



Reclaiming God's Vision for Women

St Michael le Belfrey

1. How to study the Bible

Recognise:

- 1.1. Cultural and personal filters
- 1.2. Scholars are always learning more about what the Bible says
- 1.3. Translation/Interpretation issues
- 1.4. The limitations of human understanding of God

2. God's Creation Vision for Women

Gen 1:26-28

Then God said, "Let us make *adam* (humanity) in our image, according to our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air, and over the livestock, and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. So God created *ha'adam* in his own image; in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them. God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth."

Gen 2:7,15-18

The Lord God formed the human (*ha'adam*) from the dust of the ground and breathed into their nostrils the breath of life, and the *ha'adam* became a living being...The Lord God took the *ha'adam* and put them into the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.

And the Lord God commanded the *ha'adam*, "You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die. The Lord God said, "It is not *tov* (good/complete) for the *ha'adam* to be alone. I will make a *ezer kenegdo* suitable for the being."

God took all created animals to *ha'adam* to see if suitable companions, "but no suitable *ezer kenegdo* was found."

So God caused *ha'adam* to fall into a deep sleep, created another being from their side and made an *is'sah* (woman) "from the rib taken out of the *ha'adam* (2:22) and brought her to the *ha'adam*. The *ha'adam* said, 'Bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh, she shall be called *is'sah* for she was taken out of *ish*. For this reason an *ish* (man) will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife and they shall become one flesh. "

Gen 3: 16 - Following humans' disobedience to God

"Your desire will be for your husband and he will rule over you."

2.1. Female characteristics attributed to God in the OT

Mother:

Numbers 11:12 Mother suckling her children and responsible for caring for them

Deut 32:18 Mother who gave birth of her children (Israelites)

Is 42:14 Woman in labour whose forceful breaths are image of divine power



Is 26:3-4 Mother who gives birth to and protects Israel

Is 49:14-15 Mother who doesn't forget the child she nursed
Is 66:12-13 Mother comforts her children
Hosea 11:1-4 Mother calls, teaches, holds, heals, feed her young
Ps 131:2; Job 38:8, 29; Prov 8:22-25

God associated with trad female cultural activities:

Nehemiah 9:21 Seamstress
Ps 22:9-10, 71:6; Is 66:9) Midwife
Ps 123:4 Woman in authority re servants

God described metaphorically as female animal:

Female bird protecting young (Ps 17:8, 36:7, 57:1, 91:1; Is 31:5; Deut 32:11-12)
Eagle (Deut 32:11-12; Ex 19:4; Job 39:27-30)
Mother bear (Hosea 13:8)

Wisdom (often associated with the Spirit) is referred to as a woman in Proverbs (Prov 1:20-33, 8:1-9:12)

2.2. Female characters in the OT

National leaders

Miriam (Ex 2:7, 15:20-21; Num 20:1)
Deborah (Judges 4:4-5)
Huldah (2 Kgs 22:14-20 & 2 Chr 34:22-28)

Saviour/liberators

Hebrew midwives, Shiprah and Puah (Ex 1:15-19)
Queen Esther (Esther)

Models of faith

Rahab (Josh 2:1-13)
Ruth (Ruth)

Model of working / business woman

Proverbs 31

Song of Solomon

3. God's Redemptive Vision for Women

3.1. Jesus' teaching

Used stereotypically male and female activities (Mk 4:26; Matt 13:33)
Illustrated God's nature and Kingdom with parables about men and women (Lk 15:8-10; Lk 15:1-7)
Used women as examples of model discipleship (Lk 18:1-6; Lk 21:1-4)



3.2. Jesus' behaviour

Healed women including those making him ritually unclean (Lk 7:36-50; Lk 8:43-47; Lk 8:36-50; Mk 1:29-31; Mk 5:22-43)

First person he told he was Messiah (Jn 4)

Commended Mary as disciple (Lk 10:38-42)

Women were among his disciples and supporters (Lk 8:1-3)

God chose women as his first witnesses to the resurrection (Matt 28:9, Mk 16:9, Lk 24:9-10, Jn 20:10-18)

3.3. Women highlighted by Paul

Women in church leadership

Lydia (Acts 16:13-15)

Phoebe (Rom 16:1-2)

Nympha (Col 4:15)

Women teachers (including to men)

Priscilla (Acts 18:18-19; Rom 16:1; 1 Cor 16:19; 2 Tim 4:19)

Other church leaders who were women!

Women apostles

Junia (Rom 16:1-16)

Women Paul worked with

Mary (Rom 16:6)

Tryphena, Tryphosa, Persis (Rom 16:12)

Julia, Nereus and his sister (Rom 16:15)

Euodia & Syntyche (Phil 4:2-3)

Claudia (2 Tim 4:21)

Apphia (Philemon 1:2)

Women commended for their faith

Lois and Eunice (2 Tim 1:5)

Prophets

Philip's 4 daughters (Acts 21:9)

4. Reclaiming God's Vision for women

Study to find what the Bible says

Take active steps to re-write our distorted narratives

Teach regularly from the perspective of Biblical women

Language

Identify encouragers and be encouragers

See yourself as being made in the image of God

Be part of the church modelling Kingdom relationships in all areas of life



Suggested additional reading:

Gupta, Nijay. *Tell Her Story: How women led, taught, and ministered in the early church*, 2023

Peppiatt, Lucy. *Rediscovering Scripture's Vision for Women: Fresh perspectives on disputed texts*, 2019

Williams, Terran. *How God Sees Women: The end of patriarchy*, 2022

Witherington, Ben. *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, 1984

Criado Perez, Caroline, *Invisible Women: Exposing data bias in a world designed for Men*, 2019

There are lots of other books, but these are easy reading and a good start.