

WOMEN'S Bible Study: "Women of the Word in the Word"

Rev. David Steffenson—Fall 2015 (Wednesdays from 1:00-2:30 p.m. at Oasis Church)

Introduction:

This will be *an eight session Bible study*, looking at colorful women of the Word. These ancient women encountered every imaginable, true-to-life, experience that modern, contemporary women face: anger, infertility, rape, incest, adultery, mental illness, marital & family system problems, racism, sibling rivalry, idolatry and murder.

Imagine any problem, crisis or challenge, and these women experienced it firsthand. They knew sin, but they also exhibited amazing leadership, ingenuity, quick wit, cooperation, courage, grace, and sacrificial love & service. Some of these fascinating women of the Word are nameless. Many have puny profiles. God used women to further His Word & serve His holy purposes. *"Of the some three thousand named Bible characters, fewer than 10 percent are women."*

Thanks for being a Woman in, and of, the Word!

Class Schedule:

Session One—September 9: Eve - "Be Fruitful & Multiply"

Session Two—September 23: Sarah & Rebekah – "Barren Among the Fruitful"

Session Three—October 7: Rachel and Leah – "Sister Wives"

Session Four—October 21: Dinah & Tamar – "Rape & Incest"

Session Five—November 4: Shiphrah & Puah; Jochebed, Miriam, Zipporah – "Exodus Women"

Session Six—November 18: Deborah & Jael & Delilah – "Women with a Reputation"

Session Seven—December 2: Rahab and Ruth – "Foreigners in the Family Tree"

Session Eight—December 16: Michal and Bathsheba – "David's Wives"

SESSION ONE: Eve - "Be Fruitful & Multiply"

First Word: Name two women, one from Scripture and one from your life, who have been memorable and influential in your life? What did you learn from them?

Read Matthew 1:1-17: Matthew begins his story of Jesus with *a genealogy*. What surprising names are included in this family tree? What does the inclusion of these women tell us about the importance of women in Salvation History?

Genesis means "beginning". In the beginning, God created human beings, male and female, in God's image. What does *the name Eve* mean? What do you remember about Adam's wife?

Read Genesis 2:18-25. It's not good to be alone. God creates "*a helper fit for*" Adam. Adam means *earthling*, created from the earth; a human from the *humus*. At this point in the Creation Story, Adam is not a male person. When you think of Eve as being "*a helper fit for*" Adam what images come to mind? Do you think of a complementary half (an equal partner), or a subservient and submissive spouse? Is one

spouse superior and one inferior, or are they both equal companions?

NOTE: EZER KENEGDO: Usages of 'ezer in the Old Testament show that in most cases God is an 'ezer to human beings, which calls to question if the word "helper" is a valid interpretation of 'ezer in any instance it is used. 'Ezer literally means a "power or strength" equal, corresponding to the man. Adam says, "This is bone of my bones" (an equal). The woman was never meant to be an assistant or "helpmate" to the man. The word "mate" slipped into English since it was so close to the Old English word "meet," which means "fit to" or "corresponding to" the man (which comes from the phrase that likely means "equal to"). Read I Corinthians 11:11-12. What insight does St. Paul provide?

In Ephesians 5:21ff, St. Paul says that the husband is supposed to be the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the Church. Paul also says that husbands and wives are to be servants of one another, submissive to one another, out of reverence for Christ. What does this mean? **Equal** does not mean "the same".

Some people say that God creates Adam on the sixth day and then creates Eve, meaning that Eve is the height of God's creation. God the potter becomes God the anesthesiologist and God the surgeon. God puts the human to sleep and takes out the side of the human (not a rib). For the first time human beings are identified as **ISH** (man) and **ISHSHAH** (woman). Even in the present day we hear people refer to their spouse as their "other" or "better" half. The height of God's good creation is the formation

of gender for the sake of companionship, and reproductive sex (Be fruitful and multiply). Marriage makes a husband and wife one flesh; naked and not ashamed. What does being "one flesh" look like in Holy Christian Marriage?

The Garden of Eden is Paradise. How do you imagine paradise? Sin enters the Garden when God's Law is disregarded. There was only one rule in the Garden of Eden. Read Genesis 2:17. What was the LORD's one rule; one prohibition? What are the consequences of disobedience?

Read Genesis 3:1-24. Whose fault is the Fall? Would any of us want one solitary act or sin on our part to define our whole existence? The serpent was made by God. Why did God put this crafty, stumbling block in the Garden of Eden? Do you think the serpent wore Eve down over time, or did he get her to eat the forbidden fruit the first time he tempted her? The serpent invites Eve to question the Word of the LORD: "Did God actually say....?" The woman adds to the WORD of God: "God told us not to eat or TOUCH the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." What are the dangers of adding to the Word of God? The serpent calls God a liar. But the Bible says that Satan (the serpent; devil) is the father of all liars (John 8:44). The Woman trusts the words of a stranger rather than the WORD of her Creator. The serpent promises Eve that she won't die, but instead she will be her own God; her own autonomous self! What kind of fruit do you think that Eve ate? Was it an apple or a fig perhaps? Eve ate and also gave some fruit to her husband to eat. Adam was with her. Why didn't Adam intervene and put this conversation immediately to a stop?

We often blame Eve for the Fall, but it appears that she didn't have to twist Adam's arm to get him to eat. What happens when Eve eats the forbidden fruit? She and Adam know that they are naked. Nakedness becomes a shameful thing. They hide when they hear the sound of the LORD walking in the Garden. God finds Eve & Adam and addresses them. Question: "Where are you?" Response: "We're hiding because we're naked". Question: "Who told you that you are naked? Have you eaten the forbidden fruit?" What does Adam do when God invites him to confess his sins and receive forgiveness? He plays the blame game. The man (Adam) blames the woman (Eve) whom God gave him. Adam points the finger at God. Who does Eve blame for the mess of the Fall? Choice-sequences! What are the consequences for disobedience? How do we rationalize our sin & sinning? What promise does God make in Genesis 3:15? How does God cover the nakedness of Eve and Adam? How is expulsion from the Garden a gift of Grace?

Read I Corinthians 11:3 and I Timothy 2:14-15. What does the New Testament say about Eve's role in the Fall? Eve was deceived, but Adam willfully disobeyed (see Romans 5:12-14; I Cor. 15:21-22). The man and woman are both complicit; and so are we. Childbearing brings salvation; i.e. the birth of Jesus (Galatians 4:4) who is our Savior. Baptism is the Womb of the Church, birthing us into the death & resurrection of Jesus.

Creation's Mandate: "Be Fruitful and Multiply!" Read Genesis 4:1-2 and 4:25-26. The name Eve means "life". Eve becomes the mother of all living things. Though labor will be difficult, a wife

will desire the gift of children. Adam *knew* Eve. What does it mean "*to know*" someone in a biblical sense? The Hebrew word is *YADA*, which means to know someone in a relational sense, not just in a cognitive or coitus manner. Adam and Eve had intercourse (*YADA*). Intercourse is "the exchange of thoughts or feelings between individuals or groups". Intercourse is a communication word; a relationship word. Eve bears two sons, Cain and Abel, and she gives credit to God (the SOURCE of life)!

Eve is a farmer's wife, & a farmer herself. Cain is a crop farmer and Abel has livestock. We don't hear how Eve reacts to the sibling rivalry of her sons (e.g. offerings to the LORD). One can only imagine the heartache of a mother who buries her baby because he has been murdered by her firstborn. Have you known the loss of a child? God banishes Cain to the land of Nod, but he bears a mark of divine protection. Eve is bereft of both of her sons. Her story ends with conception (*YADA*) and the birth of Seth; the child of promise (Genesis 2:15). According to Genesis 5:4, Adam was 130 years old when Seth was born. Adam lived another 800 years and had other sons and daughters, presumably via Eve.

Is there anything wrong with being a wife and a mother? Is a woman less if she doesn't bear a child or have a vocation outside of the home? If you could visit with Eve & ask her one question, what would you ask or want to know? How do you hope to be remembered after you are dead and buried? Final thoughts or questions?

Preparation for Session Two: Read Genesis 12:10-20; 16:1-16; 18:1-15; and 25:19-28.

SESSION TWO: Sarah & Rebekah – “Barren Among the Fruitful”

First Word: “Behind every good man is a great woman.” What do you remember about Sarah and Rebekah? What about Sarah’s Egyptian maid, Hagar?

Read Genesis 11:30. Abraham is 75 & Sarah is 65 when God calls them to travel to the land of promise. What challenge/obstacle is announced in this verse?

Sarah is anything but an enviable character. She comes from Ur of the Chaldeans and is married to her half brother Abraham (same father—Terah, but different mothers; Genesis 20:12). We first meet Sarah when she is 65. Barrenness defines her. How is Abraham supposed to be the father of a multitude of descendants when his wife is 65, barren, and past menopause? Her biological clock had run out decades ago. Sojourning has been the story of her life: from Ur to Haran to Canaan to Egypt to Read Genesis 12:10-20. God promises Abraham land, a great name, many descendants and blessing! The first threat to the promise is a famine. Like Sarah, the land is barren. Abraham takes his family to Egypt. To protect his own skin, Abraham pawns off Sarah as his sister. Sarah enters Pharaoh’s harem. How does God intervene, and in everything work for good (Divine Providence)? Perhaps Hagar was part of the booty that Abraham left Egypt with after deceiving Pharaoh.

Abraham returns to the Negev and recognizes that the land cannot support the livestock of both his and Lot’s (his nephew) flocks and herds.

Being generous, Abraham gives Lot the first pick of the land. Lot chooses the Jordan Valley and the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah. That leaves the wasteland of Canaan for Abraham & Sarah.

In Genesis 15, we discover that Abraham has adopted Eliezer, a slave of Damascus as his heir, because he and Sarah remain childless. God renews the covenant with Abraham & reminds him that his descendants will be innumerable, like the stars in the sky. “Your own son shall be your heir.” Just believe!

Read Genesis 16:1-16. Sarah is not a powerless woman. Recognizing her barrenness, she commands her husband to have sexual relations with her Egyptian maid, Hagar. They practice surrogate motherhood the old fashioned way. Who does Sarah blame for her barrenness? Abraham obeys Sarah. (*“The husband may be the head of the wife, but she is the neck and she can move him any way she chooses.”*) The husband always gets the last word: “Yes Dear!” Abraham doesn’t protest. Sarah apparently thinks that God needs her assistance in fulfilling the promise of many heirs. Once again God’s providence prevails. Human acts of sin cause heartache in the home. Oh what a tangled web we weave. When Hagar becomes pregnant, as planned, Sarah blames Abraham for the contempt she is experiencing. Abraham plays the victim & reminds Sarah that whole thing was her idea. He tells Sarah that Hagar is her maid/slave and that she may do with her as she pleases. Evidently the treatment is so harsh that Hagar runs away. The Angel of the LORD intervenes. How old is Abraham & Sarah when Ismael is born to Hagar?

Abraham is circumcised at the age of 99. Read Genesis 18:1-15. The LORD appears to Abraham at the Oaks of Mamre and announces that Sarah and Abraham will have a son in the Spring. What do Abraham and Sarah do when the birth announcement is given? How does laughter become a “name game”? How old will Abraham and Sarah be when Isaac is born? As chapter 18 comes to a close, Abraham is interceding for the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (residence of Lot and his family). Lot’s wife is turned into a pillar of salt. Does Sarah grieve the destruction of Sodom, or does she think that Lot’s wife and the residents get exactly what they deserved? Do you remember what Lot’s daughters did to preserve the family line (Moab and Ammon)?

In Genesis 20, Abraham convinces Sarah to pretend once again that she is his sister. Imagine having your husband insist that you prove your love to him by offering yourself to other men. Sarah is taken into the harem of King Abimelech of Garar. Once again the providence of God prevails. Abraham receives a boatload of gifts. Why is trusting the promises of God so difficult for Abraham and Sarah, and for us too?

As promised, Sarah gives birth to Isaac in the Spring (Genesis 21). Isaac is circumcised on the eighth day as commanded by God. Abraham made a great feast on the day of Isaac’s weaning. What does Isaac’s 13-year-old half brother, Ishmael, do to ruin the celebration? Sarah demands that Abraham send the slave woman and her son away. Reluctantly, he agrees. The LORD intervenes, promising to make a great nation of Ismael (Arabs) also, because he is Abraham’s offspring. But it shall be through

Isaac that the promise will be fulfilled. We wonder if Sarah ever knew about the planned sacrifice of her son on Mount Moriah (Genesis 22). Sarah dies at the age of 127, when Isaac is 37 years old, Isaac is still unmarried. It must have been hard not living long enough to see your only child get married. Sarah is buried in the Cave of Machpelah, east of Mamre in Hebron. Abraham paid 400 shekels of silver (a huge price) for the burial site (Note: the typical bride price—*Mohar*—at the time would have been 30-40 shekels). The cave would eventually hold the remains of Abraham, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob and Leah also.

God fulfilled promise in His own time. The name Sarah means *princess*. What did Sarah say when she gave birth to Isaac (21:6)? Describe a time in your life when God brought you laughter. Read Genesis 17:6; 18:12 & 15; and 21:10. What five adjectives would you use to describe Sarah?

In Genesis 24 we hear the saga of Abraham’s quest to find a wife for Isaac. Abraham sends a trusted servant (Eliezar?) to the Old Country to find good stock from his own kin. Nahor (present day Iraq) is about 500 miles northeast of Canaan. An oath is taken. **Rebekah is an answer to prayer**. She was Isaac’s second cousin. Rebekah & Isaac get married. Isaac takes his wife into the tent of his deceased mother. He is finally comforted after his mother’s death. Isaac loved Rebekah (24:67). Isaac was 40 years old when he got married (25:19). We discover in Genesis 25 that Abraham took another wife, his concubine Keturah, and had more children. Abraham died at the age of 175 (25:7) and was buried with Sarah in the Cave of Machpelah.

Read Genesis 25:19-28. Rebekah experiences infertility for 20 years. Twins are an answer to prayer, but nations are at war within her womb (Esau and Jacob). Two babies are in her womb punching each other. Isaac is 60 years old when the twins are born. What alarming words end this passage of Scripture (25:28)?

Favoritism will take its toll in the Isaac household. Are you someone's favorite? Jacob lives up to his name. What is he doing as he comes out of his mother's womb? If Isaac was 60 when the twins were born, and Abraham lived to be 175, how old was Abraham when Esau and Jacob were born? What does the Bible tell us about polygamy and multiple wives? Have you or someone you know, known the sorrow of infertility? Why is wanting a baby and not being able to have one such a trial? What about the added pain of miscarriages? What do the stories of Sarah and Rebekah tell us about family life and family systems in the Old Testament?

In Genesis 26, we learn that Isaac repeats the sins of his father. He too passes his wife off as his sister in the land of Gerar (Abimelech, King of the Philistines). Though Isaac doubts the LORD's protection and lies to Abimelech, the LORD provides him with agricultural prosperity and the respect of the local rulers. At the age of 40, Esau marries two Hittite women, who make life bitter for Isaac and Rebekah. In Genesis 27 we hear about Isaac's gifting of the blessing. Isaac is old and near death. He summons his favorite son & asks for a tasty meal. Rebekah overhears the request and intervenes on her son Jacob's behalf. Deceptive Jacob, scheming Rebekah, unwitting Isaac & impulsive Esau all fall short of

the LORD's perfect standard. Jacob flees the wrath of his brother and heads to sanctuary of Uncle Laban. Rebekah never sees her son Jacob again. **"Let the curse fall on me" (27:13).**

What three words changed Rebekah's life forever (24:58)? Sarah & Rebekah both had the courage to pack up and leave the security of the familiar. What do you think Rebekah's marriage was like in the early years of her life with Isaac? How does a parent's favoritism affect the destinies of one's children and the dynamics of life in the household? What are some of the family system issues you have experienced firsthand? Why do you think Rebekah resorted to trickery to obtain the promise for Jacob (25:23)? Do you think she regretted her actions when she faced the consequences? How are Rebekah's actions similar to those of her mother-in-law Sarah? What did these two women share in common? How were they different? St. Paul uses Sarah and Hagar in Galatians 4 to illustrate the two Covenants: Law & Gospel.

Excerpts from Barren Among the Fruitful (2014), by Amanda Hope Haley: *"The problem of infertility may soon reach epidemic levels in our society. It is projected that 40% of women currently 25 years & younger will have difficulty conceiving a child or reaching a live birth." "Having a baby isn't a happy ending. Finding wholeness by accepting God's plan is a happy ending." "Children aren't the only 'fruit' in the Bible." "Be spiritually fruitful in a barren world." "Over time my nightly prayer changed from 'God get out of my way' to 'God, don't let me get in Your way'." "With more questions than answers, I simply must remember that God is always in charge of everything. His plan is perfect."*

Preparation for Session Three: Read Genesis 29:1-30:24; 33:1-3; and 35:16-29.

SESSION THREE: Rachel and Leah – “Sister Wives”

First Word: Rebekah says her goodbyes to her favorite son, Jacob. For his own protection she must send him to her brother Laban. She will never see her son again. Her death is not explicitly mentioned in Scripture (35:8; 49:31). In Haran, the cheater will get cheated and the grabber will grab the wrong girl. Leah & Rachel are not simply sister wives because they are married to the same man. Rather, they are sisters, who are married to the same man. What do you remember best about the stories of Leah and Rachel?

Read Genesis 29:1-30:24. What does this story teach us about “what goes around comes around”? Do we always reap what we sow? Does Jacob get what he deserves? Rachel and Leah are rival sisters. What is the rivalry? What do you make of the baby-making competition between Leah and Rachel?

Scripture tells us plainly that Jacob loved Rachel (29:18, 30), but that Leah was hated/rejected (29:31). Jacob was smitten by Rachel; it was love at first sight. How does the Book of Genesis describe Leah and Rachel? Marriages were arranged. They were business transactions. If love developed, well and good, but procreation was the goal. The normal wage for a shepherd was 10 Shekels per year. The normal Bride Price (*Mohar*) would have been 30-40 Shekels. Jacob agrees to work for Laban for seven years; i.e. 70 Shekels, to secure Rachel as his wife. He pays a hefty price for love (Elvis: “I Can’t Help Falling In Love”). The 84 months seem like only a few

days. When has time flown by for you? When has time gone painfully slow for you? The 7 days that Jacob waited for Rachel, after “going into Leah” (consummating with the wrong sister), must have seemed like forever. How do you think the wedding night deception unfolded? Was Leah a willing accomplice? Did Rachel know what was happening? The sport of polygamy in the Bible has at least one common thread; it is fraught with fierce competition. Rachel and Leah are expected to perform and produce: human baby-making machines.

The Bible tells us that God opened the womb of Leah because she was hated and closed the womb of Rachel (29:31). If you’re keeping score, then you recognize that Leah gets off to a fast start. She may have weak eyes, but she is a “fertile myrtle”. The score is quickly Leah, 4, and Rachel, 0. Rachel envies her sister. She says to Jacob, **“Give me children or I will die.”** her motto is **“babies or bust.”** Bilhah is pressed into duty, serving as a disposable surrogate. The score is now 4-2. Leah sends in her own sub, Zilpah. The score is 6-2. Reuben, Leah’s firstborn, finds a patch of mandrakes (an aphrodisiac; fertility drug), and Leah is able to trade mandrakes for a night in bed with Jacob. Is Jacob just a stud for hire? Leah conceives three times, producing two more sons & a daughter (Dinah). Now the score is 9-2. Good news comes Rachel’s way (30:22). God remembers Rachel and opens her womb. How does Rachel respond to this gift of God? She names her son Joseph, which means *“May the LORD add to me another son”*. Rachel is still in the game; score-keeping!

After Jacob increases his herds with some

interesting breeding techniques, the LORD tells Jacob that it is time to return to Canaan. Though Jacob has much to fear by facing his brother, the LORD says, "I will be with you." Jacob shares the announcement with Leah & Rachel. Both wives consent to the journey. Sneaking away, while Laban is shearing his sheep, Jacob and his household flee. What bad & dangerous thing does Rachel do (31:19)? Eventually Laban catches up with Jacob and his household. Jacob thinks there will be a fight, but Laban apparently harbors no ill feelings. He says, "Why did you leave without giving me a chance to say good-bye to my daughters and grandchildren?" He also says that he wants his household gods/idols back. What dangerous vow does Jacob make (31:32)? How does Rachel get herself out of this mess (31:35)? She is a clever lady; a chip off the old block (Laban).

The Caravan moves on toward Canaan. Faced with possible death (a confrontation with Esau), Jacob offers his brother a large bribe, hoping to appease him with an elaborate gift. Jacob then turns to the LORD in prayer (a wrestling match), & makes preparations to secure his family's safety. Notice how Jacob positions his family as he prepare to face Esau and the demons of his past (33:1-3). Things don't end as one might expect. Esau is in a forgiving mood. He lets "bygones be bygones".

As the story of Leah and Rachel comes to a close, we see that Rachel dies giving birth to her second son. She called him Ben-oni (son of my sorrow), but Jacob named him Benjamin (son of the right hand). Rachel is buried near Bethlehem. Leah on the other hand will be buried in

the family plot (Cave of Machpelah). It will be through her fourth son Judah, that the promise will be fulfilled, & the gift of Messiah will come (the ancestral line of Jesus). Rachel will continue to weep for her children, when Herod slaughters the newborns near Bethlehem at the time of Jesus' birth (Matthew 2:17-18).

Questions: Have you ever dealt with sibling rivalry & jealousy? Do you see members of your family as teammates or as competition? St. Paul tells the Christians in Corinth that "all members of the body suffer when one member suffers, & all members of the body rejoice when one member is honored." Easier said than done? Can you relate to the "*pretty sister syndrome*"? What does the story of Leah and Rachel tell us about the sovereignty of God? What do you make of Rachel stealing her father's gods? How has history dealt with Rachel and Leah? Each sister had something that the other wanted. Does the pretty girl win in the end?

NUGGET: The Supreme Court has taken upon itself to redefine marriage in our Country. The Book of Genesis speaks of surrogate motherhood, multiple wives and incest. In each case it is sin, not divine will, that determines the actions of human beings. Now that gender is no longer a valid criterion for marriage, why would it matter if consenting adults, who self-define themselves sexually, wish to practice polyandry, polygamy, or choose to marry a sibling? Oh what a tangled web we weave. Genesis Women bespeak the challenges of their times and our times as well. Seen the TV show "Sister Wives?"

Preparation for Session Four: Read Genesis 34:1-31; and 38:1-30.

SESSION FOUR: Dinah & Tamar – “Rape and Incest”

First Word: In the Book of Genesis we hear that Leah gave birth to six sons & one daughter. What do you remember about her daughter Dinah? Tamar was the Canaanite daughter-in-law of Judah. What do you know about the ancient practice of Levirate Marriage? Did you know that Tamar gets named in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1:3)?

Read Genesis 34:1-31. We sometimes want to blame the victim for the violence perpetrated against her or him. But is it not also true that in life, we sometimes enter into high-risk, dangerous situations of our own volition? When is it necessary for us to assume some responsibility for the outcomes of our own free will and self-made choices?

Would Lot’s daughters’ premeditated seduction of their drunken father be classified as rape today? What about Abraham’s intercourse with Hagar? What does Genesis 34 tell us about Dinah and Shechem? Dinah is apparently beautiful, carefree and trusting. Shechem is apparently rich, powerful, and spoiled. He is used to getting what he wants. The town is named after him. We can imagine Dinah being spoiled, as the only girl in the family with six big brothers watching over her. Was she doted on or ignored? Who did she talk to? Did she have any friends? Certainly she knew firsthand the rivalry & bad blood among the sister wives and their handmaids.

Jacob purchased land near the city of Shechem.

One day, Dinah decides to go out and “visit the women of the land”. Did she understand this to be a safe adventure, or one with some element of risk? We don’t know. Being the protective father and grandpa that I am, I never would have permitted it. Shechem saw Dinah, seized her, lay with her and humiliated her. Certainly this was not consensual sex. Inquiring minds want to know: Was this date rape? Did Dinah flirt with Shechem? Did she lead him on? Rape is rape! There is no excuse for it. In some cultures and in some eras, when a man engages in sex with a woman, he is required to marry her. Scripture tells us that Shechem was smitten by Dinah. *“His heart was drawn to her. He loved her and spoke tenderly to her.”* He spoke to his father Hamor, **“Get this girl for my wife.”**

The reaction of Jacob and his sons is understandable. “Such a thing ought not to be done.” Hamor attempts to right a wrong and to make peace with Jacob. Shechem wants to find favor with Jacob. He is willing to pay whatever is asked. No “Bride Price” (*Mohar*) is too great a payment for Dinah. The sons of Jacob are not looking for compensation, but for revenge. They deal *deceitfully* with Shechem, because he has defiled their sister. The compensation for settlement of this wrong is circumcision. The sign of God’s covenant with Israel becomes the means by which Jacob’s sons transact revenge. When it comes to sexual misconduct, do “the ends justify the means”? On the third day, while the men of Shechem are still severely sore from circumcision, two of Dinah’s brothers, Simeon & Levi, take the sword and slay all of the men, and plunder the city. Jacob is displeased by what they have done. He is more worried about his

reputation, than the honor of his daughter Dinah. Levi & Simeon reply, “Should he treat our sister like a prostitute?” Wait a minute. The profession of prostitution was both common and consensual in the ancient world. Certainly not rape. Though it is of course possible for a prostitute to be raped. Did you notice where Dinah has been this whole time (34:26)? Does this surprise you? How do you assess Dinah’s going off to a neighboring town alone? Was Dinah raped or is the account less than conclusive? If you were writing the end of Dinah’s story, how might you finish it?

Read Genesis 38. Joseph, the firstborn of Rachel, is the favorite son of Jacob. His father gave him a coat of many colors. He is apparently a spoiled brat. While Joseph is being transported down to Egypt, having been sold by his brothers into slavery, the Joseph Narrative (Genesis 37-50) gets an interlude (Genesis 38) . Genesis 38 serves as more than just a digression or a travel interlude. It also explains how Tamar became an ancestor of Messiah Jesus.

The story begins with Judah marrying a nameless Canaanite woman, the daughter of Shua. Judah “goes into her” and she is fruitful, bearing him three successive sons: Er, Onan, and Shelah. Judah selects a wife (Tamar) for his son Er. What happens to Er? According to the ancient custom of Levirate Marriage, what is Onan’s duty? He is supposed to produce an heir for his brother. What evil thing does he do during intercourse? Who gets the blame for Er and Onan’s deaths? Next in line is Shelah, but Judah refrains from giving him to Tamar. In the course of time, Judah’s wife died. After he was comforted, he

joined his good friend, Hirah the Adullamite. Judah goes up to Timnah for the celebration of sheep shearing. Tamar removes her clothing of widowhood and puts on the garments of a prostitute. Judah sees a prostitute, but does not know that it is Tamar. He solicits her services. What payment does Tamar receive for her services? Why is getting a pledge a game changer for Tamar (signet, cord, staff)?

3 months later, Tamar is found to be pregnant. Accused of being a whore/prostitute, she is brought out to the city gate where justice is rendered (let her be burned). What evidence does Tamar produce in her defense? “I’m pregnant by the man who owns these items.” Judah says, “She is more righteous than I, since I did not give her to my son Shelah.” Tamar gives birth to twins (Perez and Zerah).

Genesis 38 is one of the most sordid chapters in the Bible. Despite human sinfulness, God is at work. The LORD’s providence prevails. In everything God works for good. Jacob’s son Judah, who negotiates the services of a prostitute, and Tamar, a Canaanite daughter-in-law who disguises herself as a prostitute, have a child (Perez) whose lineage leads to the Messiah. Tamar turns the tables of Judah. Does it seem strange that marrying one’s brother-in-law would be expected, but marrying one’s widowed father-in-law would be forbidden? Do you admire Tamar for her sting operation, or are her actions disgusting? What does Paul say about prostitution in 1 Corinthians 6? What does Jesus say about Levirate Marriage in Mt. 22:23-33?

Preparation for Session Five: Read Exodus 1 and Numbers 12.

SESSION FIVE: Shiphrah & Puah; Jochebed, Miriam, Zipporah – “Exodus Women”

First Word: How familiar are you with the Exodus Women named in this session? *“Now there arose a new king over Egypt who did not know Joseph.”* Exodus 1:8 is one of the saddest verses in all of Scripture. 300 years pass since the time of Joseph’s death. A nameless Pharaoh, who is king over Egypt, doesn’t remember the providence of God through His servant Joseph. When has memory failed you? “Those who fail to learn from history are doomed to repeat it.” Pharaoh’s name is forgotten, but the names of two Hebrew midwives are forever remembered.

Read Exodus 1:1-22. What do you remember about **Shiphrah and Puah**? The king’s actions proved him to be a fool. Attempting to prevent the escape of his free slave labor, he provokes the Exodus. The descendants of Jacob/Israel are 70 when they enter Egypt at the time of the famine. They are about 2.5 million at the time of Exodus. What is ironic about Pharaoh’s program for population control of the Israelites? Fear can cause a person to do strange and evil things. The more the king oppressed the Israelites, the more they multiplied. Two of the Hebrew midwives are instructed to practice infanticide. Whom do they choose to obey; Pharaoh or God (Read Acts 5:29)? How do Shiphrah & Puah explain their actions to the king? “The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the church.” How does God use suffering and oppression to further His kingdom? What reward does Puah & Shiphrah receive for their faithfulness? What is Pharaoh’s Plan B (1:22)?

Read Exodus 2:1-25. What are the names of Moses’ mother, sister and wife? All 3 identify Africa as their home. Imagine what must have

been going through the minds of the Hebrew women, pregnant and expecting, when they hear Pharaoh’s edict and contemplate giving birth to a son who will be drown into the Nile River. Certainly a mother’s worst nightmare. In Exodus 6:20 we discover the name of Moses’ mother. **Jochebed**, is a descendant of the tribe of Levi. She marries her nephew Amram and they have two sons, Aaron and Moses. I suppose by now we’re used to incestuous marriages among the Patriarchal families: Sarah was married to her half brother, & Rebekah, Rachel and Leah were all married to their cousins. When Jochebed can hide her three-month-old Moses no longer she places him in a little basket (ARK) and floats him in the Nile River. Ironic isn’t it, seeing that the Nile is decreed to be Moses’ tomb. Moses is hid among the reeds along the river bank. Don’t you just love it when a plan comes together? Pharaoh’s daughter comes to the river to bathe, sees the basket, has pity on the Hebrew baby, and decides to defy her father’s edict and protect the baby boy. Miriam is in on the plot. She is hiding until Pharaoh’s daughter sees the baby. Then Miriam, Moses’ big sister, pops up and offers a suggestion to Pharaoh’s daughter: “Do you want me to find you a Hebrew woman to nurse your baby?” Ironically, Jochebed gets to nurse and raise her own son under the protection of Pharaoh’s daughter. Jochebed even gets paid for her services. At around age 3, Moses is handed over to the Princess. Moses is named & adopted, and raised by Pharaoh’s daughter. Jochebed’s actions spare her son, but she must hand him over to be raised in Pharaoh’s Court. What sacrifices have you offered, or witnessed, regarding a mother’s love for her children?

When Moses is all grown up, he witnesses the mistreatment of a Hebrew slave, intervenes, and in the process murders an Egyptian. At the age of

40, Moses flees to Midian and sits down by a well. **The location is a well.** Deja vu anyone? The well is often a location where romance is kindled and a man finds a wife. Moses meets the 7 daughters of a Midianite priest named Jethro (4:18). Moses protects the 7 shepherdesses from the neighboring shepherds. Apparently, there is a conflict over water rights. Moses waters their flocks and in a short time is given Zipporah in marriage. Together they have a son named Gershom. I wonder how much of Moses' past he shared with his wife. I wonder how Zipporah must have reacted to Moses' report about an encounter with the LORD in a Burning Bush. Remember, Zipporah's father is a priest. Moses, at age 80, with the command of God, and the blessing of Jethro, returns to Egypt to deliver God's people from captivity. Read Exodus 4:24-26. What strange thing happens on the way to Egypt? What does Zipporah mean when she says, "A bridegroom of blood"?

We hear very little about Zipporah after this point in the story. We assume that she and her sons witness the plagues, and participate in the Exodus. In Exodus 18:1-6, we discover that sometime along the way, Moses sent his wife and two sons back home to live with Jethro. Jethro brings Zipporah and his two grandsons (Gershom and Eliezer) out to Mount Sinai (Horeb) to meet Moses. After sharing in worship, and offering advice about "delegating", Jethro leaves & heads home (18:27). We assume that Zipporah and the boys stay with Moses during the forty years of wilderness wandering. Deuteronomy 34:7 tells us that Moses was 120 when he died and was buried by the LORD. Whatever we might add regarding Zipporah can only be conjecture. Moses' wife, Zipporah, is believed to be from Cush, south of Egypt in the region of present day Sudan/Ethiopia.

Read Exodus 15:20-21. We return to **Miriam**. She was older than Moses, but her age is not given. Aaron, Moses mouthpiece, was 3 years older than his brother (Exodus 7:7). Miriam participated in the plot to save baby Moses. She reappears after God's deliverance of His people at the Red Sea. Moses leads the Israelites in a song of praise to God, & then Miriam, with tambourine in hand, leads the women in dance and Song: "*Sing to the Lord, for God is highly exalted. Both horse and driver God has hurled into the sea.*" Miriam is called a prophetess.

Later, during the wilderness wanderings (Numbers 12), Miriam reappears when she & her brother Aaron speak unfavorably about Moses' Cushite wife. They also discuss how God has spoken to them too, implying that they are unhappy with the status quo of Moses' leadership. God overhears their conversation and calls the three siblings into the Tent of Meeting. The LORD chastises Miriam and Aaron. Miriam's punishment is seven days of leprosy. Her death is recorded in Numbers 20:1.

Questions: God rewarded the faithfulness of Puaah & Shiphrah. How has God rewarded your faithfulness? If you were Jochebed, how might you have taken a different course in attempting to save your son from Pharaoh's wrath? Considering what we know about Miriam, how would you describe her strengths & her shortcomings? Is it appropriate for women to challenge the authority of men? Why does Aaron get off scot-free, & Miriam gets 7 days of leprosy as her punishment for rebelling against Moses & God? Zipporah endured harsh words from Aaron & Miriam. Why are some spouses accepted more readily into the family than others?

Preparation for Session Six: Read Judges 4, 16.

SESSION SIX: Deborah and Jael and Delilah – **“Women with a Reputation”**

First Word: In the days of the Judges, “everyone did as right in their own eyes” (17:6 & 21:25). Individual, subjective, autonomous decision making was the law of the land. Sound familiar? A four part cycle gets repeated throughout the narrative of the Book of Judges (Israel sins, God punishes Israel for her sins, Israel repents, God restores the peace by commissioning a Judge). The Judges were renowned not for their court cases, but for their military campaigns. Israel’s survival was not the result of its military heroes, but rather the persistent, unwearied love of God. Do you have a favorite Judge?

Read Judges 4. The People of Israel AGAIN do what is evil in the sight of the LORD. We hear this refrain 4 times before Deborah’s name is mentioned. Is this evil behavior accidental or willful and deliberate sinning on Israel’s part? The LORD sells his people into the hands of the enemy where they are oppressed cruelly for 20 years. When life is a mess and we’ve given up hope of saving ourselves, we cry to the LORD for help. God’s answer to His people’s prayers is **a prophetess named Deborah**. Deborah is judging Israel, setting up court under the Palm of Deborah. The people of God came to her for judgment. Did the court cases weigh heavily upon her as she tried to sleep at night? How much of her day did she share with her husband Lappidoth? Deborah wears more than one hat. She is responsible for overseeing the military. Her skillset is simply amazing!

One day, Deborah calls in Barak, her military commander & asks why he hasn’t obeyed the Word of the LORD. God has apparently ordered

Barak to gather 10,000 of his troops and to lead them in battle against the Canaanites and their commander, Sisera. The LORD has already guaranteed the victory. So why isn’t Barak obeying? Barak says to Deborah, “I’ll go if you go with me.” Deborah doesn’t bat an eye. She says, “Of course I’ll go with you, but because of your weak faith, the victory will not be yours. A woman will get the honors.” Barak undoubtedly thinks that Deborah is speaking of herself. The LORD does as he has promised. The entire army of Sisera falls by the edge of the sword. Sisera abandons his chariot, & on foot tries to escape his pursuers. He ends up at the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber. Jael’s husband was loyal to Sisera & the Canaanites, but his wife was loyal to the LORD. How does Jael outwit Sisera & put him to death? It’s a brutal act, worthy of a PG13 rating. We hear no more about Jael. Like most heroic women she doesn’t seek the fame and glory. But she is remembered in a song, a ballad blessing the LORD. In Judges 5, Deborah & Barak sing a duet, probably written by Deborah. Jael & Deborah are mentioned in verses 6-7; Barak is added in verse 12. Beginning with verse 24, we hear the grisly account of Jael’s slaying of Sisera. The song ends with an epilog: “The land had rest for forty years.”

On paper, Deborah is a strong woman; in fact a superwoman. Not a single bad word is spoken of Deborah. Ironically, in the Hebrews 11 Litany of Faith, Barak is mentioned (Hebrews 11:32), but Jael & Deborah are omitted. One can only wonder WHY? Imagine yourself going to court where Deborah is presiding. Are you afraid of the judge’s verdict? Why are some men easily threatened by strong women? Do you think Lappidoth was living in the shadow of his wife? Was he proud of her? Was he perhaps a house husband, raising the

children? Is Deborah singing her own praises in her ballad? Why do you think Deborah praised Jael for such a brutal act?

We move on to Judges 16, where a beauty named Delilah is introduced into the Samson Story. To recap: Beginning with Judges 13, we hear about the life and exploits of Samson. His birth was an answer to prayer. Samson was God's chosen instrument of deliverance in Israel's fight against the Philistines. He was a Nazarite of God, expected to adhere to a strict diet and never to cut his hair. An angel of the LORD (Jesus) offered his birth announcement. Samson is born and named. His first recorded activity is a visit to Timnah, where he sees a Philistine woman and demands that his father get her for him. Why is Samson fraternizing with the enemy (14:4)? His parents try to persuade him to marry a good Jewish girl, but Samson wants what he wants. Is there a method to his madness? Samson first discovers his God-given strength when he wrestles with a lion and prevails. The Philistines plow with Samson's heifer and learn the answer to his riddle. After Samson's fiancée has betrayed him, he kills 30 innocent men in a fit of rage, and his intended bride marries his best man. When he returns to get his bride, his father-in-law offers Samson a younger, more beautiful sister in her place. Samson goes ballistic and sets the grain fields on fire with the assistance of 300 foxes. He also slays 1000 Philistines with the jawbone of a donkey. "Samson judged Israel in the days of the Philistines for 20 years (15:20).

Read Judges 16:1-31. As chapter 16 begins we hear that Samson is visiting the city of Gaza and keeping company with a prostitute. It doesn't take a rocket scientist to see that Samson has serious female troubles. Samson falls in love with Delilah.

She is promised 1100 pieces of silver if she can discern the source of Samson's amazing strength. She doesn't beat around the bush. She comes right out and asks Samson. After playing her for the fool, Samson finally reveals the source of his strength. It's his hair, which has NEVER been cut. Delilah has his hair cut while he is asleep. The Philistines finally prevail over Samson. They show no mercy. They gouge out Samson's eyes & make him grind mill in the prison. Samson's weakness for women proves to be his doom. Samson gets the last laugh when he brings down the house of the Philistines in the midst of a pagan feast. His hair has regrown and he asks God for one final moment of strength. The building collapses and thousands are killed; Samson too. We assume that Delilah was also numbered among the dead.

Questions: Do you know of a mother who has had to contend with an out-of-control son like Samson? Samson seems to enjoy his "bad boy" reputation. Does Delilah demonstrate any redeeming qualities? Why do you think she so willingly betrayed Samson? Why did he play along with the charade? Does the presence of prostitution in our narrative bother you? Did you know that the Catholic Church permitted prostitution in the Middle Ages in order to protect decent young women from being raped? Have you ever nagged someone to death in order to get what you wanted? Not only did Samson's strength leave him, but the LORD also left him (16:20). Is it more serious to lose everything or to lose the LORD? The answer is obvious.

Preparation for Session Seven: Read Joshua 2 and 6:22-25; also the Book of Ruth.

SESSION SEVEN: Rahab and Ruth – “Foreigners in the Family Tree”

First Word—STORY: I never met Carol Irons. In 1998, she had recently escaped an abusive marriage to a man who had also made death threats. Carol was trying to put her life back together, going out with friends, joining a Bible Study, & taking piano lessons. Enter Clarence Ratliff, a police officer with a gun, out to kill Judge Carol Irons, his estranged wife. For killing his wife, Clarence was sentenced to 15 years; for shooting at fellow police officers, he was sentenced to life in prison. Ratliff died in prison of terminal cancer. Some say justice was served, but others, familiar with the Jael story in the Book of Judges, probably wish that Clarence had ended up in Jael’s tent or Deborah’s Court. Hammer and peg, anyone?

Read Joshua 2. In this Session we meet two women who are foreigners, indispensable players in the lineage of Messiah. Both women, Rahab & Ruth, are named in Matthew’s account of the Genealogy of Jesus (Mt. 1:5). Rahab is also mentioned in the Book of James and Book of Hebrews. She was a harlot by profession, but she left this trade and married Salmon. She became the mother of Boaz and the mother-in-law of Ruth. But, let’s not get ahead of ourselves.

After the death of Moses, the LORD handed over the leadership reigns to Joshua. Joshua and Caleb, as you may recall, were the only two participants of the Exodus allowed to enter the Promise Land. The LORD speaks to Joshua and says, “Just as I was with Moses, so shall I be with you. Be strong and courageous!” Joshua, a

former spy himself, knows the importance of a reconnaissance mission. He sends out two spies to check out the military might of the Promise Land, especially the walled city of Jericho. When the two spies arrive in Jericho, they go to a strategic location, Rahab’s house, which is built into the walls of the city. Rahab was a prostitute and perhaps ran an inn. She hides the two spies under stalks of flax, drying in the roof. She tells the nameless spies that the whole land and the entire city are in fear of the LORD & His people. The LORD’s reputation precedes Him. Rahab negotiates a deal with the spies: *“life for life; I’ll protect you, if you protect me.”* The spies promise Rahab survival when the city is conquered as a reward for aiding and abetting their escape. We know the rest of the story. A scarlet cord in the window of her house will guarantee protection for all within her house. Here is the question that begs to be asked and answered: Why was Rahab and her family saved? She didn’t give any strategic information that helped destroy Jericho. In fact, it will be the LORD alone who brings victory to His people, without Israel lifting a finger, let alone a sword (Joshua 6). So why is Rahab, a harlot, spared? Only God knows. Somehow, Rahab knows the name of the LORD. God has evidently brought her to faith, and faith is the basis of her and our salvation. We dare not judge a book by its cover.

Questions: What are some of the most obvious practical lessons that we learn from Rahab? Are you acquainted with any prostitutes? In the Book of James (2:25) we are told that faith is completed by works. Why do you think James used Rahab as an illustration of authentic faith?

Read Hebrews 11:31. Does it surprise you that Rahab is mentioned in the Faith Hall of Fame? Martin Luther once said, “You are saved by faith alone, but if faith is alone, it is not faith.” What do you think Luther meant? What is the difference between saving faith and veneer faith? What evidence of Rahab’s faith do you see in Joshua 2? A promise is a promise; see Joshua 6:22-25.

Read the Book of Ruth. The setting is the days of the Judges; approximately 400 years of violent military strife, mixed with periods of peace and sinning on Israel’s part. The story begins with a famine. Ironically, in Bethlehem (The House of Bread), there is no bread. Bethlehem is also the burial site of Rachel, who died giving birth to Benjamin. Elimelech (from the tribe of Judah) takes his wife Naomi & 2 sons Mahlon & Chilion, and travels to Moab, in hopes of preserving his family. What note of sadness is mentioned at the start of this story? The Bible places a high priority on the care of widows and orphans. Have you known the grief of losing a husband or a child? Naomi hears that the LORD has visited His people. There is Bread in the House of Bread. She returns home to Bethlehem. Naomi tries to persuade her two daughters-in-laws to return to their mothers’ houses. What is the basis of her persuasion? Why do you think Orpah returns home and Ruth decides to stay with Naomi? What role did faith have in their decision making? Who does a bitter (MARA) Naomi blame for her misfortunes? How will the LORD fill Naomi’s emptiness? Naomi and Ruth arrive in Bethlehem in March-April during the Barley Harvest. What kind of a man is Boaz.? Do you

think it was coincidence or providence that brought Ruth to Boaz’ field. How would you describe Ruth to someone who has never heard her story? Ruth is a hard worker, gleaning fields to provide sustenance for herself and Naomi. Remember there was no welfare & social security in the Days of The Judges. Six times in our story, Ruth is referred to as a Moabite. She introduces herself to Boaz as a foreigner. Why is this detail significant? Boaz is one of the potential redeemers of the estate of Elimelech. What happens when the Barley and Wheat Harvests have ended? What is Naomi’s strategy for finding Ruth a husband? Is she playing the role of a matchmaker? Is there a note of seduction or hanky-panky involved in the scene at the threshing floor? What clues does the author of this book give us? Did you know that “feet” is a euphemism for sex (genitals)? Ruth returns to Naomi with six measures of Barley. Is this a promise ring of sorts, or payment for the previous night’s sleep-over? What does it mean for Boaz to be a redeemer for Ruth? It’s best to read the fine print in the contract for deeds.

Our story began with sorrow, barrenness and famine. When the story concludes the bitter have joy and the empty are filled. Blessings abound. Ruth becomes the great-grandmother of King David. Ruth the Moabite, like Tamar the Canaanite pretend-prostitute, and Rahab the Jericho prostitute, become God’s servants of redemption. Is it a sin to be angry with God or to blame Him for our woes? How does the story of Ruth illustrate our marriage to Jesus, our Redeemer?

Preparation for Session Eight: Read I Samuel 18:17-29; 19:11-17; II Samuel 6:16-23; 11:1-27.

SESSION EIGHT: Michal and Bathsheba – “David’s Wives”

First Word: We all know that Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines (I Kings 11:3). The total number of David’s wives is more obscure (II Samuel 3:2-5). We know that David had many concubines. Late in life when his circulation was poor and he couldn’t get warm, his servants enlisted the services of a young virgin, named Abishag (I Kings 1:1-4), to be his electric blanket/hot water bottle. One of David’s wives was Abigail, previously married to Nabal (I Samuel 25). David doesn’t get high marks for his treatment of women. In this Session we’ll look at two of his wives, **Michal and Bathsheba**.

Read I Samuel 18:17-29. David, with a sling & 5 smooth stones, has slain the giant Goliath. The Spirit of the LORD is with David, but has left Saul (Israel’s first King). David is a musician who plays the lyre to relieve Saul when he is tormented by evil spirits. David’s best friend is Saul’s son, Jonathan. One would assume that David would be Saul’s favorite person, best friend. Not so. In fact Saul is jealous of David and despises him. Saul uses the Philistines to get David killed. He promises David the hand of his daughter Michal in marriage if he brings 100 Philistine foreskins. There is a method to his madness. Saul assumes that David won’t stand a chance when the odds are 100:1. Not only does David slay 100 Philistines, he slays 200. Instead of a bride price he delivers 200 foreskins. Michal is given to David in marriage. Twice we hear that Michal loved David. Does David love Michal, or is she simply a way for him to become royalty & enter Saul’s family?

Read I Samuel 19:11-17. How does Michal rescue her beloved husband from her father’s evil intents? When must a daughter show greater loyalty to a man other than her father? Evidently, Saul punished Michal for her deception by giving her to another man as wife (I Samuel 25:44). She is the only woman in the Bible for whom the word polyandry applies. After the death of Saul, Abner, Saul’s General, decides to switch sides. We read in II Samuel 3:12-16 that David made peace with Abner. What was the condition of the covenant? How does Paltiel, the second husband of Michal, react to this deal? Michal is taken away from a man who really loves her and placed in David’s harem. To celebrate David’s reign, the Ark of the Covenant is brought back into Jerusalem (II Samuel 6:16-23). David, wearing only a scanty linen ephod, is dancing half-naked before the Altar of LORD. Michal, less than impressed, chastises David. David tells Michal that she doesn’t need to defend his actions. The rest of Michal’s life is summed up in one verse (II Samuel 6:23). How does David punish Michal? What was life like for Michal? What kind of a husband was David? How do you rate David as a husband?

Read II Samuel 11. It’s springtime, the season when kings go to war. What is David doing instead of leading his troops in battle? II Samuel 11 is an episode of *sex in the city*. What “just happened” late one afternoon? Do you think Bathsheba was complicit in the act of adultery, or was she simply a victim of rape? How is Bathsheba described. Why is she bathing? How does David attempt to cover up his sin? In this story did you notice the frequency of the word SEND?

How does David react to the death of Uriah the Hittite? How does God feel about the evil actions of David? After Bathsheba has mourned the loss of her husband, she moves into the palace with David and becomes his wife. Where is she in the pecking order of David's harem? She bears him a son, but the son dies shortly after death. What must her grief have been like, losing a husband and a newborn baby? When David is confronted by the Prophet Nathan about his sin, David comes clean and confesses his transgressions. The LORD puts away David's sin, but because David has utterly scorned the LORD, the newborn child dies (II Samuel 12:23). Did you notice that Nathan confronts David only, not Bathsheba? In the parable Nathan tells David, what character represents Bathsheba in the story? What might that say about her role in the act of adultery? Why do you think her name is omitted from Mathew's genealogy, where she is simply called Uriah's wife?

Read II Samuel 12:24-25. What does David do when Bathsheba is mourning the loss of her son? Can another child replace the one a mother has lost?

While David is on his deathbed, blanketed by Abishag his bed-warmer, his fourth born son Adonijah is plotting and proclaiming himself to be the next in line for the throne (I Kings 3:5). Adonijah has the support of Abiathar the priest & the military commander Joab. But other priests and prophets (e.g. Nathan) are not siding with Adonijah. Bathsheba, with the support of Nathan, goes in to visit with David about royal succession. It's Nathan's idea. So Bathsheba, assertive woman that she is, visits with David on

his deathbed, reminding him of a promise he made that Solomon would be the next king (I Kings 1:13). Right on cue, Nathan arrives and repeats Bathsheba's talking points. Solomon is crowned and Adonijah and his supporters are fearing for their lives. Bathsheba reminds us that a mother will do almost anything to secure the future of her children.

Final Questions: Do you think that women were judged more harshly for sexual sins than men in the biblical times? What about today? Do you remember the story of Jesus and the Samaritan Woman in John 4? What about the story of the woman caught in the act of adultery in John 8? Have you ever considered that Uriah may have been one of the descendants of the Hittite wives of Esau, whom Rebekah despised? What are Bathsheba's strengths & weaknesses? Comparing Michal and Bathsheba, which wife of David do you most admire and why? Do wives sometimes get embarrassed by the behavior of their husbands?

Proverbs 31:10-31 is an acrostic poem (using all 22 letters of the Hebrew Alphabet) describing the "ideal woman". Do you think it is possible that Bathsheba was the voice behind the words of Proverbs 31? Why or why not? In this study, who was your favorite Biblical Woman? Why?

Looking ahead: In the Spring we will look at part 2 of "Women of the Word and in the Word". Sessions 1-8 have been on women from the Old Testament. Sessions 9-16 will be on women from the New Testament. Thanks for sharing this journey with me! Thanks for being a woman in the Word and of the Word!

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