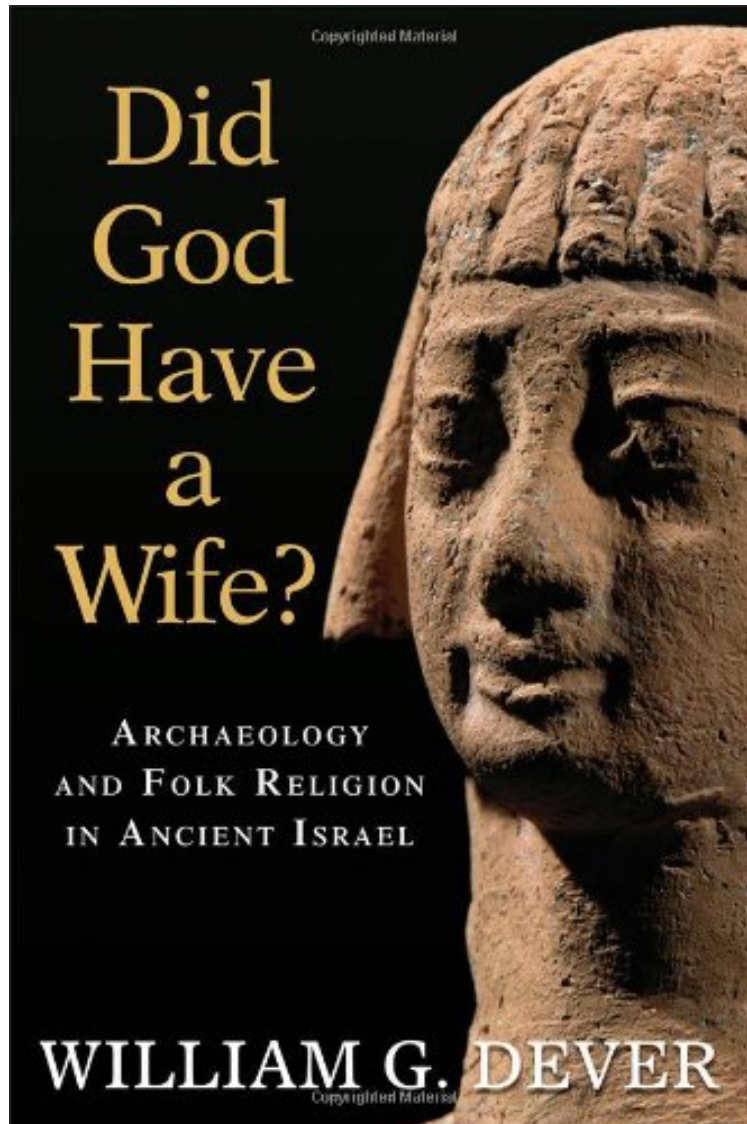


[Free read ebook] Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel

Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel

William G. Dever

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William G. Dever : Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Did God Have a Wife?: Archaeology and Folk Religion in Ancient Israel:

3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Asherah, the means by which Yahweh blessed his people By K. Smith A good text for beginning archaeology, especially biblical archaeology in courses studying the texts, epics (e.g.

Gilgamesh Epic, et al) and material culture from which ancient Israel emerged. When I studied Biblical Archaeology the course was primarily the study of early Canaanite epics which had been uncovered at Ugarit and Ebla and how some of the language and stories were similar to what we have in the Bible. The course was short on the uncovered material culture of ancient Israel, in each of its defining periods, and how that material culture was dated. This book would fill that void. It begins as an "Apologia Pro Archaeologia" just in case you didn't think archaeology was relevant prior to purchasing the volume, and you will be sure to notice that the author, a male, thinks females are very important the world over. And in part that theme is dictated by the material culture of ancient Israel. The author writes at times like early Iron Age Israeli folk religion, dominated by females, was a feminist enterprise even back then. The author doesn't develop a theme he introduces from an observation he makes well into the book, that folk religion was the religion of all the family, men and women, and that the book religion advocates of the temple literati and royal courtiers of the Jerusalem court excluded men as well. Israeli Folk religion was the religion of a class of Israeli society not connected with the emerging royal consciousness of the Davidic lineage, perhaps beginning with Hezekiah, and becoming fully developed in Josiah as he attempted to reclaim all of Israel in the wake of the Assyrian depredations in the north. The author touches on how the developing "book religion" ethos of the Jerusalem court prodded first Hezekiah, then Josiah, then those after Manasseh to assert exclusive control over their territory as if they were independent kings. And that is something the book highlights to the author's credit: the bible would have you believe that most Judean kings were independent - they were not; they were always in a state of vassalage to their more powerful neighbors to the South (Egypt) or the northeast (Assyria, Babylon). The Deuteronomistic ethos which claimed the right to rule all of Israel, the author shows, was a late development in Israeli life, itself a subset of ancient Canaanite culture, but more importantly, this ethos which claimed all of Israel was the means by which the Judean kings were caused "to poke the bear" so to speak, and bring havoc upon the region's inhabitants. The author shows how folk religion and its female figurines persisted through the late monarchy despite the condemnations of the Jerusalem court and its prophet propagandists, The religion of Abraham was polytheistic, and endured to the Babylonian Exile, but he doesn't quite make the statement that the Judean kings themselves caused the calamity which occurred and he should have. The prophets all state the blame lies with the people's devotion to the folk religion; but the real problem, asserted in veiled statements in this text, was when devout monarchs attempted to assert independence over Israel rather than accept vassalage and it ended badly. So the text draws a contrast between the reality of ancient Israeli religion at its very beginnings, which was polytheistic, with how the Bible asserts it had always existed as monotheism or at best henotheism, and that assertions of an ideal monotheism were actually a very late development of the Judean monarchy prior to the Babylonian invasion. He contrasts the proliferation of how Israel "folk religion" persisted in the area through the early Judean monarchy and its similarities with the Northern kingdom, and how after Assyria laid waste to its rival in the north, that the Southern Judean monarchs began to assert a claim over the northern lands and began to do so with a new "Deuteronomistic" ideology which further separated Israelis from their Canaanite origins and which a developing thesis of monotheism, of Yahweh alone as the God of Israel. The author fails to mention how this theme became a reality only after the Babylonian captivity, and then only after the Persian Empire conquered Babylon. The author hints at the reality of the tendency of national crises to cause rethinking and a reassessment of Israeli religion, and how religion in Israel was radically different after the return from exile which was then centered totally on "book religion" of the Deuteronomistic school of the late monarchy. The author fails to mention that the emerging Jewish Monotheism, which became ethical monotheism, became so precisely because their Babylonian captors were conquered by a society, the Persian Empire, which itself had as its religious ideology one of Ethical Monotheism from the teacher Zoroaster. He doesn't say so of course, but it is an obvious consequence of historical events.

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Lots of archaeology, but with lots of historical understanding
By Matthew O'Neil
This text is heavy in the exploration of archaeology from antiquity. Not that that is a problem, but the content involving the historical understanding of Asherah comes as a bit of an afterthought. Archaeology is huge and using it to understand history is crucial, but I would have liked to explore the main thesis more than artefacts. Regardless, I love this book. It adds a new dimension to the understanding of the Israelites' faith in its original context and what characteristics they borrowed from other Near Eastern cultures.

5 of 6 people found the following review helpful. Devers provides some great evidence and persuasive arguments
By hefruth
Devers provides some great evidence and persuasive arguments, although he wavers a bit (maybe a lot) on a few issues, including whether or not to directly admit the idea that there was a Great Goddess, known by different names, who preceded the idea of an 'all-father' god, since fatherhood was learned, not natural. I would have also liked to see him tackle the Book of Ruth, wherein the post-exile writers tried to justify (and prove to the women) why they should change cultural habits--from having the man "cleave" unto his wife in her home, which she probably owned, passed down from her mother (a tradition from when the Hebrews lived in tents, which the women created), to having women follow the men to their homes, given the newer and growing idea of paternity as superior to maternity (also the main reason for all those patriarchal begets in Genesis--the writers had to hammer the idea of patriarchy into their readers/listeners). Such a transition from matriarchy to patriarchy is clear in many of the choices these elitist male-oriented writers attempted (and were successful in many ways) to impose on a previously maternal based culture. We

always know who the mother is, knowledge which also gives birth to the idea of "immaculate" births, but learning to tell when you've become a father is difficult--hence an emphasis on removing the woman from her home and excluding access to her. Contrary to male-oriented beliefs, male lions are not Thinking of creating progeny when they kill the babies of the females who they want to pretend to control; they just remember who they had sex with, and kill the offspring of the females they have not yet had intercourse with, so there is no reason to assume human males were any different (many men still refuse to believe they are fathers today).Dever also errs in showing some of his own pervasive biases--assuming only women cooked and assuming no Israelite woman could read or write (despite archeology illustrating that priestesses from nearby nations wrote letters and literature; if Ashera was worshipped in the Temple, there should have been Israelite priestesses, too), and he also demonstrates that innate fear many men have when discussing the Great Goddess (whom he insists is merely the Great Mother most of the time) because he refuses to entertain the idea that humanity began our spiritual worship by assuming there must be an all-powerful Goddess creating and directing life, since women--in their "magic"--were the only evident creators in early humanity. When did humans become conscious that males had a role in procreation and were not just reacting to women's magical sexual attractions? Cultural anthropology shows us that, even in tribal cultures, women made the homes, owned the crop fields, and the people believed the main creative divinity was female (and that the male was often either mischievous or temperamental). Even in other patriarchal religions, the male divinities have to overcome and often dismember the female divinity in order to create the earth or to create certain sustaining food sources. Dever ignores all this evidence to continue to support the patriarchy--something he cannot bear to eliminate all together. His fear of upending the patriarchy also means he's incapable of admitting he's a wannabe feminist--someone who believes that both genders are equal, even if sometimes different. It is foolish for a scholar to dismiss the idea of an original Great Goddess when there is so much evidence around the world that shows the feminine was revered not just for fertility, but also for power. That the Judean exile writers chose to push the masculine divinity to the forefront, moving him from a mere monolatry god to a universal one, was a conscious political choice to allow men to run roughshod over women. One other important error Dever makes is to imply that any scrutiny of the Judean religion as it is practiced today is anti-semitism. He eagerly points out the continued persecution of women in some Moslem countries (not all Muslims share that sexist view), but he crosses a line he should not have by calling some scholars anti-semitic, simply because they analyze and find wanting all or most Judean religious concepts. While I applaud Dever for his efforts in trying to set the record straight, even he doesn't do the issue justice.

Following up on his two recent, widely acclaimed studies of ancient Israelite history and society, William Dever here reconstructs the practice of religion in ancient Israel from the bottom up. Archaeological excavations reveal numerous local and family shrines where sacrifices and other rituals were carried out. Intrigued by this "folk religion" in all its variety and vitality, Dever writes about ordinary people in ancient Israel and their everyday religious lives. *Did God Have a Wife?* shines new light on the presence and influence of women's cults in early Israel and their implications for our understanding of Israel's official "Book religion." Dever pays particular attention to the goddess Asherah, reviled by the authors of the Hebrew Bible as a foreign deity but, in the view of many modern scholars, popularly envisioned in early Israel as the consort of biblical Yahweh. His work also gives new prominence to women as the custodians of Israel's folk religion. The first book by an archaeologist on ancient Israelite religion, this fascinating study critically reviews virtually all of the archaeological literature of the past generation, while also bringing fresh evidence to the table. Though Dever digs deep into the past, his discussion is extensively illustrated, unencumbered by footnotes, and vivid with colorful insights. Meant for professional and general audiences alike, *Did God Have a Wife?* is sure to spur wide and passionate debate.

Susan Ackerman "In *Did God Have a Wife?* Bill Dever presents a multidimensional portrait of ancient Israelite religion with his characteristic eloquence and panache. Most significantly, through his detailed examination of archaeological materials, Dever reveals crucial facets of what he calls 'folk religion,' or the religion of one of ancient Israel's most neglected communities, the everyday people."