

# “Church & Gender” Study Guide

## Lesson 6: Women in the Old Testament

### Outline

1. Old Testament Women
  - a. Deborah, Judges 4:5-6
    - i. Prophetess
    - ii. Judge of Israel
    - iii. “summoned Barak”
  - b. Huldah, 2 Kings 22:14-15
    - i. Contemporary of Jeremiah, Zephaniah, Nahum, and Habakkuk
    - ii. Counselor to King Josiah’s court
    - iii. Asked to weigh in on the Law (2 Kings 22; 2 Chr. 32)
    - iv. Prophecies and issues commands
  - c. Miriam, Micah 6:4; Exodus 15:20-21
    - i. Miriam
    - ii. Prophetess/leader sent by God
    - iii. Named alongside Moses and Aaron
    - iv. Secondary to Moses, but only in the sense that Aaron is (Numbers 12:1-16)
    - v. Leads women in worship (Exodus 15:20-21)
  - d. COMPLEMENTARIAN: Notable women in the Scriptures prove that women may exercise leadership in some circumstances. However, male leadership remains the norm in most Old Testament texts.
  - e. EGALITARIAN: Notable women in the Scriptures prove that God intended women to be leaders along with men. That men normally were leaders reflects the norms of ancient patriarchal society rather than God’s will.
2. Demeaning Women?
  - a. Many “Texts of Terror” show awful things happening to women: Hagar, The Concubine (Judges 19), Jephthah’s Daughter, etc.
  - b. None of these stories approve of the way these women are treated. Condemnation is even implied.
3. Problem Texts
  - a. Leviticus 12:2-7
    - i. Ceremonial purity laws are often arbitrary.
    - ii. Impurity is not “evil.” Impurity meant “not normal.”
    - iii. Perhaps, ancient people thought mothers needed extra time to care for newborn girls.
  - b. Exodus 20:17
    - i. Yet, a man’s lawful duty was to “give happiness to his wife” (Deut. 24:5) as opposed to the reverse.
    - ii. Marriage does imply “possession.”
    - iii. Paul affirms that the man does own the wife ... just as the wife owns the husband (1 Cor. 7:4).
  - c. Deuteronomy 21:10-14

- i. What should happen to women after war? I hope we are more appalled when they are slaughtered.
  - ii. Strange as it sounds, these rules protected women from exploitation, violence, and destitution.
  - iii. War is ugly and terrible.
- d. Leviticus 27:1-8
  - i. First, in the ancient world chattel slavery was normalized.
  - ii. Second, notice that the Old Testament reforms that system and provides protections for slaves.
  - iii. Third, if you are willing to accept these premises, why would it shock you that women were priced lower? Think about average muscle mass for each gender.
- e. Deuteronomy 22:28-29
  - i. If a man meets a virgin who is not betrothed, and seizes her and lies with her, and they are found, then the man who lay with her shall give to the father of the young woman fifty shekels of silver, and she shall be his wife, because he has violated her. He may not divorce her all his days.
  - ii. Matrimony was designed to protect women.
  - iii. Men were not allowed to treat sex as sport or conquest (same for seduction, Exodus 22:16-17).
  - iv. "He may not divorce her all his days" (Deut. 22:29b).
  - v. This also prevented the community from treating the woman as defiled or even an adulterer.
- f. Summary
  - i. The passages of concern seem to be laws responding to the fallen, ancient world.
  - ii. Viewed in that light, they are in many cases protective of women.
  - iii. I don't expect a modern audience to be comfortable with them.

### Discussion Questions

1. If the Old Testament was supposed to demonstrate that women have equal role in leadership as men, why are women in leadership an exception to the norm? If the Old Testament was supposed to demonstrate that women have no place in leadership with men, why does the text describe the notable women leaders mentioned above?
2. What do you make of the "problem passages" discussed above? Does the Old Testament demean women? If so, what does that mean for us as Christians? If not, why does it feel that way at times to so many readers?