

**Look for the Women: A Virtual Bible Study in Search of Hope**  
**Leader's Guide by Karl Anliker**

This 4 part Bible study series is rooted in the words of Rachel Held Evans who in her final book *Inspired* empowered readers with a feminist approach to reading difficult passages of the Bible. Evans writes, “The point is, if you **pay attention to the women**, a more complex history of Israel’s conquests emerges. Their stories invite the reader to consider the human cost of violence and patriarchy, and in that sense prove **instructive to all who wish to work for a better world.**”

**Goals:**

1. Empower readers with a life long tool to read the Bible by looking for the women
2. Help readers enter the minds and hearts of Biblical women through art, scholarship, and poetry
3. Guide readers in making connections between the Bible and modern movements for justice

**Experience:** Participants are encouraged to be open and reflective with the text. Because these passages depict the cost of violence and patriarchy, participants are encouraged to be gentle with one another. This study is focused on experiencing empathy with biblical women and gaining understanding of both their stories and the stories of participants.

**Notes on Discussion:** Be creative with the questions provided. Perhaps sometimes an all group discussion will work best. Other times, perhaps journaling and then discussing. Maybe partner discussions before sharing with the whole group. The focus of this study is the discussion. Give it time and space to grow.

In addition to the detailed guide below, depending on your context, you may wish to offer **Zoom Instructions** or **Biblical Summaries**. Examples of these two items can be found on the last page of this guide.

**Biblical Art, poetry, and scholarship:** The art, poetry, and scholarship used throughout this study are only a starting point. Feel free to add additional artwork or poetry, especially if your group is large enough to divide into smaller groups.

## Bible Study Session 1: Miriam

### Introductions

Introduce yourself and tell us what your epithet would be...

*Examples: Ivan the Terrible, Khaleesi: Mother of Dragons, Zeus: Lord of the Clouds, and Miriam: sister of Moses*

### Focus

Share the following items with participants to give a focus to your reading of scripture and to help them know where the study is headed!

- Naming the difficult parts of this story
- Looking for the women, finding hope
- Determining what this might mean for us, today.
- Read the bible story, examine art, consider a quote from a scholar, read a poem, and write a blessing

### Scripture

*Scripture can be read by a participant or the instructor. Participants can be invited to read along with the text in front of them or simply focus on listening.* Exodus 1:15-22; Exodus 2:1-10; Exodus 15: 19-21

### Question

What do you notice in this picture about Miriam and the other women?

### Art

Miriam and the women dancing at the Red Sea, depicted on a mural at the Messianic Society Cemetery in Jerusalem. (Zeevveez/Flickr)

### Question

Who are the women in this story? What do you understand about them? Their motives, desires, thoughts, feelings?

### Scholarly quote

"A Paradoxical Prophet: Jewish Women Poets Re-Imagine Miriam" by Enid Dame

### Question

What did you discover from how this scholar understands Miriam?

### Poem

Miriam: The Red Sea © Muriel Rukeyser, from "Searching/Not Searching," in *Breaking Open* (New York: Random House, 1973).

### Question

How does the story of these women invite us to think about building a more just and peaceful world?

### Closing Activity/Blessing

Write a blessing. Participants can do so individually while on site or do so as a takeaway activity. Depending on the group size, people are also encouraged to work together.

Examples: God bless Miriam, Shiphrah Puah ... Bless her for her....

Sustain her in her... God bless all the women who... God bless all the people who lead...

## Bible Study Session 2: Hagar and Sarah

### Introductions

Introduce yourself and tell us (briefly) about one item or place in your home you have relied on while we shelter in place.

### Focus

Share the following items with participants to give a focus to your reading of scripture and to help them know where the study is headed!

- Naming the difficult parts of this story
- Looking for the women, finding hope
- Determining what this might mean for us, today.
- Read the bible story, examine art, consider a quote from a scholar, read a poem, and write a blessing

### Scripture

*Scripture can be read by a participant or the instructor. Participants can be invited to read along with the text in front of them or simply focus on listening. Genesis 16:1-15; 21:9-21*

### Question

What do you notice in these pictures of Hagar and Ishmael?

### Art

*Hagar And Ishmael* by Jean-Charles Cazin, *Expulsion of Ishmael and his Mother* by Gustave Dore, *Hagar and Ishmael* by Alan Jones.

### Question

Who are the women in this story? What do you understand about them? Their motives, desires, thoughts, feelings?

### Scholarly quote

Phyllis Tribble in *Texts of Terror*

### Question

How do the women, including Hagar and Sarah, reveal a more complex story of the people of Israel?

### Poem

“Ahti” by Lyn Gottlieb

### Question

How does the story of these women invite us to think about building a more just and peaceful world?

### Closing Activity/Blessing

Write a blessing. Participants can do so individually while on site or do so as a takeaway activity. Depending on the group size, people are also encouraged to work together.

Examples: God bless Sarah and Hagar ... Bless them for their....

Sustain them in their... God bless all the women who... God bless all the people who lead...

## Bible Study Session 3: Unnamed Women, Lot's Wife

### Introductions

Introduce yourself and tell us (briefly) about an important person in your life but who you don't know or can't remember their name...

### Focus

Share the following items with participants to give a focus to your reading of scripture and to help them know where the study is headed!

- Naming the difficult parts of this story
- Looking for the women, finding hope
- Determining what this might mean for us, today.
- Read the bible story, examine art, consider a quote from a scholar, read a poem, and write a blessing

### Scripture

*Scripture can be read by a participant or the instructor. Participants can be invited to read along with the text in front of them or simply focus on listening. Genesis 19: 15-26*

### Question

What do you notice in these paintings? The first depicts Lot's wife and the second is titled Lot's wife.

### Art

"Lot Fleeing from Sodom", Benjamin West, U.S. American, 1738-1820

*Lot's Wife* by Anselm Kiefer

### Question

Who are the women in this story? What do you understand about them? Their motives, desires, thoughts, feelings?

### Scholarly quote

Steven Luger in "Flood, Salt, and Sacrifice: Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder in Genesis

### Question

Was Lot's wife punished? How does it change your understanding of her if she experienced psychological trauma?

### Poem

"Lot's Wife" by Kristine Batey

### Question

How does the story of these women invite us to think about building a more just and peaceful world?

### Closing Activity/Blessing

Write a blessing. Participants can do so individually while on site or do so as a takeaway activity. Depending on the group size, people are also encouraged to work together.

Examples: God bless Lot's wife ... Bless unnamed women...

Sustain them in their... God bless all the women who... God bless all the people who...

## Bible Study Session 4: Rizpah

### Introductions

Introduce yourself and share with us who you think is the most powerful person you have ever met...

### Focus

Share the following items with participants to give a focus to your reading of scripture and to help them know where the study is headed!

- Naming the difficult parts of this story
- Looking for the women, finding hope
- Determining what this might mean for us, today.
- Read the bible story, examine art, consider a quote from a scholar, read a poem, and write a blessing

### Scripture

*Scripture can be read by a participant or the instructor. Participants can be invited to read along with the text in front of them or simply focus on listening. 2 Samuel 21:1-14*

### Question

What do you notice in the story about Rizpah? Who is she? What do you notice about her in the painting?

### Art

*Rizpah protecting the bodies of her murdered sons Armoni and Mephibosheth.*  
Watercolour after J.M.W. Turner. Credit: Wellcome Collection. Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0)

### Question

Who are the women in this story? What do you understand about them? Their motives, desires, thoughts, feelings?

### Scholarly quote

*'Dis(re)membered and Unaccounted For': פְּיִלְגָּם (concubine) in the Hebrew Bible* by Isabelle Hamley

### Question

How does this scholarly perspective reinforce or challenge your understanding of Rizpah?

### Poem

“A poem for Rizpah and all her daughters” by Teresa Kim Pecinovsky

### Question

How does the story of these women invite us to think about building a more just and peaceful world?

### Closing Activity/Blessing

Write a blessing. Participants can do so individually while on site or do so as a takeaway activity. Depending on the group size, people are also encouraged to work together.

Examples: God bless Rizpah ... Bless strong women who resist ...

Sustain them in their... God bless all the women who... God bless all the people who...

Additional Sample Material:

### **Sample Zoom Instructions**

- Take a deep breath! Bible Study via zoom is different, but we are gathered to sustain hope and courage!
- Mute yourself and start/stop your video in the bottom left corner of your screen. Change your view to see everyone or the speaker, by clicking the gallery or speaker view in the top corner (or the plus sign on a mobile device).
- If you have a question or comment during a difficult time to chime in, use the chat button at the bottom of your screen and I will be sure to circle back to your comment.
- These Bible studies involve difficult stories in the bible. If you need to take a step back please do so.

### **Sample Biblical Summaries**

Story of Moses: Although the Hebrew people had risen to power in Egypt through Joseph, a new Pharaoh erases all that, relegating the Israelites to slavery. Moses is the unlikely hero who finds God in a burning bush and is called to free God's people from slavery. The process isn't easy, with the heart of Pharaoh hardened to the cries of Moses and his people. God and Moses strike Egypt with a host of plagues. The final plague, where the Angel of Death kills first born children, persuades Pharaoh to let the people go. The arc of this narrative closes with the Israelites led by Moses, crossing the sea by God's miracle, and being free from Pharaoh's army! Who is missing from this story?