

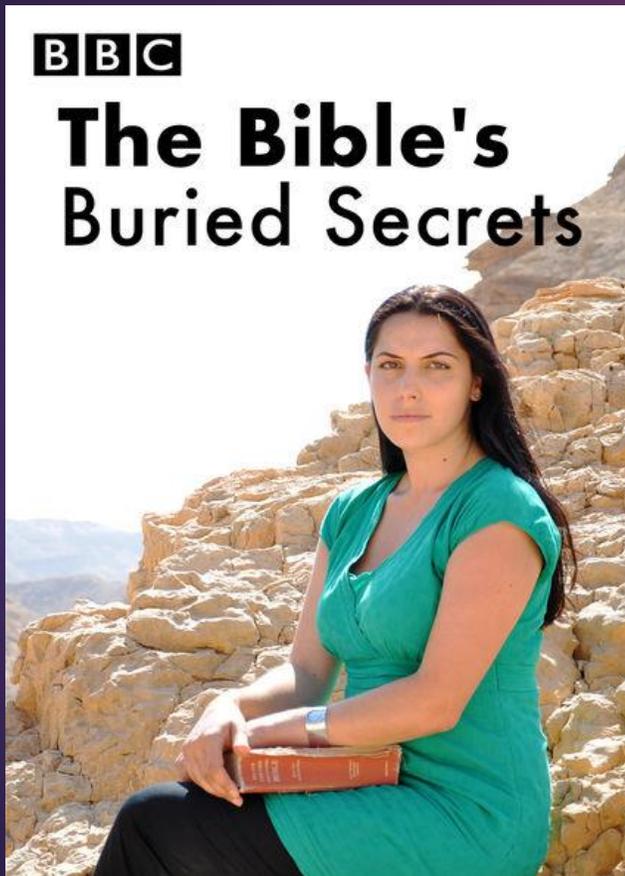
BBC

# The Bible's Buried Secrets





# Why Study This?



- BBC Documentary available on Netflix
- Hosted by Dr. Francesca Stavrakopoulou, religious professor and self-proclaimed atheist
- She does not believe Moses or David ever lived
- 2nd episode attacks monotheism in the Bible



**Prof Stavrakopoulou**  
@ProfFrancesca

Professor of Hebrew Bible & Ancient Religion at Exeter University, with a sideline in TV and radio. Geeky. Greeky. Atheist.

📍 UK. Exeter/London

🔗 [humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/staff...](https://humanities.exeter.ac.uk/theology/staff/)

# Dr. Stavrakopoulou's Assertions



- ▶ “I think the evidence now shows that the people of the Bible believed in many gods, and the scribes who composed the Bible did their best to conceal this, but not altogether successfully.”
- ▶ Canaanite god **EL** is the same God of OT.
- ▶ YHWH was ruler of a divine council of gods that included Asherah as his female consort.
- ▶ After Babylonian captivity, Jewish leaders purged references to polytheism from Biblical writings, making Bible a fictitious account of Israel's religion.

# Did Israel worship the Canaanite god EL?

- ▶ Gen. 17:1 – “I am Almighty God (El Shaddai); walk before Me and be blameless.”
- ▶ Ex. 6:2-3 – “I am the LORD. I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob as God Almighty (El), but by My name LORD I was not known to them.
- ▶ Hebrew word El can refer to any deity or to the Almighty God.
- ▶ Isn't it logical for different nationalities to have similarities in religion post-Babel?

# Was God one of several gods the Israelites were to worship?

- ▶ Gen. 1:26 – “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...”
- ▶ Ex. 15:11 – “Who is like You, O LORD, among the gods?”
- ▶ 1 Kgs. 22:19 – “I saw the LORD sitting on His throne, and all the host of heaven standing by, on His right hand and on His left.”
- ▶ Ps. 82:1 – “God stands in the congregation of the mighty; He judges among the gods.”
- ▶ Heaven includes angels, but they are not deities to worship – Rev. 19:10, 22:8-9; Gen. 18, 19; Heb. 13:2
- ▶ Mere mention of “gods” does not mean they existed or were equal to God

# Did God have a wife?

- ▶ Canaanite god El did have a wife—Asherah, the goddess of fertility.
- ▶ Asherah mentioned ~40 times in the Bible.
- ▶ Many excavations in Israel have uncovered female figurines in domestic buildings that appear to be small idols of Asherah.
- ▶ Deut. 33:2-3 – What is at God’s right hand?

“Fiery Law”

799. אֲשֵׁרָה

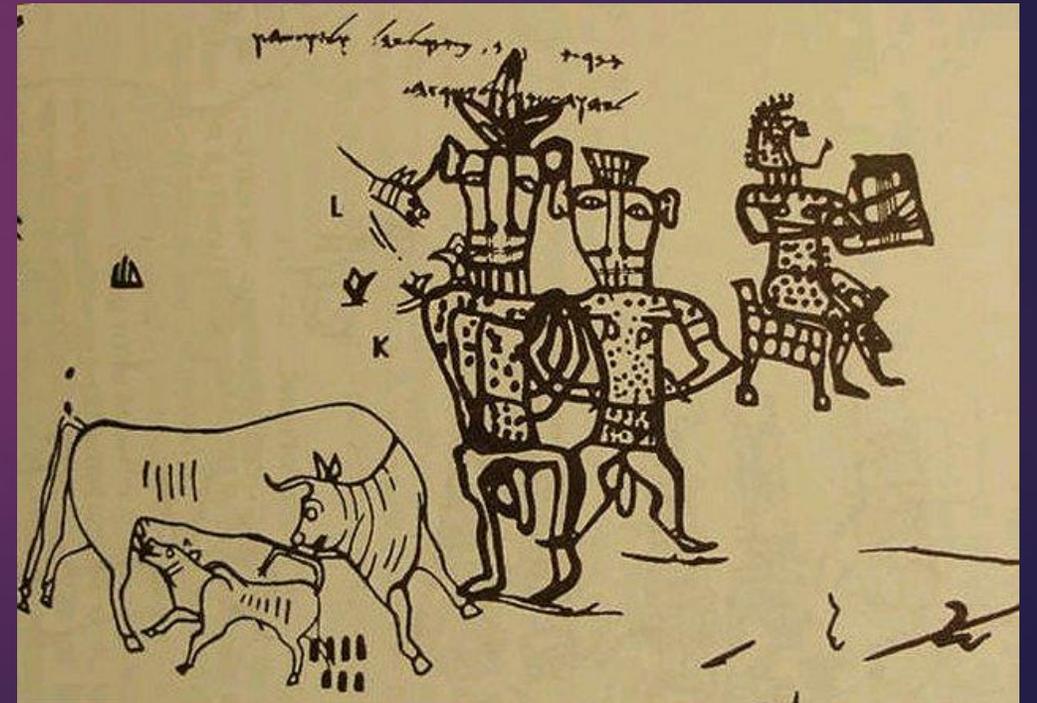
“Asherah”

842. אֲשֵׁרָה



# The most “convincing” evidence about Asherah...

- ▶ 1975 excavation on Sinai peninsula found a bowl with an inscription that coupled God’s name with Asherah: “Blessing from Yahweh of Samaria and his Asherah”



# Asherah in the Bible

- ▶ Mentioned as part of forbidden idol worship
- ▶ Ex. 34:13 – “But you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and cut down their wooden images (for you shall worship no other god, for the LORD, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God).” (see *also* Deut. 12:3)
- ▶ Deut. 16:21 – “You shall not plant for yourself any tree, as a wooden image (Asherah), near the altar which you build for yourself to the LORD your God.”
- ▶ Jdg. 3:7 – “So the children of Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD. They forgot the LORD their God, and served the Baals and Asherahs.”

# Asherah in the Bible

- ▶ 2 Kgs. 23:13-14 – King Josiah destroyed high places Solomon had build for Ashtoreth, along with sacred pillars and wooden images.
- ▶ If God had a wife, why would He be jealous of worship to her and forbid it? And why wouldn't she be the mother of Jesus?
- ▶ Clearly, the nation of Israel worshiped Asherah and Baal. Evidence supports that, and the Bible admits it.
- ▶ BUT, this does not mean it was part of worship to God!

# Application

- ▶ Examining issues like this are important for our understanding of the Bible.
- ▶ This is one example of how people will extract things out of the Bible in an attempt to support their bias.
- ▶ Everything in the Bible is not open to each person's interpretation—some truths are vital for obedience and unity.
- ▶ Just because people change what God says does NOT mean God established things a different way.