

A WEEK IN THE LIFE OF A GRECO-ROMAN WOMAN



HOLLY BEERS

EXCERPT

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Academic

A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman A Week in the Life Series

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It had been a time of such pride and honor.

But now things were different. *How will we survive?* She wondered. *The catch is so small most days, and after selling the fish and paying the taxes, there is not much left.* They usually kept a couple of small fish for their family, to guarantee that they would have something to eat that day. But the income from selling the rest paid their rent and gave them the ability to buy cloth, fuel for cooking, and other food. Mostly they lived on grains, olive oil, vinegar, diluted wine, and lentils or beans. A real treat was a fresh vegetable or piece of fruit.

The noises of vendors hawking their goods mixed with the laughter of children and the sounds of sheep, pigs, and wild dogs. Anthia let her mind wander as she walked, and as they passed Dorema's favorite vegetable stall she was hit once again with the realization that Dorema was dead. A wave of grief covered her, drowning out the noise of the busy marketplace.

Her haze of grief was halted by the cry of Nikias. She stopped walking, her eyes searching for her son. *There he is.* His dark hair flopped over his equally dark eyes, and his small naked body was crunched into a ball on the ground. She walked several steps back, to where he was sitting and clutching his bleeding knee. Bending over was awkward with her belly protruding, but she did so quickly, scooping him up while making soothing sounds. He insisted that she kiss his knee, and she did, wiping the blood from his olive skin with her hand and offering up a quick prayer of thanks to the gods for his health and vitality. *Almost three years old, and so strong. His name was well chosen; he is truly victorious.* Though Nikias insisted on being carried through the busy area, she set him down next to her and grabbed his little hand instead. "Your brother in my belly is taking up all of mommy's space," she told him. "Soon I will hold both of you, one in each arm. Soon, my little victory."

They passed a shop displaying burial items, and her grief returned. She noticed the same type of tombstone that marked Dorema and her tiny daughter's grave outside the city. After Dorema's death, the midwife had followed accepted practice and cut the baby out of the womb. But it had been too late. The child was stillborn.

Dorema's family had scraped together enough money to purchase the gravestone and pay for the engraving, though they had not been able to pay what it cost to commemorate Dorema or the baby properly. Anthia had done what she could; she had assisted Dorema's mother and sister in washing, oiling, and wrapping the bodies. She had stood with family and friends at the wake, as Dorema's body lay, her infant daughter next to her, with her feet pointed toward the door in the one-room home Dorema had shared with her husband, his brother, and his brother's family. In contrast to the tears of the women, however, Dorema's husband had stood stoically. Anthia knew that he was a man of few words and that he had not been affectionate toward his wife. Dorema also had not felt affection for her husband. She had simply accepted her father's wishes and married the man of his choosing.

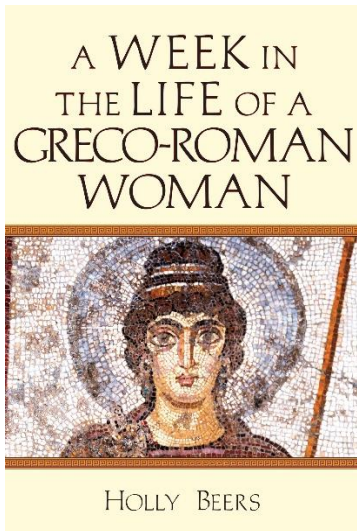
She shook her head to clear it and tried reminding herself of what everyone knew—that pregnancy and childbirth were dangerous, and everyone had friends and family who had not survived them—but it didn't help. She was careful to keep her emotions veiled, however, and maintain her composure. A public display of grief would shame and anger her husband.



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He was a good man, taking seriously his responsibility to care for her. Anthia was his second wife, his first having died in childbirth. She had heard that his first marriage was largely a product of his father's wishes, though she did not doubt that he had cared for his first wife in ways that were similar to how he treated her. Their own marriage had been initiated by him; she had noticed his eyes on her during festival meals and in the agora, or marketplace, and she was pleasantly surprised when he had approached her father. They were social peers, sharing the same status, and the match had pleased families on both sides. At the time she had been fourteen years old, and he twenty-eight. She was ready for marriage and the responsibility of caring for a home, as her mother had trained her well. While Philetus occasionally hit or pushed her, she knew that it could be much worse, and she was grateful to be married to a man who did indeed care about and for her by providing for her needs. Their household felt secure to Anthia. They were doing their part for the honor of Ephesus, the province of Asia, and the Roman empire.

Marriage

In the Roman Empire a healthy household was considered to be the foundation for a healthy society. Marriage for nonelites (who comprised most of the population in the Roman Empire) was a family matter, not a governmental concern. This was due largely to the lack of money for a dowry or legal inheritance. In such situations the man and woman simply agreed that they wished to be married to each other, each stating "yes," and their community accepted it. There were no prewritten vows or religious aspects. They would celebrate with friends and family and set up a home together.

A good wife was expected to be loyal in everything. Loyalty to one's husband included being chaste until marriage, following his gods, obeying him, demonstrating modesty, not courting attention from other men, showing affection in bed to him as her only sexual partner, and allowing him to have other sexual partners without penalty. It was only adultery if a husband's sexual partners included other men's wives. The wife's loyalty extended to her husband's parents and family as well. There was a great deal of social pressure on wives to live up to these expectations, and most wives fell in line.

Social expectations for husbands included providing clothing and other necessities for their wives, teaching wives the family trade, and being discreet in their sexual liaisons. Physical and sexual abuse by husbands was common and socially accepted.

—Taken from chapter one, "Day 1, Wednesday (Day of Mercury/Hermes)"



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Holly Beers (PhD, London School of Theology) is associate professor of religious studies at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. She is the author of *The Followers of Jesus as the Servant: Luke's Model from Isaiah for the Disciples in Luke-Acts*.

Will Anthia Risk Everything to Follow Jesus?

"Trying to imagine what life would have been like in the Roman empire can be hard enough, it can be harder too if you are trying to imagine what life was like for women, whose voices are mostly muted and marginalized in the annals of history. So it is quite rewarding to have someone like Dr. Holly Beers do the hard work of research and creative storytelling to help us imagine the life of women in the Greco-Roman world. Anyone interested in New Testament background or Roman antiquity will find here an enthralling and informative narrative about the prominence and plight of women in the ancient world."

—**Michael F. Bird**, academic dean and lecturer in theology at Ridley College in Melbourne, Australia

"Holly Beers spins a mesmerizing tale that weaves the historical reality of first-century Ephesus—fishing, family life, childbirth, Artemis—with the universal human need for love and purpose. From the opening pages, I could not put down her story. Beers takes her extensive knowledge of the New Testament and shapes a fictional woman's journey of discovery of the gospel and the early church community. The fast-paced narrative is filled with dialogue as biblical characters—Paul, Priscilla, Timothy, and others—come to life under Beers's skilled storytelling. This is a must-read for men and women of all ages who want a fresh look at the power and promise of the gospel."

—**Lynn H. Cohick**, provost/dean of Denver Seminary

"In a story that simultaneously captivates the imagination and reflects a great deal of historical and socio-cultural research, the daily concerns and plight of a first-century Greco-Roman woman come to life in the fictional Ephesian Anthia. This week-long snapshot of a life offers a truly intersectional approach to a woman's experience, which allows the reader to get an informed feel for how gender, economic status, cultural customs, gynecological health, technology, family structures, and religious practices might coalesce. Re-embedding Paul's proclamation of Christ within this fictional—but potentially realistic and certainly based on careful research—context enables modern readers to hear anew both the scandal and the hope that the gospel must have held for its earliest hearers."

—**Kara Lyons-Pardue**, professor of New Testament, Point Loma Nazarene University

"Holly Beers masterfully transports her readers into the bustling port city of Ephesus, where we follow Anthia through the drudgery of daily life as an abused fisherman's wife. Caught between her fidelity to Artemis, fascination with Jesus, and fear of reprisal, Anthia and her readers experience the gravity of her dilemma: Will she risk everything to follow Jesus? I highly recommend this book, not only as a gripping page-turner but also as a powerful exegetical tool—rich with historical and cultural details that bring the Bible to life through the eyes of a first-century woman."

—**Alicia R. Jackson**, assistant professor of Old Testament, Vanguard University



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“With its captivating story and attention to detail, *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman* paints the ancient world in vivid color. From the sounds in the public and private spaces to the smells of ancient bread and fish, readers will find themselves learning about the ancient world while immersed in a compelling story about a woman, her community, and her journey of faith. Whether for personal reading or as a course textbook, Holly Beers’s story will leave a lasting impression on every reader!”

—**Beth M. Stovell**, associate professor of Old Testament, Ambrose University, National Catalyst for Theological and Spiritual Formation for Vineyard Canada

“*A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman* gives us beautifully vivid storytelling and superb treatment of the historical background. Each element breathes life to the other such that the story is richer and the historical background more vibrant because of the book’s unique genre.”

—**Rebekah Josberger**, professor of Hebrew and Old Testament at Multnomah Biblical Seminary

“Holly Beers does some important things in this enjoyable work of historical fiction. First, she makes me care about the characters at the center of the drama. Second, she provides an accessible introduction to the religious, economic, and social world of a Greco-Roman woman with all its difficulties and complexities. Finally, she demonstrates the ways in which those worlds would be upset and transformed through an encounter with the burgeoning Christian community. It’s a great resource for anyone wanting to know about the experiences of women in the first years of the church’s life.”

—**Esau McCaulley**, assistant professor of New Testament at Wheaton College, coordinator of Call and Response Ministries

“Holly Beers brings keen insights from the social world of the New Testament to her story of Anthia. Beers tells a captivating story of this Ephesian woman, whose life with her husband, son, and soon-to-deliver second child is one of subsistence living from their modest fishing business. The sidebars about life in first-century Ephesus complement the storyline. As Anthia encounters the early Christian movement (Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila), she is drawn into the way they share life and meals together across the fixed boundaries of social status. This book brims with information about life in Ephesus in the first century and shines a light on the experience of people in the Greco-Roman world and how they might have engaged the early church. Beers is a great storyteller and the book is hard to put down. I recommend it for anyone wanting to get a feel for first-century life as it was lived on the ground.”

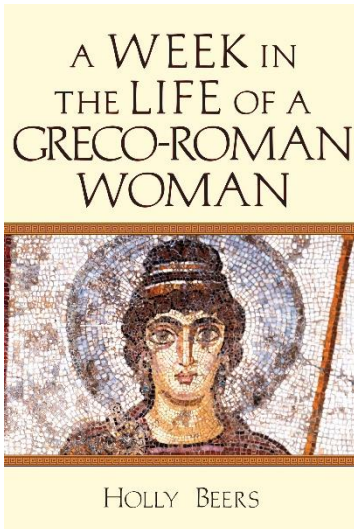
—**Jeannine Brown**, professor of New Testament and director of online programs at Bethel Seminary, San Diego and St. Paul



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DETAILS



A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman A Week in the Life Series

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In this gripping novel, Holly Beers introduces us to the first-century setting where the apostle Paul first proclaimed the gospel. Illuminated by historical images and explanatory sidebars, this lively story not only shows us the rich tapestry of life in a thriving Greco-Roman city it also foregrounds the interior life of one courageous woman—and the radical new freedom the gospel promised her.

A Week in the Life Series from IVP

Ever wanted a first-century view of the world of the Gospels? The volumes in A Week in the Life Series capture a view of Jesus' world from the outer framework looking in. Splashed with informative sidebars and images, it is entertaining historical fiction.

In these imaginative and absorbing narratives, New Testament scholars lead us behind the veil of centuries to see and experience the historical and social realities of this important era. Allowing the light of what we know to conjure possible events, these books are a fun and informative journey into the wrinkles and folds of lost stories. In addition to the newest titles, *A Week in the Life of a Greco-Roman Woman*, the series includes:

A Week in the Life of a Slave by John Byron, July 2, 2019, 168 pages, \$16, 978-0-8308-2483-0

The narrative follows the slave Onesimus from his arrival in Ephesus, where the apostle Paul is imprisoned and fleshes out the lived context of that time and place, supplemented by numerous sidebars and historical images.

A Week in the Life of Rome by James L. Papandrea, February 19, 2019, 223 pages, \$16, 978-0-8308-2482-3

We are invited into the daily struggles of the church at Rome just a few years before Paul wrote his famous epistle to them.

A Week in the Fall of Jerusalem by Ben Witherington III, August 22, 2017, 160 pages, \$17, 978-0-8308-5173-7

It's AD 70, and Jerusalem is falling to the Romans, its temple being destroyed. As Jews and Christians try to escape the city, we travel with some of them through an imagined week of flight and faith. In this imaginative and entertaining narrative, Ben Witherington leads us behind the veil of centuries to experience the historical and social realities of this epochal event.

A Week in the Life of a Roman Centurion by Gary M. Burge, April 6, 2015, 192 pages, \$20, 978-0-8308-2462-5

In this fast-paced, fictional account, we follow Appius, a Roman centurion, and Tullus, his Jewish slave, from battles to the gladiator arena and finally to the village of Capernaum where they encounter a Jewish prophet from Nazareth.

A Week in the Life of Corinth by Ben Witherington III, March 30, 2012, 159 pages, \$18, 978-0-8308-3962-9

In this work of historical fiction, Ben Witherington III provides a one-of-a-kind window into the social and cultural context of Paul's ministry.



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