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All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times

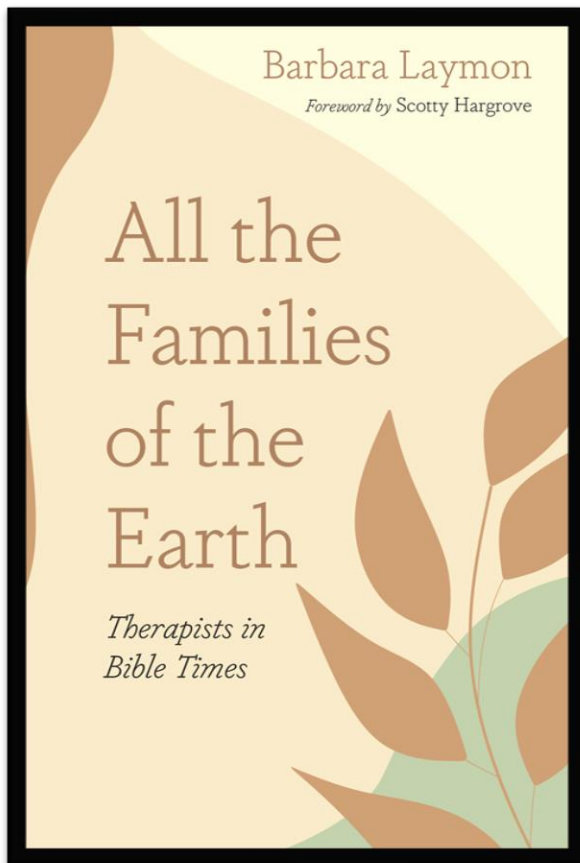
by Barbara Laymon

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New Title from Barbara Laymon
All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times



In *All the Families of the Earth*, characters from Abram to Ruth come alive, providing fresh insights for today's challenges. Barbara Laymon's imaginative approach involves behind-the-scenes therapists who counsel biblical figures and journal about their conversations. Informed by Laymon's background as a counselor, the therapists tell the stories of Scripture while describing the complexities of counseling. A creative group discussion guide invites readers to think alongside the therapists as they analyze family patterns. *All the Families of the Earth* offers a thoughtful view of families, then and now, and provides new perspectives on familiar Scriptures.

Barbara Laymon is a writer, research analyst, licensed professional counselor and faculty member at the Bowen Center for the Study of the Family. With a PhD from the Pastoral Counseling Department of Loyola University, Maryland, she aims to be a thoughtful presence, offering new perspectives with a wry sense of humor. She and her husband live in Washington, DC, where they are avid *Nationals* baseball fans, hoping for a miracle.



Interview with Barbara Laymon

How did you think of the idea for *All the Families of the Earth*?

For three years, I blogged about the Bible readings of the lectionary cycle, finding family systems concepts everywhere. By the end of the cycle, I wanted to write a book about family systems and scripture. How to write an *interesting* book became the challenge and that's when the idea of putting therapists into the stories came to me.

What made the idea come together into a book?

My first trip to Israel, which happened to be that same spring, solidified the approach. I had a new appreciation, for instance, for a cave on a hot day – the calm, the view, the cool air. Once I got home, with a feel for the context of the stories, I started writing in earnest.

What was the writing process like for you?

It was fun. Using different therapists over time gave me a chance to explore the very different ways I've seen therapists work – all successfully, more or less, in the story and in life. And getting into the stories of the Bible yielded a lot of Aha moments for me.

What was your favorite part?

Oh, that's a hard question, like asking a mother to name her favorite child! Each chapter was different, I think, and that is what gave the book its energy.

Your book gives lots of suggestions for Bible Study. Do you have anything you would add here?

I have enjoyed – and learned from – many hours in small group Bible Study. Similarly, in my years as a professional counselor, the chance to sit with others as a clinical case is reviewed has provided important insights. Both have helped me to understand more about life and what we humans are up against. I tried to combine them in the last entry for each chapter. I will be interested in hearing how well it's working – or not!

Any last words?

I used multiple Bible translations as I wrote. Exploring the scripture references for each entry was interesting. In short, I loved writing this book.

An Excerpt from *All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times*

Entry 2.1

From bored to astonished

Gen 14:14–16; 15:5; 16:1–2

Dear Diary,

As usual, Sarai and Abram came in today with a lot on their minds. First, they wanted to talk about Lot, who has already gotten into trouble in Sodom. Abram had to put together a small army to go rescue him! They were moaning and groaning, putting the focus right back on Lot, even though he's moved away.

All this came with some comfortable joining between the two of them. How two people can make peace at the expense of a third! They agreed that Lot was in over his head and they had to save him once again, and so on and so forth, on and on. Boring. I could not figure out a way to interrupt them, and I must admit that I lost track of the conversation for a minute there.

Then, out of nowhere, Sarai made a demand. She has to have a baby. She does not care how it happens, only that she must have one. The disrespect she is shown as a childless woman must stop, and right now, she said. I tried to explore her thoughts and feelings, but she was having none of that. Her idea is that Abram should provide them with a child by getting Hagar pregnant. Who is Hagar? She is an enslaved person, one that we took away from Egypt, and she works as Sarai's maid. If Sarai arranges for Hagar to have Abram's baby, then Sarai saves face.

Well, that idea woke me up. Abram indicated with some solemnity that he felt he should do Sarai's bidding. Eye roll, right? I mean, Hagar is maybe fifteen years old—young, alone, and attractive. Sarai, for her part, seemed to be looking forward to the new sleeping arrangements.

I knew something would happen when Lot left, but this had not occurred to me. It seemed that neither of them had thought the idea through. I tried to engage them in some questions about how the decision might change their lives...

In the end, all I got from each of them was a sense of urgency about Abram's having a baby with someone, anyone. I wonder what I could have done differently. How could I have prompted more thoughtfulness? They could not bring themselves to reflect on the pressure they were feeling to have a baby or to consider the consequences of their actions. It is a less than ideal way to decide something, that's for sure.

Your one surprised diarist,

Emma

Praise for *All the Families of the Earth: Therapists in Bible Times*

“Emotional process that takes place among families does not change. Concepts that accurately describe how families function apply to families that lived in biblical times as well as our own. How might family therapists informed by Bowen Theory understand the emotional process taking place in biblical families and respond to members of the family who come to them for consultation? Barbara Laymon creatively illuminates the functioning of families in the Bible and our own as well.”

—**Randall T. Frost, director, The Bowen Center for the Study of the Family**

“Barbara Laymon’s *Only Families in the Bible* peers imaginatively behind the curtain of a family therapist’s work with various familiar biblical figures, bringing Bowen Family Systems Theory to bear on the struggles of ancient families who prove not so different from ours. She creatively unveils fresh aspects of the biblical texts, while illustrating well the application of the theory. Laymon has thus served both readers of the Bible and students of Bowen Theory.”

—**R. Robert Creech, retired professor of pastoral leadership, George W. Truett Theological Seminary**

“Engaging a combination of wisdom, humor, creativity, and emotional openness, Barbara Laymon connects biblical stories with clarity to the relationships, faith principles, and families of today. Using systems thinking, biblical knowledge, and the framework of Bowen Theory, this resource provides a human bridge across the ages and allows us to see our own beliefs, community lives, and multigenerational family experiences with new perspective. The Discussion Guide is a wonderful accompaniment.”

—**Emlyn A. Ott, Executive Director, Healthy Congregations, Inc., associate professor of pastoral theology and leadership, Bexley Seabury Seminary**

