

Women Leaders in Scripture

Supplemental Overview & Survey of Leading Women in the Bible

WOMEN LEADING—WELL OF COURSE.

A Bad View Of Complementarians: *Leadership somehow male only*

- Ø All over the place in Scriptures from Eve to Mary Ø Injustice to the scripture
- Ø Patriarchy not orthodoxy—Biblically untenable Ø Confuses functionality and office

- Ø Defines theology and practice in the negative

SOME O.T. STANDOUTS

Miriam

Ø The first woman in the Bible to be called prophetess was Miriam, the sister of Moses and Aaron. The title appears in Exodus 15 when Miriam leads the women of the Israelites in a victory chant after the destruction of pharaoh's army in the Red Sea:

20Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing.

21Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea." (NIV)

Ø In Numbers 12:2, Miriam identifies herself as a prophet.

Ø Miriam's leadership position is also identified by Micah:

1Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married, for he had married a Cushite woman. 2And they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?" I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. (Micah 6:4, NIV)

Deborah

Ø Judges 4-5: She is described as a judge, the mother of Israel, a prophetess, and a military leader.

4 Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading [a] Israel at that time. 5 She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. 6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: 'Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor.

Ø But there are a couple of issues

Ø This does not take away from Deborah's leadership—only the lack of Israel's **Huldah**

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Ø Huldah the prophetess declared a written document to be Holy Scripture (c. 621 B.C.). 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34.

Ø It takes place during the reign of King Josiah, when workmen repairing the Temple of Solomon discover an old scroll. The High Priest Hilkiah knows an important find has been made, exclaiming:

¹⁵ *She said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me,*
¹⁶ *This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. ¹⁷ Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.'* ¹⁸ *Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: ¹⁹ Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. ²⁰ Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" (2 Kings 22:15-20 NIV)*

8 Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." 9 "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, [b] the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman." So Deborah went with Barak to Kedesh, 10 where he summoned Zebulun and Naphtali. Ten thousand men followed him, and Deborah also went with him.

JESUS AND WOMEN

Anna

Anna, an 84-year-old Temple attendant, is another example of a prophetess in the New Testament, and is one of the first people to proclaim that Jesus is the Messiah. The description occurs in Luke 2: 36-38

Mary and Martha Women at the Well

The Women at the Tomb...so many more examples of how Jesus interacts, dignifies, and restores His image through women can be found by just doing a cursory reading of the gospels. Tish Warren, a scholar on this topic, says that the way Jesus interacted and restored women was unlike anything the world had ever seen up to that point in history and unlike anything we have seen since.

***Before we get to Paul's writing in the NT, it's best to re-orient our interpretive grid to the historical context in which Paul was writing. Scholar, Kyle Haper, in his book, "From Shame to Sin" argues that if you were a high born woman, you could not have sex with anyone except your husband. But if you were a man, it was expected that men could have sex as much as they wanted so long as they were not of your social class. You had sex with people depending on your social status. It was understood that you had to have sex with someone who was higher than you in the social order. It was worse than a double standard. Sex was seen as just an appetite. Christianity came in and brought a new deep logic to sex. It was radical (monogamous heterosexuality sex within marriage), but the woman had full rites over the husband's body. Nor did Christians see sex as just an appetite: it was radical sacrifice that reflected the trinity. It was a way to mirror and reflect the nature of the universe. High view of sex, freedom, and equality. What looks today as repressive, was more egalitarian in its own time. Larry Hurtado, another scholar, approaches topics in the early church in his works as well asking questions like, "Why on earth would anyone have become a Christian in the first century?" One of the dominant answers to that question was that women saw the church as profoundly liberating compared to the Greco-Roman culture in which they lived. The irony of this**

important topic is that it was Christianity that gave the world the gift and deep logic of restoring and maintaining the dignity of women as image bearers of God. So as we look at the sheer amount of leading women in Paul's context, the church would have seemed radical within the non-Christian culture in which it was born into. What may sound like common sense or even repressive for us today, could have sounded radically progressive in the 1st century.

THE WOMEN OF PAUL'S MISSION

NAMES OF WOMEN

*1 Corinthians (2 women who appear to be leaders within the early church)

Chloe (1:11)

some 'from Chloe'

Priscilla (16:19)

church at her house

*Romans (11 women mentioned)

Phoebe (16:1)

'our sister', servant/deacon (*diakonos*) of church in Cenchrea, benefactress/patroness (*prostatis*)

Priscilla (16:3)

fellow-worker (*synergos*; with Aquila), church at their house

Mary (16:6)

'worked very hard for you'

Junia (?) (16:7)

'outstanding among the apostles' (*apostolois*; with Andronicus)

Tryphena and Tryphosa (16:12)

'women who work hard in the Lord'

Persis (16:12)

'another woman who has worked very hard in the Lord'

mother of Rufus (16:13)

'who has been a mother to me, too'

Julia (16:15)

none

sister of Nereus (16:15)

none

Olympas (16:15)

none

*Philippians (2 women mentioned)

Euodia and Syntyche (4:2)

co-workers (?), 'contended at my side in the cause of the gospel'

Colossians (1 woman mentioned)

Nympha (4:15) church at her house

*Philemon(1 woman)

Apphia (2)

'our sister' (cf. Rom. 16:1); church at her house (with Philemon)

*2 Tim. (2 women mentioned)

Priscilla (4:19)

none

Claudia (4:21)

none

THE WOMEN OF ROMANS 16

1 I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church at Cenchreae, 2 that you may welcome her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints, and help her in whatever she may need from you, for she has been a patron of many and of myself as well. 3 Greet Prisca and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, 4 who risked their necks for my life, to whom not only I give thanks but all the churches of the Gentiles give thanks as well. 5 Greet also the church in their house. Greet my beloved Epaphroditus, who was the first convert to Christ in Asia. 6 Greet Mary, who has worked hard for you. 7 Greet Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen and my fellow prisoners. They are well known to the apostles, and they were in Christ before me

Phoebe | Prisca | Mary | Junias?

Perhaps the most notable example is John Chrysostom. Though certainly against women serving as bishops, he nevertheless took *lounian* to be a woman.

THE WOMEN OF ACTS Priscilla

Ø Priscilla and her husband Aquila (tentmakers by trade) are mentioned 6 times in the New Testament. Interestingly, Priscilla is mentioned before her husband four of those six times (Acts 18:18,26, Rom 16:3, 2 Tim 4:19) – an unusual practice in New Testament times. the Pauline communities were.

Ø John Calvin in his Commentary on Romans says about Priscilla:

It is a singular honor which he ascribes here to Prisca and Aquila, especially with regard to a woman. The modesty of the holy man does on this account more clearly shine forth; for he disdained not to have a woman as his associate in the work of the Lord; nor was he ashamed to confess this...”

Ø The two of them founded at least two churches in their home (Rom 16:3-5, 1 Cor 16:19).

Ø She taught Apollos

The daughters of Phillip

Ø Four women who are mentioned explicitly in Acts as having the ability to prophesy are the daughters of Phillip (probably the Deacon):

⁸ *Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven.* ⁹ *He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.” (Acts 21:8-9, NIV)*