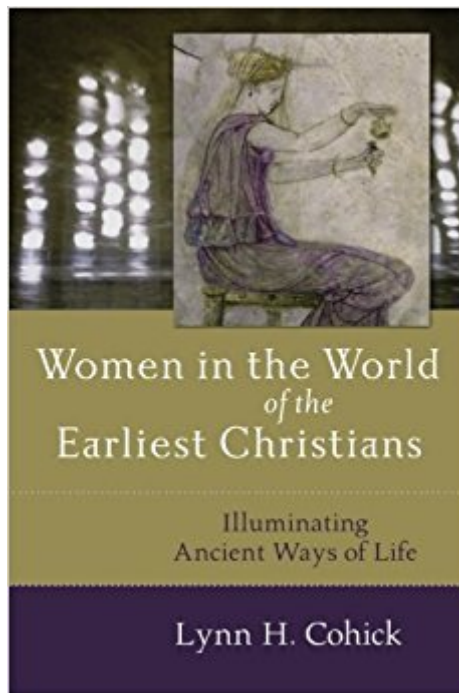


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# Women In The World Of The Earliest Christians: Illuminating Ancient Ways Of Life



## Synopsis

Lynn Cohick provides an accurate and fulsome picture of the earliest Christian women by examining a wide variety of first-century Jewish and Greco-Roman documents that illuminate their lives. She organizes the book around three major spheres of life: family, religious community, and society in general. Cohick shows that although women during this period were active at all levels within their religious communities, their influence was not always identified by leadership titles nor did their gender always determine their level of participation. The book corrects our understanding of early Christian women by offering an authentic and descriptive historical picture of their lives. Includes black-and-white illustrations from the ancient world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Many preconceptions exist about the role of women in the Greco-Roman and Jewish worlds at the time of Jesus. By taking us through the world of women at that time, Cohick offers a solid glimpse of first-century culture--a wonderful window into the world of the New Testament that is well worth the read."--Darrell L. Bock, Dallas Theological Seminary

A richly detailed and finely nuanced invitation into the lives of women in the Hellenistic and Roman periods. The study profits from Cohick's integrated examination of literary, epigraphic, iconographic, and archaeological evidence. She exposes gender bias and ideology in literary evidence without discarding what reliable evidence these texts offer for the reconstruction of women's 'real life' experience. This book challenges some oft-heard generalizations about women, women's roles, and women's influence, replacing these

with the more complicated and varied realities of women's experience in the ancient world."--David A. deSilva, Ashland Theological Seminary"Cohick invites the reader into the lives of women in the ancient world. She carefully assesses the available information--from literature, artwork, inscriptions, and even business receipts--sketching a portrait of 'real women's experiences' in the early days of Christianity. To combine fascinating storytelling with careful historical assessment is no simple task; Cohick does so with ease. Essential reading!"--Jeannine Brown, Bethel Seminary"This is an important book for all students of the New Testament, however novice or advanced. Cohick's historical sensibilities and sympathetic reading of the whole range of available evidence overturn a number of caricatures that have for decades plagued claims about women (and men) in the world of the early church. Her presentation of the life of the ordinary Roman woman from Greco-Roman, Jewish, and Christian sources is a model of careful exploration and nuanced reconstruction. It deserves to be read attentively and consulted often."--Joel B. Green, Fuller Theological Seminary"Cohick combines insights from ancient Roman and Jewish texts with current scholarship on the lifestyles and limitations of being female in the first Christian century. The New Testament is not her primary focus, but it is frequently discussed, providing many fascinating parallels, which sometimes confirm and sometimes question traditional interpretations. The book includes many provocative new ideas, which will become the focus of much new work."--David Instone-Brewer, Tyndale House, Cambridge

Lynn H. Cohick (PhD, University of Pennsylvania) is professor of New Testament at Wheaton College in Wheaton, Illinois, and coauthor of *The New Testament in Antiquity*. She previously taught at Nairobi Evangelical Graduate School of Theology.

I appreciated this book's attempt to correct scholarship that has painted the Judaism of that era with a wide single-colored chauvinist brushstroke (this has no doubt pained some Jewish scholars and perhaps even fed anti-semitic ideas in some individuals). There is much treasure in here. However, in focusing on the little details that she finds that would complicate the picture among both Hellenistic and Hebrew society, I fear she may get lost in the forest for the trees a bit. It seems like a lot of contemporary history scholarship is a reconstructionist platform aimed at counteracting another reconstructionist platform, and I've started to become wary in reading some of these books that we may be in part counteracting error with error. To her credit, she notes that she is only presenting a possibility of what the world of women might have looked like, but it seems to focus on the rose-tinted pictures and on the rather novel, exceptional finds rather than the likely position for

women as a whole. She is smartly applying a hermeneutics of suspicion to historians who have come before, but one can be over-suspicious. You might want to read this alongside her oft-critiqued *Jeremias* (as did I... but he is dry) or her careful contemporary Ben Witherington. I've picked up Patricia Cox Miller's *Women in Early Christianity* and plan to read that next. I agree with the author's concluding aside that if women were granted leadership abilities at times in that era and certainly w/in the Christianity of that era then we ought to keep that in mind when trying to limit the same contemporaneously (in other words, how about we call unnecessary limitations off?). It's interesting that the same conclusion is readily gotten whether by focusing on the overall strong limitations for women of that era and contrasting them w/ their freedoms in early Christianity or by focusing upon the exceptional opportunities for women of that era and seeing something more like a continuity in early Christianity as does this author.

Very interesting review of the life setting of the 1st C, and just before, in terms of the experiences of women. It helps those who exegete the New Testament to understand scriptures regarding marriage and the place and role of women. For example, what does the Apostle Paul mean when he says, "...be married..." to the believers in Corinth when there was no such thing as legitimate marriage for these people. Quite likely, Paul and the first Christians had a different definition of marriage to those of the ruling Romans. This does raise issues for NT scholars concerning the theology of marriage for Christians with regard to the life setting of the first century. Perhaps marriage, for them, (the first Christians) was not something that was primarily legitimised by the state, but rather, by a higher power. Lynn Cohick's explanation of the place of concubines and prostitutes was very instructive and enlightening. I would have liked to see a chapter on the discoveries of the city of Pompei in terms of prostitution, the place/role of women and how this informs her subject. This one of the best books I have read on the life setting of the first century. Her writing style made it a pleasure to read this book. Highly recommended.

Cohick clearly presents vast amounts of information that challenge many of the stereotypes about what women did and what was permitted women to do in the Greco-Roman world. One of her most enlightening sections occurs in her Conclusion under the subtitle of "Expanding Our Imagination." She writes: "It is perhaps surprising to the modern reader to see that women were active in the commercial world as merchants, vendors, artisans, and shopkeepers. Women populated the marketplace, selling, buying, and loaning money.... Women enjoyed the Roman banquet and the baths.... For those who study the New Testament, the fact that women were present in most

communal venues entails a reassessment of who would have heard a missionary preacher like Paul or Peter speak to market crowds. Women were present alongside men in public places - women from a wide swath of society, including slaves and wealthy patrons. Such a realigned vision offers an opportunity to reflect on the challenges faced by the early church concerning not only gender but also racial and social diversity. And it allows the contemporary church to examine its own record" (pp. 324-25). This book should be required reading in any course on New Testament Introduction and any course on Early Church History.

I am highlighting the information in this well written book so I can get perspective on women before and immediately after Jesus birth. I am not a researcher. I was interested after reading Nine Parts of Desire and The 19th wife to see what the early views and expectations were for early Christian women. Lynn has thoroughly researched this work and I am amazed at the amount of information and documentation she has made available.

Great book! Lots of wonderful information about women in the early Christian days. I know it had to be written in an expository form with footnotes, etc. I would have an easier time reading it if it had been written in more of a story form or prose..

I bought this for a seminary paper I was writing. It was helpful.

Lynn Cohick's book is well researched and easy to read. She is careful to present her research faithfully, without overstating or drawing theological conclusions. I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book and I learnt a lot.

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