



WOMEN OF THE OLD TESTAMENT

A twelve-session journey through Scripture

This booklet is designed to help you prepare for each session. You do not need to read everything listed, and there are no tests or homework requirements. The key invitation is simply to read the biblical passages before each meeting and come ready to notice, question and reflect.

"What happens when we listen to the women in the Bible rather than simply listening to what has traditionally been said about them?"

How each session will work

Each 90-minute session will include a short act of worship, some background to the biblical story, close reading of the text, discussion and time for personal reflection.

We will use five recurring questions:

- VOICE — What does she say, and is she heard?
- POWER — What power does she have or lack?
- FAITH — What does she trust, hope or believe?
- RELATIONSHIPS — Who shapes her story?
- GOD — Where is God in the story?

Some stories are beautiful; others are disturbing or morally complicated. We will try to distinguish carefully between what the biblical text actually says and interpretations that later readers have placed upon it.

Opening Act of Worship - Women of the Old Testament

Leader: In the beginning, God created humankind in the image of God.

All: We are all made in the image of God.

Leader: We come together to listen to the stories of women in Scripture — women who trusted, questioned, struggled, led, loved, suffered and hoped.

All: We come with open hearts and listening ears.

Leader: Some were powerful; some were powerless.
Some were named; others remain unnamed.
Some spoke boldly; others were rarely heard.

**All: We come to hear their voices
and to honour their stories.**

Leader: God of every generation,
you have been present in the lives of your people
in times of joy and sorrow,
in faithfulness and failure,
in courage and fear.

**All: Be present with us now
as we listen, learn and reflect.**

A moment of silence

Leader: As we begin our study today, we bring before God the
woman whose story we will hear.

**All: Help us to listen without prejudice,
to question without fear,
and to discover where your presence may be found.**

Leader: Open our eyes to see.

All: Open our ears to hear.

Leader: Open our minds to understand.

All: Open our hearts to receive.

Leader: And give us courage to allow your Word

to challenge us, change us and draw us closer to you.

All: Amen.

Scripture for the day

Leader: We hear now a verse from Scripture connected with today's woman.

Prayer

Leader: God of Sarah and Hagar,
of Miriam and Deborah,
of Ruth and Hannah,
of women named and unnamed,
we thank you for the witness of those
whose stories have been handed down to us.

Help us to read with honesty,
to listen with compassion,
and to seek your wisdom.

May our time together deepen our understanding of
Scripture, broaden our vision of your people,
and draw us more deeply into your love.

All: Amen.

1. EVE

Creation, temptation, blame and agency

Read before the session

- Genesis 1:26–31
- Genesis 2:4–25
- Genesis 3:1–24

Key verses to notice

Genesis 1:27 — “So God created humankind in his image...”

Genesis 3:9 — “But the LORD God called to the man, and said to him, ‘Where are you?’”

A question to carry into the session

What does the story actually say about Eve, and what have later generations said about her?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

2. SARAH AND HAGAR

Promise, power, motherhood and exclusion

Read before the session

- Genesis 12:10–20
- Genesis 16:1–16
- Genesis 17:15–22
- Genesis 18:1–15
- Genesis 21:1–21

Key verses to notice

Genesis 16:13 — “You are El-roi” — the God who sees me.

Genesis 21:17 — “God heard the voice of the boy...”

A question to carry into the session

What happens when God’s promise becomes entangled with human power and vulnerability?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

3. REBEKAH

Agency, determination and manipulation

Read before the session

- Genesis 24:1–67
- Genesis 25:19–34
- Genesis 27:1–46

Key verses to notice

Genesis 25:23 — “The elder shall serve the younger.”

Genesis 24:58 — “Will you go with this man?” She said, “I will.”

A question to carry into the session

Is Rebekah a schemer, a woman of faith, or a woman determined to shape the future?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

4. LEAH AND RACHEL

Love, comparison and longing

Read before the session

- Genesis 29:1–35
- Genesis 30:1–24
- Genesis 31:1–21

Key verses to notice

Genesis 29:31 — “The LORD saw that Leah was unloved...”

Genesis 30:22 — “Then God remembered Rachel, and God heeded her...”

A question to carry into the session

What happens to women when worth is measured by love, appearance or fertility?

Take-away for the week

God saw Leah. Notice the ways people are measured or compared — including yourself.

As you read

Try not to rush to decide whether this woman is “good” or “bad”. Notice what she says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

5. MIRIAM

Prophecy, leadership and voice

Read before the session

- Exodus 2:1–10
- Exodus 15:19–21
- Numbers 12:1–15
- Micah 6:4

Key verses to notice

Exodus 15:20 — “Then the prophet Miriam, Aaron’s sister, took a tambourine...”

Micah 6:4 — “I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam.”

A question to carry into the session

What does Miriam tell us about women’s leadership and authority?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

6. RAHAB

Outsider, courage and belonging

Read before the session

- Joshua 2:1–24
- Joshua 6:22–25

Key verses to notice

Joshua 2:11 — “The LORD your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth beneath.”

Joshua 6:25 — “But Rahab the prostitute, with her family and all who belonged to her, Joshua spared.”

A question to carry into the session

Can an outsider become central to God’s purposes?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

7. DEBORAH

Leadership, authority and courage

Read before the session

- Judges 4:1–24
- Judges 5:1–31

Key verses to notice

Judges 4:4 — “At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel.”

Judges 5:7 — “The peasantry prospered in Israel, they grew strong, until you arose, you arose, Deborah...”

A question to carry into the session

What happens when a woman exercises authority that others assume belongs to men?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

8. RUTH AND NAOMI

Loyalty, vulnerability and belonging

Read before the session

- Ruth 1:1–22
- Ruth 2:1–23
- Ruth 3:1–18
- Ruth 4:1–22

Key verses to notice

Ruth 1:16 — “Where you go, I will go; where you lodge, I will lodge...”

Ruth 2:12 — “May you have a full reward from the LORD...”

A question to carry into the session

How do two vulnerable women create a future for themselves?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

9. HANNAH

Prayer, longing and being heard

Read before the session

- 1 Samuel 1:1–28
- 1 Samuel 2:1–10

Key verses to notice

1 Samuel 1:15 — “I have been pouring out my soul before the LORD.”

1 Samuel 2:1 — “My heart exults in the LORD; my strength is exalted in my God.”

A question to carry into the session

What happens when someone brings her deepest pain honestly before God?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

10. ABIGAIL

Wisdom in the face of violence

Read before the session

- 1 Samuel 25:1–44

Key verses to notice

1 Samuel 25:32–33 — “Blessed be the LORD... and blessed be your good sense...”

1 Samuel 25:35 — “I have heeded your voice, and I have granted your petition.”

A question to carry into the session

What can courage and wisdom achieve when someone has little formal power?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

11. BATHSHEBA AND THE UNNAMED WOMEN

Power, silence and survival

Read before the session

- 2 Samuel 11:1–27
- 2 Samuel 12:1–25
- 2 Samuel 13:1–22

Key verses to notice

2 Samuel 11:4 — “So David sent messengers, and they took her...”

2 Samuel 13:20 — “But Tamar remained, a desolate woman, in her brother Absalom’s house.”

A question to carry into the session

What happens when women are caught in systems of male power, and what happens when their voices are not heard?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

12. ESTHER

Courage, identity and using power

Read before the session

- Esther 1–10

Key verses to notice

Esther 4:14 — “Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.”

Esther 4:16 — “I will go to the king... and if I perish, I perish.”

A question to carry into the session

What happens when someone discovers that her position gives her both opportunity and responsibility to act?

As you read

Notice what the woman says and does, what others say and do to her, where she has power or lacks it, and where God appears to be at work. Bring your questions as well as your insights.

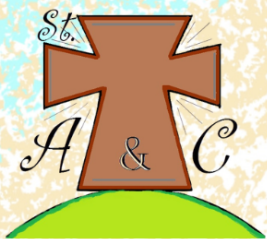
A final reflection

At the end of the course we will look back across the twelve sessions and ask what has changed in the way we read these women and the Old Testament.

- Which woman has stayed with you most strongly?
- Which story challenged your assumptions?
- Whose voice did you hear differently by the end of the course?
- Where did you encounter God?
- What have these women taught you about God?
- What have they taught you about human beings?
- What have they taught you about yourself?

*Call to me and I will answer you,
and will tell you great and hidden things
that you have not known.*

Jeremiah 33:3



Parish of Luton, St Anne with St Christopher



Women of the Old Testament

a Bible study

The Vicarage 33 Felix Avenue, Luton, LU2 7LE

Sunday 3pm

27 September

25 October

22 November

13 December

24 January

28 February

14 March

25 April

23 May

27 June

25 July

22 August

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