



Other Classes

STUDY GUIDE **NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US**

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Contents - NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US

A two-part series about women in scripture offered by Martha Lundgren

PART 1: NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US	2
From the Beginning	2
PART 2: NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US	4
Leaders, Influencers, and Evangelists	4
BIBLIOGRAPHY: NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US	6
Deaconess Martha Lundgren	6

PART 1: NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US

From the Beginning

Had you ever noticed how early female characters show up in each of the first two books of the Hebrew scriptures? And they show up in big ways, far beyond the “women as property” that could be interpreted as shorthand for “women don’t play much of a role in salvation history”.

1. Just twenty-seven verses into Genesis 1, God creates humanity, male and female, in God’s own divine image. Another version of the creation of humanity follows right behind, in Genesis
 - What similarities and differences do you notice in these two passages?
 - How does each passage describe the female character and the role she is expected to play (the reason for her existence)?

Genesis 1:26-28 CEB

26 Then God said, “Let us make humanity in our image to resemble us so that they may take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, the livestock, all the earth, and all the crawling things on earth.”

27 God created humanity in God’s own image,
 in the divine image God created them,
 male and female God created them.

28 God blessed them and said to them, “Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and master it. Take charge of the fish of the sea, the birds in the sky, and everything crawling on the ground.”

Genesis 2:21-23 CEB

20 The human named all the livestock, all the birds in the sky, and all the wild animals. But a helper perfect for him was nowhere to be found.

21 So the Lord God put the human into a deep and heavy sleep, and took one of his ribs and closed up the flesh over it. 22 With the rib taken from the human, the Lord God fashioned a woman and brought her to the human being. 23 The human said,

“This one finally is bone from my bones
 and flesh from my flesh.
 She will be called a woman
 because from a man she was taken.”

2. Women do get a fair amount of “air time” in the scriptures, including Miriam, Moses and Aaron’s sister. She shows up in Exodus 15, Numbers 12, 20, 26; Deuteronomy 24:9, 1 Chronicles 6:3, and Micah 6:4. And quite possibly as the older sister in Exodus 2. There, several female characters are involved in helping infant Moses survive, surely including his mother’s midwife who would have refused to follow the order to kill all Hebrew male infants at birth. (This order and the

subversive actions of midwives Shiprah and Puah are described in Exodus 1.)

- Who are all the female characters in this story?
- What is their relationship to each other and to Moses? What risks (acts of courage) did they take?
- How did they manage to operate given what you believe to be true about their place in society?

Exodus 2:1-8 CEB

1 Now a man from Levi's household married a Levite woman. 2 The woman became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She saw that the baby was healthy and beautiful, so she hid him for three months. 3 When she couldn't hide him any longer, she took a reed basket and sealed it up with black tar. She put the child in the basket and set the basket among the reeds at the riverbank. 4 The baby's older sister stood watch nearby to see what would happen to him.

5 Pharaoh's daughter came down to bathe in the river, while her women servants walked along beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds, and she sent one of her servants to bring it to her. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. The boy was crying, and she felt sorry for him. She said, "This must be one of the Hebrews' children."

7 Then the baby's sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Would you like me to go and find one of the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?"

8 Pharaoh's daughter agreed, "Yes, do that." So the girl went and called the child's mother. 9 Pharaoh's daughter said to her, "Take this child and nurse it for me, and I'll pay you for your work." So the woman took the child and nursed it. 10 After the child had grown up, she brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter, who adopted him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I pulled him out[a] of the water."

3. What did the female character in Genesis 1 and the females in the Exodus passage have in common? What do you make of that?

PART 2: NOT ABOUT US WITHOUT US

Leaders, Influencers, and Evangelists

1. In the closing of the letter of Romans, Paul sends greetings to people he knows there. Phoebe likely delivered this letter to the Romans on Paul's behalf. Priscilla and Aquila took Paul into their home in Acts 18:3, a time when Paul was preaching regularly in the synagogue. And the list goes on. All the names in bold below are that of women.

Read by itself, what does this passage tell you about Paul's attitude toward women who participated in the early church?

Romans 16:3-16 (CEB, ©2011)

1 I'm introducing our sister **Phoebe** to you, who is a servant of the church in Cenchreae. 2 Welcome her in the Lord in a way that is worthy of God's people, and give her whatever she needs from you, because she herself has been a sponsor of many people, myself included. 3 Say hello to **Prisca [Priscilla]** and Aquila, my coworkers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their own necks for my life. I'm not the only one who thanks God for them, but all the churches of the Gentiles do the same.

5 Also say hello to the church that meets in their house. Say hello to Epāenetus, my dear friend, who was the first convert in Asia for Christ. 6 Say hello to **Mary**, who has worked very hard for you. 7 Say hello to Andronicus and **Junia**, my relatives and my fellow prisoners. They are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before me. 8 Say hello to Ampliatus, my dear friend in the Lord.

9 Say hello to Urbanus, our coworker in Christ, and my dear friend Stachys. 10 Say hello to Apelles, who is tried and true in Christ. Say hello to the members of the household of Aristobulus. 11 Say hello to my relative Herodion. Say hello to the members of the household of Narcissus who are in the Lord. 12 Say hello to **Tryphaena and Tryphosa**, who are workers for the Lord. Say hello to my dear friend **Persis**, who has worked hard in the Lord. 13 Say hello to Rufus, who is an outstanding believer, along with **his mother and mine**.

14 Say hello to Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermes, Patrobas, Hermas, and the brothers and sisters [literally, brethren] who are with them. 15 Say hello to Philologus and **Julia**, Nereus and his **sister**, and Olympas, and all the saints who are with them. 16 Say hello to each other with a holy kiss. All the churches of Christ say hello to you.

2. What's your first reaction when you read the passage from Timothy in the box below? Don't spend too much time on this, just react and move on to question 3.

1 Timothy 2:12 (CEB, ©2011)

I don't allow a wife to teach or to control her husband. Instead, she should be a quiet listener.

3. In the era of the early church the Greco-Roman household codes expected “the stable household under firm patriarchal rule [to be] the basic unit of a stable patriarchal society, reflected in the husband-wife, parent-child, and master-slave relationships. New Testament writers wanted to give assurance that the Christian household contributed just as much to a stable society.”¹ And when Paul preached in synagogues, women and men did not occupy the same space.

Crossing the lines drawn by the household codes and in the synagogue, literally or figuratively, would almost surely have further accelerated the persecution of the early practitioners of Christianity. As it was, the backlash to Jesus’s way led not only to his martyrdom, but ten of his disciples as well, along with Paul. Wikipedia² lists at least 68 first century martyrs.

- Considering this context, what do you make of the prohibitions against women preaching and teaching in the New Testament?
- Taken together with the Romans passage used in Question 1, what’s your take on Paul’s attitude toward women?

¹ *Household Codes*, Carolyn Osiek, <https://www.bibleodyssey.org/articles/household-codes/>, accessed 2025/08/23

² Category:1st-century Christian martyrs, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Category:1st-century_Christian_martyrs, accessed 2025/08/23

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