



DIGGING DEEPER – WEEK 2

The Queen of Heaven

“No wonder I am so angry! Watch how the children gather wood and the fathers build sacrificial fires. See how the women knead dough and make cakes to offer to the Queen of Heaven. And they pour out liquid offerings to their other idol gods!”

Jeremiah 7:18

Then all the women present and all the men who knew that their wives had burned incense to idols—a great crowd of all the Judeans living in northern Egypt and southern Egypt—answered Jeremiah, “We will not listen to your messages from the LORD! We will do whatever we want. We will burn incense and pour out liquid offerings to the Queen of Heaven just as much as we like.”

Jeremiah 44:15-17a, b

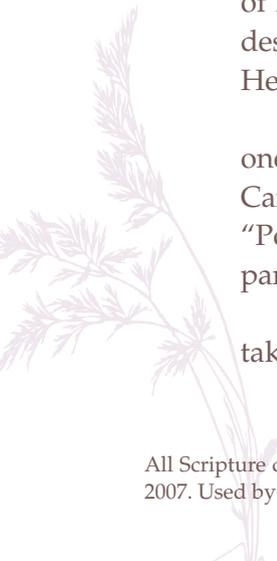
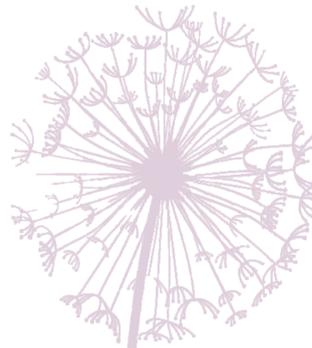
From the very beginning of Jeremiah’s ministry in Chapter 7 to the very end of his book, with a remnant of Judeans living in Egypt after Jerusalem has been destroyed, we see women leading the charge in the worship of the Queen of Heaven. Who is she? Did they make her up?

Judah and Israel were set apart as the only nations that worshiped just one God. All of the surrounding nations of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, and the Canaanite countries had numerous gods, and none of them were exclusive. “Polytheistic religions are flexible and readily accept foreign gods into their pantheons, either as new gods or through identification with existing gods.”¹

So when looking at the Queen of Heaven, the women of Judah could have taken her from one of these options:

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- The Canaanite Astarte was the evening star goddess of sex and war.
- The Egyptian sun god, Ra, had a goddess daughter also named Astarte. She was a warrior god.
- The Assyrian/Babylonian goddess Ishtar ruled over love, sexuality, and war.²

All of these cultures influenced the people of Judah. God often warned them not to be influenced by the pagan gods of the Canaanites. Egypt held Judah as a vassal nation during Jeremiah's ministry. The Babylonians came in, taking people and treasures and eventually destroying Jerusalem. Women might have seen the Babylonians' power and thought their gods to be of great power because of their military success. No matter the exact name or identity of this goddess, we find each option very similar in her appeal.

Idols of love and power also tempt us today as we fight our culture to give God first place in our lives. God loves beauty. We know this for certain because He created a beautiful world. He also likes new things as much as any of us do. Revelation 21:5 says that He is going to make all things new.

However, we must guard against the Queen of Heaven's lure to worship beauty, love, and sex. Everywhere we turn we hear messages declaring that we must go to great lengths to look good. The women of Judah lived during a time of financial crisis much as we do, but they baked special cakes, burned incense, and poured out wine in hopes of finding love and control.

We also use our resources to buy pricey cosmetics, expensive gym memberships, new clothes, Botox, and even plastic surgery in order to draw the attention of others. Looking good is not wrong, but we all know when we've crossed the line into an obsession. We also find the media telling us that fulfillment comes through romance and being wanted by men. Our thought lives and our appetite for romantic novels and movies reveal our need to be desired. This idolatry will never satisfy our souls. The women of Judah "exchanged their glorious God for worthless idols!" (Jeremiah 2:11). We would be wise to learn from them so that we are not tempted to do the same.

The Queen of Heaven was a goddess of love and also a goddess of war. The Judean women bought into the lie that she possessed the power to give them victory. We face many battles ourselves. We war with our husbands or significant others. Our desire for control leads to many fears and anxieties. This problem stems back to the garden when Eve ate the apple. Part of the curse in Genesis 3:16 reads "you will desire to control your husband." The reach of our demand for control becomes idolatry when things must always go our way with our husbands, children, jobs, friendships, and even ministries. Power drugs us to desire more and more of it until we become like the Queen of Hearts in Alice in Wonderland, saying, "All ways here are my ways!"³



Though we are not baking cakes or pouring out drinks as the women of Judah did, we worship Astarte or Ishtar every time we set beauty, sex, and power above God in our hearts. Our God is jealous for our devotion. He alone deserves first place in our affections. As you finish this week on idolatry, search your heart and confess any worship of the Queen of Heaven you may find there.

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1. L. de Blois and R.J. van der Spek, *An Introduction to the Ancient World* (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.
 2. Jack R. Lundbom, *The Anchor Bible, Jeremiah 1-20* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 476.
 3. "Alice in Wonderland," <http://www.cornel1801.com/disney/Alice-Wonderland-1951/movie-film.html>.

