

# First Person: Misogyny in the Bible

By [Hershel Shanks](#)

Christopher Rollston is one of the world's leading paleographers of ancient Near Eastern inscriptions. I have been harshly critical of some of his views, principally regarding unprovenanced inscriptions—inscriptions that have surfaced only from the antiquities market, not from a professional archaeological excavation. They may be forgeries, he argues.



Although my criticism of Chris's position is intense,<sup>(a)</sup> we remain good friends and regularly share a meal. Chris is also a master carpenter. Above my office door hangs a beautiful polished wooden plaque expertly carved with my name in paleo-Hebrew script—the kind of Hebrew letters used before the Babylonian destruction of the Solomonic (First) Temple in 586 B.C.E.

Several years ago, when Chris was teaching at Emmanuel Christian Seminary, a Tennessee seminary affiliated with the Restoration Movement, he wrote an article about the Bible's sometimes “unfair” or unequal treatment of women.<sup>(1)</sup> He recently published a revised and augmented version of this controversial article.<sup>(2)</sup>

Here are some examples from his article:

Noah and his wife had three sons (Shem, Ham and Japheth—*Genesis 5:32*) who were each married. All eight were on the ark. We know the names of all the men, but none of the women (*Genesis 8:18*), not even Noah's wife.

Rollston finds the marginalization of women obvious and “clear” in the Ten Commandments: “The wife is classified as her husband's property, and she's listed with the slaves and work animals. There is also a striking omission in this commandment: Never does it say, ‘You shall not covet your neighbor's husband.’”

Rollston continues with other examples:

An unmarried woman could be compelled to marry her rapist, as long as the rapist could pay the standard bride price and the woman's father was comfortable with

the marriage (*Deuteronomy 22:28–29*). Polygyny (a man having multiple wives at the same time) was not condemned, but was an accepted and legal custom (*Deuteronomy 21:15–17; Genesis 4:19–24; and 2 Samuel 3:2–5*). A woman’s religious vow could be nullified by her father or her husband (*Numbers 30:3–15*). And the assumption of the text is that the priesthood is all male (*Leviticus 21*). In short, within the legal literature of the Bible, women were not accorded the same status as men.

Other examples come from the New Testament; here is one of Rollston’s examples:

[*1 Timothy 2*] begins by stating that “men should pray” (and the word used here for men is *andras*, a gendered word that refers only to males) and then says “women should dress themselves modestly and decently” (vv. 8–9). So men are to pray, and women are to dress modestly. That’s quite a contrast. But there’s more: “Let a woman learn in silence and full submission. I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to be silent” (vv. 11–12). The author’s rationale: “For Adam was formed first, then Eve, and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (vv. 13–14). According to this text, women were to be silent in worship gatherings (and men were certainly not told to be silent), and the rationale for this mandate is that woman (Eve) was created second and sinned first. And the final blow is this: A woman “will be saved” (the future tense of the standard word for “be saved,” “be given salvation”) “through childbirth if she remains in faith and love and sanctification with modesty” (*1 Timothy 2:15*).

Rollston recently told us in writing what we already knew. This criticism of the Bible led to his “forced ouster” from Emmanuel Christian Seminary.

Not long after his “forced ouster,” I saw Chris and told him that this could be the best thing that ever happened to him. And so it turned out. Eventually he obtained a tenured position at the George Washington University (GWU) in Washington, D.C. Soon thereafter the prestigious position of editor of the *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* ([BASOR](#)) [opened up, and Chris and his distinguished colleague Eric Cline at GWU were appointed as coeditors to fill the position. Seldom do we write stories with such happy endings.](#)

## Footnotes

1.

See Hershel Shanks, “[Predilections—Is the ‘Brother of Jesus’ Inscription a Forgery?](#)” **BAR** 41:05.

## Endnotes

1.

Christopher Rollston, “The Marginalization of Women: A Biblical Value We Don’t Like to Talk About,” *Huffington Post*, August 31, 2012 ([www.huffingtonpost.com/christopher-rollston/the-marginalization-of-women-biblical-value-we-dont-like-to-talk-about\\_b\\_1833648.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/christopher-rollston/the-marginalization-of-women-biblical-value-we-dont-like-to-talk-about_b_1833648.html)).

2.

Christopher A. Rollston, “Women, the Bible, and the Nineteenth Amendment to the U.S. Constitution,” in Frances Flannery and Rodney Alan Werline, eds., *The Bible in Political Debate* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2016).