



The REAL Housewives of Paddan Aram

THE GARDEN COLLECTION

Student Book

*Hagar · Leah · Rachel
Bilhah · Zilpah
Tamar · Dinah*

A Bible study in Genesis

Their stories. Their struggles. Their faith. Our lessons.

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Meet the Household

Read Genesis 12-38

The title gathers women connected to Abraham's wider family. Their stories move through Canaan, Egypt, and Paddan Aram. Follow the relationships while noticing each woman as a person.

Abraham's household Hagar is Ishmael's mother.

Jacob's household Leah and Rachel are sisters. Bilhah is Rachel's maid; Zilpah is Leah's maid. All four bear sons through Jacob.

The next generation Dinah is Leah and Jacob's daughter. Tamar is Judah's daughter-in-law and later the mother of Perez and Zerah through Judah.

Our starting question What do we notice?

Who has power, who is heard, and how do the choices of one person affect another?

Open your Bible Look up Genesis 25:28 and 29:30. What do these verses reveal about favoritism?

My notes

Hagar

Read Genesis 16:1-16; 21:8-21

Meet Her Hagar is an Egyptian woman enslaved in Sarah and Abraham's household. She becomes Ishmael's mother.

Her World Her status leaves decisions about her work, body, and future largely in other people's hands. She is also a foreigner in the household.

Her Story Pregnant Hagar flees Sarah's harsh treatment. Later, she and Ishmael are sent away and face thirst in the wilderness.

What We Often Miss God's messenger addresses Hagar by name. The spring in Genesis 16 and the well in Genesis 21 belong to separate encounters.

Her Struggle She experiences mistreatment, displacement, and fear for her son. Others' attempts to control the future place her at risk.

Her Encounter with God God's messenger finds her, and she calls the Lord El Roi. Later, God hears the boy and opens her eyes to water.

What Her Story Says to Us Today God sees people outside the center of power. Her story calls us to notice distress and offer practical care.

Questions for Reflection

1. How is Hagar addressed? Genesis 16:7-8.
2. What name does she give the Lord? Genesis 16:13.
3. What changes when her eyes are opened? Genesis 21:17-19.

My notes

Leah

Read Genesis 29:16-35; 30:9-21; 49:29-32

Meet Her Leah is Laban's older daughter, Rachel's sister, and Jacob's first wife. She is the mother of six named sons and Dinah.

Her World A father arranges the marriage, and sisters share a husband. Affection, children, and status become sources of competition.

Her Story Laban substitutes Leah at the wedding. Jacob loves Rachel more. Leah names her children amid longing for love and moments of praise.

What We Often Miss Genesis describes Leah's eyes without calling her ugly. Her children include Levi and Judah, important names in Israel's unfolding story.

Her Struggle She longs to be loved and becomes entangled in rivalry. Her children cannot guarantee the affection she seeks.

Her Encounter with God The Lord sees that Leah is unloved and enables her to bear children. At Judah's birth, she turns her words toward praising the Lord.

What Her Story Says to Us Today Being overlooked by people does not make us invisible to God. Our worth is not measured by romance, appearance, or motherhood.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does the Lord see? Genesis 29:31.
2. What changes in Leah's words? Genesis 29:32-35.
3. Which daughter is named? Genesis 30:21.

My notes

Rachel

Read Genesis 29:1-30; 30:1-24; 31:19-35; 35:16-20

Meet Her Rachel is Laban's younger daughter and Jacob's beloved wife. She is the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

Her World She tends her father's sheep before marriage. Family negotiations, rivalry, and pressure to bear children shape her household.

Her Story Jacob meets her at the well and works to marry her. She gives Bilhah to Jacob, later bears Joseph, and dies after Benjamin's birth.

What We Often Miss Being loved and beautiful does not remove her distress. Bilhah's part in the household must remain visible beside Rachel's story.

Her Struggle Envy and longing sharpen her words. Her demand for children and her taking of household gods reveal a complicated life.

Her Encounter with God Genesis says God remembers Rachel, listens to her, and opens her womb. Remembering describes God's active care, not prior forgetfulness.

What Her Story Says to Us Today Love and status cannot settle every longing. We can bring sorrow to God without turning another woman's life into a competition.

Questions for Reflection

1. What does Rachel say in her distress? Genesis 30:1.
2. What does God do? Genesis 30:22-24.
3. What names are given at Benjamin's birth? Genesis 35:18.

My notes

Bilhah

Read Genesis 29:29; 30:1-8; 35:22-25; 46:23-25

Meet Her Bilhah is the woman Laban gives to Rachel as a maid. She becomes the mother of Dan and Naphtali through Jacob.

Her World Enslaved women hold less household power. Rachel and Jacob make decisions about Bilhah's role in the family.

Her Story Rachel gives Bilhah to Jacob to bear children. Rachel names Dan and Naphtali. Later, Genesis records Reuben sleeping with Bilhah.

What We Often Miss Bilhah is named, but her own speech and response are not recorded. Her sons become part of Israel's family story.

Her Struggle Her life is shaped by choices made by others. The text does not tell us what she wanted or whether she consented.

Her Encounter with God No personal conversation between Bilhah and God is recorded. Her name and motherhood remain within the family Genesis remembers.

What Her Story Says to Us Today We can honor a woman as a person rather than treating her as the means to someone else's hopes.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who gives Bilhah to Rachel? Genesis 29:29.
2. Who are her sons? Genesis 30:3-8.
3. How is her place in the family preserved? Genesis 35:25.

My notes

Zilpah

Read Genesis 29:24; 30:9-13; 35:26; 46:16-18

Meet Her Zilpah is the woman Laban gives to Leah as a maid. She becomes the mother of Gad and Asher through Jacob.

Her World Her enslaved status places her under household authority. The competition between the sisters affects decisions about her life.

Her Story When Leah stops bearing children, she gives Zilpah to Jacob. Zilpah bears Gad and Asher, and Leah names them.

What We Often Miss The celebrations are voiced by Leah, while Zilpah's own feelings are unrecorded. Her name still accompanies her descendants.

Her Struggle She has little recorded control over the arrangements. Her story asks us to notice the person behind a powerful household's plans.

Her Encounter with God No individual encounter with God is recorded for Zilpah. Genesis preserves her place as a mother within Israel's beginnings.

What Her Story Says to Us Today A quiet or unheard voice does not mean a life lacks value. We can make room for people with less power to speak for themselves.

Questions for Reflection

1. How does Zilpah enter Leah's household? Genesis 29:24.
2. Who are her sons? Genesis 30:9-13.
3. Which granddaughter is named? Genesis 46:17-18.

My notes

Tamar

Read Genesis 38:1-30; Matthew 1:3

Meet Her Tamar is Judah's daughter-in-law, first married to Er. She later becomes the mother of Perez and Zerah through Judah.

Her World Widowhood and household obligations affect her security. Judah promises Shelah to her but does not fulfill that arrangement.

Her Story After Er and Onan die, Tamar waits. She disguises herself, obtains identifying pledges from Judah, and later uses them to reveal his responsibility.

What We Often Miss Judah admits that she is more righteous than he because he withheld Shelah. Her story exposes his failure as well as her actions.

Her Struggle She faces bereavement, delay, dependence, and a dangerous accusation. The same man who fails her first condemns her.

Her Encounter with God God's judgment on Er and Onan appears in the chapter, but no personal conversation between Tamar and God is recorded.

What Her Story Says to Us Today God's larger story includes complicated lives. Tamar challenges double standards and calls us to examine responsibility before condemning others.

Questions for Reflection

1. What promise remains unfulfilled? Genesis 38:11, 14.
2. What pledges identify Judah? Genesis 38:18, 25.
3. What does Judah acknowledge? Genesis 38:26.

My notes

Dinah

Read Genesis 30:21; 34:1-31; 46:15

Meet Her Dinah is Leah and Jacob's named daughter and the sister of their sons. Genesis remembers her within the family as well as in a troubling chapter.

Her World Marriage negotiations, male authority, and family honor shape the response when she suffers harm in Shechem's household.

Her Story Shechem sexually violates Dinah. Men negotiate over her future, and Simeon and Levi answer with deception and deadly revenge.

What We Often Miss Dinah's words are not recorded. Her visit to the women of the land does not make her responsible for Shechem's actions.

Her Struggle She experiences violence and becomes the subject of decisions others make. Her personal response and later life are largely unrecorded.

Her Encounter with God Genesis records no personal encounter between Dinah and God. We should not invent her feelings or a divine explanation for the harm.

What Her Story Says to Us Today Dinah deserves attention as a person. Her story calls us to listen to those harmed and distinguish protection and justice from retaliation.

Questions for Reflection

1. Who is Dinah? Genesis 30:21; 46:15.
2. How do the brothers describe the wrong? Genesis 34:7.
3. What happens after the attack? Genesis 34:25-31.

My notes
