



ROSE VISUAL
BIBLE STUDIES

6 SESSIONS

WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

New Testament

Bible Study



WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

New Testament

Rose Visual
Bible Studies

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Women of the Bible: New Testament
Rose Visual Bible Studies

©2022 Rose Publishing

Published by Rose Publishing
An imprint of Tyndale House Ministries
Carol Stream, Illinois
www.hendricksonrose.com

ISBN 978-1-64938-028-9

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Special thanks to Rachel Asproth, whose poem “A Prayer for Women: Remember Your Daughters” inspired the prayers in this study. This poem first appeared in the Summer 2017 issue of CBE’s *Mutuality* magazine (www.cbeinternational.org).

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Printed in the United States of America
010622VP

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*“Blessed is she who has
believed that the Lord would
fulfill his promises to her!”*

Luke 1:45

Women of the New Testament

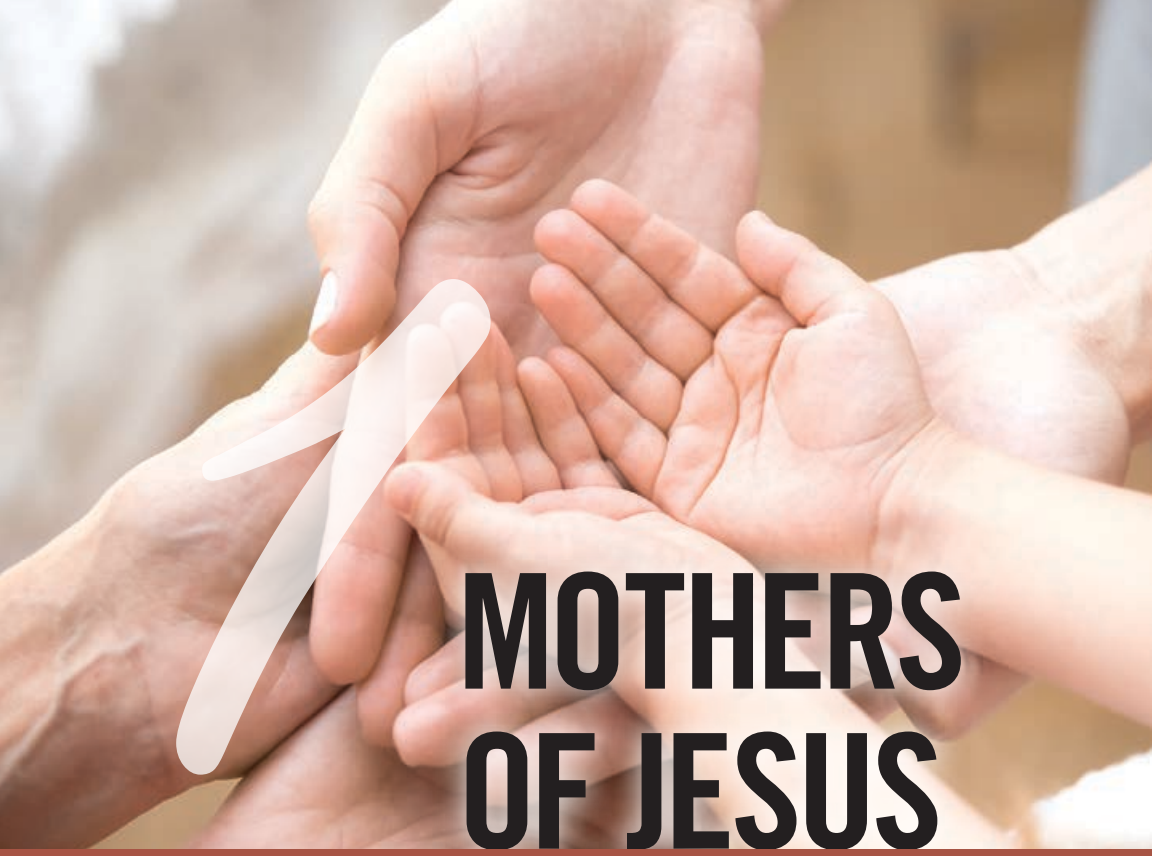


God has given us the fullness of his plan in both the Old and New Testaments—the Old forming the basis for the New, the New explaining the Old. The coming of Jesus Christ, detailed in the New Testament, fulfilled decrees of salvation and justice God had promised to his people centuries before. Not surprisingly, God appointed specific women to play significant roles in the story of Jesus' earthly life and the church that blossomed after him. Each of the women highlighted in this study has something to teach us about God. If we look closely enough, we may also notice how deeply God trusts his daughters to proclaim to *everyone* the good news of who he is and how he is at work in the world.

Women of the Bible: New Testament highlights the lives of several women you may or may not be familiar with. We start with the women listed in Jesus' genealogy: Who were they, and how did they merit inclusion in a typically male-only list? The second session is dedicated to Mary, the mother of Jesus. She is one of the few women we can follow through the entirety of Jesus' life, and here we will focus on her as a student of Scripture. Next, we'll learn about Anna, whose lifelong faith in God's promises to send a Savior spills over into one of the first recorded evangelistic

outreaches. The following two sessions turn familiar passages on their heads, prompting us to reexamine the assumptions modern audiences bring to the story of Martha and Mary and the story of the Samaritan woman at the well. We end with Paul and his shout-out in Romans 16 to many of the people who had partnered with him in ministry. It's time for a fresh look at the strategic women mentioned in Paul's list!

Perhaps you've read these narratives before but have never discovered how history, culture, and geography flavor their background. In the following sessions, you'll study aspects of these stories that aren't commonly discussed but will better inform your perspective and broaden your understanding of the original intent behind their inclusion in the Bible. Although in several ways these women's lives differed from ours today, we also see our own hopes and challenges reflected in how they've overcome obstacles and persevered in believing God's promises. In short, they relied on the same God we know and worship, and he blessed them as he blesses us. Are you ready to discover new and interesting insights into key women of the New Testament? Bring your curiosity as you learn more about the God of the Bible and your own transformative role in the story God is writing.



MOTHERS OF JESUS

*Tamar, Rahab, Ruth,
Bathsheba, and Mary*



Mothers of Jesus

Tracing family history has become a pastime for some people. These days, chances are pretty high you've noticed the popularity of DNA testing to discover your ancestry, and connecting the dots through genealogy websites has also become more common. But western society traditionally has not made a huge effort to trace family roots or understand personal identity based on a long list of ancestors. Even today we're more likely to think of ourselves as individuals with a future that doesn't depend on our background.

The world of the New Testament, however, was completely different. People not only valued the stories of their ancestors but also understood their personal identity based on connections to the past. In fact, connection was so important that Matthew opens his gospel with a list of the radical people who made up Jesus' family tree. Each name demonstrates that Jesus' life was connected to the larger Israelite storyline and stirs up readers' anticipation for the grandness of who Jesus would become. Interestingly, Matthew's genealogy breaks the traditional mold by specifically identifying women. To answer why, let's dig into their fascinating stories.



Read It

Key Bible Passage

For this session, read Matthew 1:1–17.

Optional Reading

Background stories of the women in Matthew’s genealogy of Jesus:

- Tamar—Genesis 38
- Rahab—Joshua 2; 6
- Ruth—Ruth 1–4
- The wife of Uriah (Bathsheba)—2 Samuel 11
- Mary—Matthew 1:18–25

The optional reading offers insight into the women in Matthew’s genealogy and helps us understand the background and path that led them to become mothers of Jesus.

“Jacob was the father of Joseph, the husband of Mary. Mary gave birth to Jesus, who is called the Messiah.”

MATTHEW 1:16 NLT





Know It

1. When you read the Bible and come upon lists of names like the one in Matthew 1, do you think about why those specific names are there, or do you tend to skip over or skim the list and not think much about it?

2. In verse 1, Matthew tells us what the purpose is for his list of names and calls out that Jesus is the son of David, who is the son of Abraham. Why do you think Matthew set up his genealogy by anchoring it in these two Israelite patriarchs? (Hint: What stories or characteristics do you associate with both Abraham and David?)

3. Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, the wife of Uriah (Bathsheba), and Mary are the women identified in Matthew 1:1–17. What do you know about each of them beyond their mention in this genealogy?



Explore It

Culture

During the time of Jesus, people valued their communities and families more than individual roles. They knew they had arrived at their situation in life because of those who had come before them. Children were taught to avoid bringing shame to the family's reputation, and wealth and place within the social hierarchy held more sway over a person's options than gender did. Women of high status enjoyed more freedom than men of low status.

The culture was also organized around a *patriarchal* structure defined by the father of the house. It was often *patrilocal* as well: A bride moved into her husband's house with his extended family, forming a *patrilineal* society where family lineage, and therefore family inheritance, was traced through the males—often the oldest son.

Such an arrangement explains why genealogies in the Bible usually record only male names. And although a long list of names might seem like a tedious read, each was significant to the writer and original readers and represented a moment in Israel's history. Genealogies in Scripture are like little packets of information strung together to create a narrative of a family's history with God.

Matthew's genealogy is no different. There is more here than meets the eye. He chose to mention people who didn't have admirable social standing, and he rejected the traditional method of documenting lineage only through firstborn sons. Even more shocking is that he adds women, and they are not the traditionally honored matriarchs! Matthew must be making an emphatic point by going off-script.

GENEALOGY OF JESUS, the Son of David, the son of Abraham

Fourteen
generations
from
*Abraham to
King David*

1. **ABRAHAM**



2. Isaac



3. Jacob



4. Judah and ***Tamar***



5. Perez



6. Hezron



7. Ram



8. Amminadab



9. Nahshon



10. Salmon and ***Rahab***



11. Boaz and ***Ruth***




12. Obed



13. Jesse



14. **KING DAVID**



Fourteen
generations
from
*King David
and the wife
of Uriah
(Bathsheba)
to the exile
in Babylon*

1. **KING DAVID** and *the wife of Uriah*



2. Solomon



3. Rehoboam



4. Abijah



5. Asa



6. Jehoshaphat



7. Jehoram



8. Uzziah



9. Jotham



10. Ahaz



11. Hezekiah



12. Manasseh




13. Amon



14. Josiah



BABYLONIAN EXILE



Fourteen
generations
from *the*
Babylonian
exile to
Jesus, the
Messiah

1. Jeconiah
↓
2. Shealtiel
↓
3. Zerubbabel
↓
4. Abihud
↓
5. Eliakim
↓
6. Azor
↓
7. Zadok
↓
8. Akim
↓
9. Elihud
↓
10. Eleazar
↓
11. Matthan
↓
12. Jacob
↓
13. Joseph and *Mary*
↓
14. **JESUS, the Messiah**

Narrative

Matthew's gospel begins with a provocative introductory statement: Jesus is the Messiah—the son of David, who is the son of Abraham. Mentioning David and Abraham together creates a link between the long-cherished images of the ideal Israelite king (David) and the nation's patriarch (Abraham). Matthew follows that statement with a “stylized” genealogy to support his point. “Stylized” means he skipped over certain generations, but it does not mean his genealogy is false! Ancient writers had the freedom to stylize to prove their overall point. Matthew is persuasively telling readers to pay close attention to who Jesus is. In this session, we'll focus on the women in Matthew's list by learning their backstories.



Tamar (v. 3)

Tamar's story (Gen. 38) begins with Judah, one of Abraham's great-grandsons. Judah's oldest son, Er, married Tamar, but Er died before Tamar could have children. In such cases, it was common for a brother of the deceased husband to assume responsibility for the widow, including providing her with a child. Er's brother Onan was happy to sleep with Tamar, but he knew that if she became pregnant, the child would not be his. So he selfishly took measures to prevent her from becoming pregnant. Onan also died, and again Tamar was widowed without children. Judah should have taken responsibility for Tamar, but he dismissed her by telling her to wait and marry his youngest son.

Tamar decided to take matters into her own hands. She dressed as a prostitute and sat along the road, waiting for Judah to come along. Not knowing who she was, Judah had sex with her, and she became pregnant with twins. Her actions seem outrageous,

A Coded Message

Matthew lists fourteen generations from Abraham to David, another fourteen from David to the exile, and fourteen more from the exile to Jesus (Matt. 1:17). This division is organized around the high and low points of Israel's history. But what is the significance of the number fourteen? We need to understand that in ancient times, Hebrew letters were assigned numerical values. The first letter was 1, the second letter 2, etc. David's name has three letters (ד ו ד—d v d; Hebrew words back then contained consonants and no vowels).

If we use the numbering code, ד is four and ו is six. The numbers in David's name (ד ו ד) add up to fourteen! Matthew is emphasizing (1) that Jesus belongs to the Israelite story that began with Abraham and continued through King David, and (2) that Jesus fulfills the prophecy of a Messiah who would descend from King David. Matthew's genealogy is a coded message designed to make readers sit up straight and pay attention to Jesus.

$$\begin{array}{ccc} \text{D} & \text{V} & \text{D} \\ \downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow \\ \text{ד} & \text{ו} & \text{ד} \\ \downarrow & \downarrow & \downarrow \\ 4 & + & 6 & + & 4 & = & 14 \end{array}$$

David L. Turner in *Cornerstone Biblical Commentary*, vol. 11, offers this clarification: "The genealogy has three movements of fourteen generations: (1) from Abraham to David (1:2–6a), (2) from David to the Exile (1:6b–11), and (3) from the Exile to Jesus the Messiah (1:12–16). Careful readers will note that it is difficult to arrange the genealogy into three groups of fourteen generations, but Matthew was more interested in the symbolism of 'fourteen' than in the precision of his scheme" (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale, 2005, 34).

but Tamar acted in a culturally appropriate way to seek justice. Please note, Tamar *dressed* like a prostitute—she did not become a prostitute! She ensured that Judah provided her with children and thus an inheritance. When Judah realized the magnitude of his mistake, he declared, “She is more righteous than I am” (v. 26). Tamar made a huge impact on the future Israelite nation. One of her twin sons, Perez, was an ancestor of King David (Ruth 4:18–22) and an important link in the birth of a Redeemer for Israel and the world.

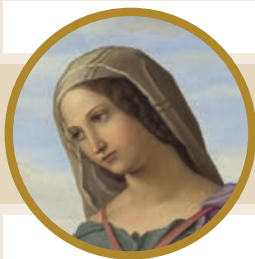


Rahab (v. 5)

Rahab was a Canaanite prostitute who lived in the city of Jericho. When two Israelites were sent to spy out the land God had promised them, the spies stayed in Rahab’s house to remain cloaked in secrecy (Josh. 2:1). The choice seems odd, but at that time the only place to remain unnoticed was in a house where people regularly came and went.

Rahab not only housed the spies but also hid them from Jericho’s officials. She had heard about the wonders God did for the Israelites by rescuing them from Egypt and allowing them a safe journey. Rahab proclaimed to the spies, “The LORD your God is God in heaven above and on the earth below” (v. 11). She became the first Canaanite to declare the supremacy of the one true God.

Rahab asked the spies to protect her and her family when the Israelites attacked Jericho. The spies agreed, promising to spare anyone who found refuge in Rahab’s house. What a remarkable story! Rahab saved her entire family because she recognized the power of Israel’s God and boldly asked for mercy. According to Matthew, Rahab married an Israelite named Salmon and became a foremother of Boaz, which leads us to the next story.



Ruth (v. 5)

Ruth’s story begins in her future husband’s hometown—Bethlehem in Israel. During a drought, a woman named Naomi, along with her family, moved east to the land of Moab with hopes of surviving there (Ruth 1:1). When Naomi’s husband died, she was left with Mahlon and Kilion, her two sons. They eventually married Moabite women—Orpah and Ruth—but then Mahlon and Kilion died. Without a husband and children, Naomi’s only hope was to return to Bethlehem so someone in her extended family could care for her. Along the way, Naomi encouraged Orpah and Ruth to return to their families so they could marry again. Orpah turned back, but Ruth stayed.

The residents in Bethlehem noticed Ruth’s hard work and loyalty to Naomi. Ultimately, Boaz, one of Naomi’s wealthy relatives, married Ruth, becoming the provider for both women. The book of Ruth concludes with its own genealogy, where we learn that Ruth and Boaz became the great-grandparents of King David.



Bathsheba, the Wife of Uriah (v. 6)

The next woman is described as “Uriah’s wife,” a title that refers to Bathsheba. Some translations add her name for clarity, but it isn’t included in the Greek manuscripts. Bathsheba is called “the wife of Uriah” in 2 Samuel 11:3. King David had stayed in Jerusalem after sending his army to battle, and late one day he saw Bathsheba as he was walking on the roof of his palace. Notice that *he* was looking down at *her*. The Bible says

she was “bathing” (v. 2), but that doesn’t mean she was soaking in a claw-foot tub.

In fact, bathing at that time was a matter of rubbing down with oil and scraping off impurities. It’s also possible Bathsheba was using a wet cloth to clean herself after completing her period (v. 4). Bathsheba was in the privacy of her home, but often this story is told as if she had purposely enticed David by soaking naked in a rooftop bubble bath. Such a scenario is not implied in the Bible! Rather, David lusted after Bathsheba while her husband, Uriah, was fighting David’s war.

David sent servants to bring Bathsheba to his palace, where it’s implied that David raped her. Bathsheba became pregnant, and David worried that if Uriah found out, he would seek retaliation. To protect himself, David crafted a way for Uriah to be killed in battle. After Bathsheba had mourned her husband’s death, David took her as his wife. Sadly, their son died soon after birth, but Bathsheba and David’s next son, Solomon, lived to become one of Israel’s great kings and an ancestor of Jesus.

Let’s circle back to the question of why Matthew called Bathsheba “Uriah’s wife” instead of “wife of David” or “mother of Solomon.” It’s possible his actions were a rebuke against David, or perhaps he intended to honor Uriah’s memory. Whatever the case, Bathsheba’s mention in Jesus’ genealogy reminds us that God can transform even the messiest of situations into a blessing for the entire world.



Mary, the Mother of Jesus (v. 16)

The final woman Matthew mentions is Mary, but we’ll save her story for the next session. Sufficient to notice here is that once more Matthew breaks a pattern. Joseph is called

“the husband of Mary,” a highly unusual way to refer to a man—in terms of his relationship to a woman. The genealogy states that “Mary was the mother of Jesus” but carefully leaves out a biological connection between Jesus and Joseph.

A Common Thread

Some suggest these women have a shady past in common, yet consider that Judah called Tamar “more righteous than I” in her quest for justice (Gen. 38:26). Rahab was identified as a prostitute, but her choices saved the spies from certain death and redeemed herself and her family. Ruth was praised for her strength of character. Bathsheba was violated, then suffered the death of her husband and first child. Those were not *her* bad choices in life. And Mary submitted to God’s plan knowing others would accuse her of actions she had never taken.

Rather, *this* is the common thread: Social traditions do not constrict God. Ruth was a Moabite, Rahab a Canaanite—two nations that were Israel’s enemies. Tamar and Bathsheba had suffered injustices. And Mary had a child in a most uncommon way! By including these women, Matthew highlights how God intervenes in history, through all kinds of people, to bring about his purposes. Matthew’s lineage underscores God’s faithfulness in the past and hints that it will continue through the birth of Jesus.



Live It

The genealogies sprinkled throughout the Bible show modern readers that family memories were honored and long-lasting. We may not know the names of fourteen generations of our ancestors, but the people living in Bible times did. What a great reminder that God's story reaches long before us and will continue long after us. As he writes his grand narrative, he still interacts kindly and mercifully with individuals, and he does not require that they represent a certain class or gender.

Life Application Questions

- 1.** Do you notice particular patterns in the lives of your ancestors that match or differ from those in your own life? Can any of the blessings you enjoy today be traced back to God's work in their lives?

2. Choose one of these women and think about her story. What parts can you identify with? Do you recognize her story in the lives of anyone you know?

3. Because of Rahab's bold actions, her entire family was saved. How might Rahab's example inspire you to pray for the needs of your loved ones?

4. We could use descriptions like *immigrant*, *marginalized*, or *abused* for the women listed in Matthew 1, but those words would not tell their full story. Can you think of any labels we place on others that prevent us from seeing who they really are?

5. Have you ever felt like you didn't fit in with church crowds or were left out because you didn't match the Christian mold? Remember, God isn't restricted by our made-up cultural standards. How has God worked in your life despite your unconventional circumstances?

Prayer

God of our grandmothers,

God of all who feel lost and forgotten,

God of those who are orphaned and without a family,

God of the courageous who advocate for their families,

Remember your daughters today.

Remember those who do not feel like they fit in.

Remember the women who have a fierce love for their
whole family.

Remember those made to feel small because of their gender.

Remember all who yearn to understand what it means for Jesus
to be “God with us.”

Closing prayers in this study are based on Rachel Asproth's “A Prayer for Women: Remember Your Daughters.” Used by permission.