Spirit (Moroni 10:4–5). The Bereans are commended for examining the scriptures daily to test apostolic teachings of the time (Acts 17:11).

Reflection: What do you think of Lehi's prophecy?

Quote:

"Christ's model reorients authority away from fear and toward transformative invitations, while scripture consistently places responsibility on the covenant community to discern, test, and spiritually verify the doctrine they receive." - Jared

Further Reading:

Margaret Baker's papers

www.margaretbarker.com/Papers/default.htm

1. Start with The Secret Tradition -this shows Deuteronomistic editing really well
2. Move to Restoring Solomon's Temple -this shows the mounting, garden, tree first temple theology
3. Then Wisdom and the Other Tree -hokmah spirit of the Divine Mother
4. Then First Temple Symbolism in the Fourth Gospel -Good introduction to first Temple symbolism
5. Then The Paraclete -Wisdom to Spirit Traditions
6. End with Gazing on the Mystery -the Divine Presence of the Temple

Margaret Barker argues that these strands reflect remnants of First Temple theology in which a “Lady of the Temple” or a personified divine Wisdom associated with the presence of God that was central to Israel’s worship. In The Mother of the Lord, she contends that Second Temple reforms suppressed this older layer, while traces survived in wisdom literature and early Christian theology. Rowan Williams has publicly acknowledged the seriousness of her work, noting that it attempts to explain tensions within the Hebrew Bible and early Christianity through this lost temple tradition.

Barker’s thesis remains debated within mainstream scholarship. However, the linguistic data are clear: Wisdom is feminine, present at creation, and associated with divine ordering; temple theology centers on divine indwelling; later Jewish tradition re-feminizes presence in the Shekhinah. Whether one accepts Barker’s reconstruction fully or not, the Hebrew canon itself preserves complex and layered traditions about divine presence. The feminine dimension was never entirely erased.

Quote:

"....."

“Institutions centralize.
Reforms legislate.
But language remembers.” - Jared

Next Unit:

Moving forward, we are looking into onomastics, because the names written in the text preserve the history of what has been simplified and lost. For example, Asherah's name has
Asherah's name remains embedded in blessing formulas such as “Yahweh and his Asherah.” Hokmah (Wisdom) is grammatically feminine and speaks as a pre-creation presence in Proverbs 8. Shekhinah, derived from the root שכן (“to dwell”), later becomes a feminine grammatical expression of divine indwelling in Jewish tradition. Titles such as “Lady of the Temple” emerge from attempts to reconstruct earlier theological strata.

Personal names in the Bible function theologically. Miriam, Moses, Noah, and Rebekah are encoded narratives, divine encounters, and covenantal roles. When viewed diachronically, names are palimpsests of the older traditions, linguistic fossils. They retain theological patterns that later redactors attempted to narrow but cannot fully erase.

The next unit will explore how names function as carriers of sacred memory and how etymology, morphology, and usage reveal patterns of remembrance and suppression across Israel's religious development.

We will also introduce a new source called the Deuteronomistic tradition.

These editors reflect a theological program most clearly articulated in Deuteronomy and extended through Joshua–Kings. This is not viewed as corruption, so much as scholars understand it as editorial shaping driven by reform movements, particularly those associated with King Josiah in the late seventh century BCE.

It is recognizable through it's:

- Vocabulary update
- Focus on central sanctuary
- Retrospective point-of-view
- Regular use of "YHWH your God"
- Emphasis on obedience expressed through the verb שָׁמַע (to hear/obey)
- The evaluative refrain in Kings: “He did what was right... but the high places were not removed.”

Within the Documentary Hypothesis, the Elohist source (E) is identified primarily by linguistic and theological features that distinguish it from the Yahwist (J) and the Deuteronomist (D). The name “Elohist” comes from the consistent use of the divine title אֱלֹהִים (Elohim). This preference reflects a theological pattern.

One of the clearest markers of the Elohist tradition is mediated revelation. In E-associated narratives, God frequently communicates through dreams, angels, or prophetic intermediaries rather than direct anthropomorphic appearances. For example:

- Genesis 20 — God appears to Abimelech in a dream.
- Genesis 28 — Jacob receives revelation in a dream at Bethel.
- Genesis 22 — The “angel of God” calls to Abraham from heaven.

This indirect mode contrasts with the Yahwist's more immediate, embodied portrayals of YHWH walking, speaking face-to-face, or forming humans from dust.

The Elohist source also displays a strong northern orientation. Many E-associated passages emphasize locations such as Bethel and Shechem, sites associated with the northern kingdom. Prophetic authority is foregrounded. Abraham is explicitly called a “prophet” (נָבִיא) in Genesis 20:7, and the fear of God (יִרְאַת אֱלֹהִים) becomes a recurring theme (Genesis 22:12).

Scholars also note certain linguistic tendencies in E material, including:

- Preference for “Elohim” before Sinai
- Emphasis on prophecy and moral testing
- Reduced anthropomorphism compared to J
- Interest in covenant obedience and ethical fear of God

