

NAZARENE THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

YOUR DAUGHTERS SHALL PROPHECY:
A BIBLICAL THEOLOGY OF SINGLE WOMEN IN MINISTRY

A Thesis
Submitted to the Seminary Faculty
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

by
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Kansas City, Missouri
March 20, 2002

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To my parents Carl and Shirley Bound

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank my thesis director, Dr. Coleson, for his guidance, not only throughout the writing of this thesis, but through my time at Nazarene Theological Seminary. I would also like to thank Summit View Church of the Nazarene where I am on staff for allowing me to step away from some of my responsibilities to complete this paper.

I also thank Linda Hardin and Jim Hampton for the use of their personal libraries and for the conversations on the single life within both the church and ministry. I would also like to thank Debra Stoehr for proofreading this paper and offering additional historical background on both women throughout the history of the church and the church's attitudes toward women throughout its history.

Finally I thank my parents Carl and Shirley Bound for raising me to believe that I could do anything I set my mind to and be anything I dreamed I could be.

CHAPTER ONE

THE PROBLEM

“Are you going to seminary to be a pastor’s wife?” I do not know how many times I have heard this question through the three and a half years I have attended seminary. I find it intriguing, and insulting, that most people I meet in church think, even on the graduate level, a woman’s sole purpose for pursuing an education is to marry. When one is eighteen and heading off for college that is one thing, but when one is in her late twenties and in graduate school, that is quite a different thing. For one thing graduate school is more costly, and for another it is more difficult and intense. The odds of one’s parents helping to pay expenses also decreases from the college level to the graduate level. Why do people assume that a woman would pay that much in money and time in the hopes of finding the elusive “Mr. Right”? The questions I want to ask are: Why do people assume that marriage is always the motivation for what any woman does? And why do people assume that marriage is even on a woman’s list of priorities?

Another attitude I encounter within the church is the assumption that I will forsake part, or all, of my calling in order to marry. When I discuss my calling and where I think that will take me, the typical response is, “Well, all of that may change when you get married.” It seems perfectly acceptable within our church culture for a

woman to forsake her calling for “the one.” Yet, if a man forsakes his calling to marry then his ability to be “the head of the house” is called into question when he lets his wife “take the lead.” Whereas the man can be both a leader and husband, the woman is relegated to being a wife, and ministry is viewed as something she does to bide her time.

I have discovered interesting dynamics being a single woman with a call into leadership positions in the church. Although much has been researched and written on women in ministry in general, not a lot has been done on the single woman in ministry. Most of the arguments for women in ministry seem to stem from the assumption that women do marry, and whether or not they should function in a position of authority in the church when that would put them in authority over their husbands. But what of the woman who is not married? And what of the one who does not plan to marry?

On the opposite end of this spectrum is the belief that a woman cannot minister in the church unless she has a man “to cover” her; a view that is based on the faulty exegesis of 1 Corinthians 11. Then single women are discounted from ministry because they have no man to give them authority, and thus make sure they do not fall into error.¹

So where does this leave single women who have a calling and a desire to serve in leadership positions? My question and the basis for this thesis is: does a woman’s marital status affect the calling God has placed on her life? Does being married or single discount one from a leadership position within the church? Does

¹ See J. Lee Grady, *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women: How the Bible Has Been Misused to Keep Women in Spiritual Bondage* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2000), ch. 5.

either state enhance one's calling?

The question of where single women fit into ministry is a recent conundrum within the church. From the earliest days single women, both widows and virgins, devoted themselves to remain single to better serve God and further the gospel. In the early church wealthy widows established religious communities and used their wealth to minister to the poor and oppressed. Women such as Paula, Macrina and Marcella chose not to marry or remarry in order to devote themselves wholly to God through prayer and good works. Although through most of the medieval church women were not allowed to hold leadership positions such as priest or bishop, or teach outside of their cloisters, a few women were able to break through the gender roles of their time and exerted considerable influence on those around them.

In the fifth century Bridget established a convent in Kildare, Ireland that soon grew into a flourishing spiritual center in the country. She was co-leader over the community, which was centered around both a convent and monastery, with a bishop, Cloneth--they led the community as equals.² One of her biographers, Cogitosus, even credits her with being a bishop, which may not be that far-fetched considering the lines between laity and clergy and the roles between men and women were not as fixed in Ireland as they were in other places in Europe.³

During the seventh century Hilda was the abbess of Whitby--one of the spiritual centers of England. Like Kildare, Whitby was a joint convent and monastery and Hilda was the abbess of both. Out of her monastery would come five bishops, and

² Katharine Scherman, *The Flowering of Ireland: Saints, Scholars, and Kings* (New York: Barnes and Nobles Books, 1996), 113.

³ Thomas Cahill, *How the Irish Saved Civilization: The Untold Story of Ireland's Heroic Role from the Fall of Rome to the Rise of Medieval Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1995), 175-6.

she ruled a vast territory around Whitby, even providing soldiers in times of war.⁴

This was not unusual for the time. Abbesses managed their own realms and handled the finances to run them. Normally their domains were ruled by the pope bypassing the local bishop. Abbesses also “appointed local parish priests, heard confessions and cared for the material and spiritual needs of their people.”⁵ These women were also ordained with the signs of the office of bishop: “the miter, ring, crosier, gloves, and cross”; however, later writings seem to replace “ordained” with “blessed,” obscuring the leadership role these women did play in the early church.⁶

During the Medieval period women mystics recorded their visions, which were theologies. Women such as Hildegard Von Bingen and Teresa of Ávila, leaders in their own right, would influence both men and women and the male leadership within the Church. Priests and bishops sought advice and guidance from both women, and their writings are still influential in the church today.⁷ Other women like Julian of Norwich and Mechthild of Magdeburg also contributed to the theological writing and leaders of their day, and Catherine of Siena would call the male leadership of the Church to accountability regarding their abuse of power and gaining riches. She was influential in the return of the papacy to Rome from Avignon, France.⁸ Teresa of Ávila and Catherine of Siena are the only two women whom the Catholic Church has

⁴ Edith Deen, *Great Women of the Christian Faith* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, Inc., 1959; reprint Uhrichscile, OH: Barbour and Company, Inc.), 35, 37.

⁵ Stanley J. Grenz with Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church: A Biblical Theology of Women in Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1995), 41.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ See Deen, pp. 98-107 and Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Women and Redemption, A Theological History* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), pp. 81-92.

⁸ Deen, 50-60.

honored with the title “Doctor of the Church.”⁹

This changed with the Protestant Reformation. Luther and Calvin both insisted on marriage being the preferred and God-ordained state. Neither thought that either men or women (but especially women) could lead celibate lives, and the only way to fight the sexual immorality of their day, and lead obedient lives to God was marriage.¹⁰ Both Luther and Calvin interpreted the creation stories to say woman was created second; therefore, she was subordinate and inferior to man. Her role was to be a wife and mother, and her sphere of influence was to be the home, freeing her husband to lead in the secular and sacred realms of life. The Fall only put these roles in contention with each other with hardships that would not have been there in the original creation, i.e. man would now work hard to provide food, and woman would have pain with childbearing, but the roles themselves were preordained from creation.

Little has changed concerning the views of marriage and singleness within Protestantism. Some Protestant orders have monasteries and convents like Catholicism, but the divine order is still marriage and procreation, which is the preferred state, and marriage is to be strived for over being single. Combined with the added necessity of needing help to tame the frontier land, American Evangelical Protestantism became even more marriage and family oriented. The necessity of having large families to provide help with the farm, ranch, and building towns, made being single an anathema. This view has carried over into both the Industrial and post-Industrial ages even though its premise is no longer valid.

Some notable women chose to remain single to pursue their callings: Florence

⁹ Grenz with Kjesbo, 41.

¹⁰ Ruether, 117-126.

Nightingale, Emily Brontë, Henrietta Mears, Lottie Moon, Amy Carmichael and Susan Muto. Some of them were criticized and endured hostility for remaining single to pursue what they considered God's calling on their lives.

Although there was an acceptable place for single women in the church until the Protestant Reformation--it did have its drawbacks. The women were considered no longer as feminine--they were looked on as women who had put off their femininity in order to become male spiritually through fasting and celibacy.¹¹ To be holy and devoted to God as a single woman meant denying one's self as female, which was equated with carnality, to aspire to "male" spirituality. Women could not be as God created them to be while serving him as nuns and abbesses.

The nuns and abbesses did have two advantages. First, they were considered to be adults serving God as single women. The standard for adulthood in American society is marriage--it is the marker from adolescence to adulthood; it is the sign that one is all grown up.¹² This attitude is also prevalent within the church. In her article "Single Refinement" Lauren F. Winner recounts a married friend telling her "he thinks people cannot be 'fully mature' until they marry."¹³ This attitude feeds into the belief that being single means to be in a constant holding pattern of waiting and never being settled. On the whole single adults put off other markers associated with adulthood such as purchasing a house or retirement planning because they believe that those are

¹¹ Lelwica, Michelle, "Fulfilling Femininity and Transcending the Flesh: Traditional Religious Beliefs and Gender Ideals in Popular Women's Magazines," *Journal of Religion and Society* [http://moses.creighton.edu/JRS] 1 (1999), par. 7; accessed 22 January 2002.

¹² Natalie Schwartzberg, Kathy Berliner, and Demaris Jacob, *Single in a Married World: A Life Cycle Framework for Working with the Unmarried Adult* (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1995), 4.

¹³ Lauren F. Winner, "Single Refinement," *Christianity Today*, (June 11, 2001), 30.

married activities.¹⁴ This also contributes to the belief one is not grown up until marriage.

The other advantage the nuns and abbesses had was that no one assumed their calling was to marriage, and they would not be whole or complete apart from being a wife. This attitude is summed up well in Winner's article as she describes the dating and marriage "theology" of Kim Hartke. Hartke, the founder of True Love Ministries, believes not only do most women want to be married, but most are *called* to be married.¹⁵ Does that mean those of us *called* to ministry exchange callings like clothes when "Mr. Right" comes along? In a society where women outnumber and outlive men, is it reasonable to assume that most women will get married simply because that is their calling? Has the woman who does not marry due to circumstance or choice missed her "calling" and by inference God's will for her life?

In her book *The Cloister Walk* Kathleen Norris interviewed Benedictine nuns concerning both their calling and their celibacy.¹⁶ The nuns she spoke with agreed their vow to remain celibate and not love one person exclusively freed them to love inclusively and better minister to those around them. This allowed them to focus all their attention on their students, those they counseled, nursed, and ministered to. As one sister told Norris when celibacy works, the goal of celibacy is to allow one to stretch "the ability to love, and particularly, to love non-exclusively."¹⁷ Norris also believes this is the foundation of the great hospitality found in Benedictine convents.

¹⁴ Schwartzberg, Berliner, and Jacob, 14-5.

¹⁵ Winner, 30.

¹⁶ See Kathleen Norris, *The Cloister Walk* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), 249-263.

¹⁷ Norris, 260. See also Sally Cline, *Women, Passion, and Celibacy* (New York: Carol Southern Books, 1993), chapters 5 and 6.

In her article Winner laments the Protestant church does not have such a purposeful way to focus its single adults on ministry and service. As she notes, those who have committed their lives to singleness and celibacy in order to serve do not simply “fall into a monastery”; it is a decision made with prayer and within an affirming community.¹⁸ On the other hand Protestant singles flounder in the netherland of singleness waiting for “the one,” and they do not consider the possibility of purposeful singleness until they are into their 30s, and marriage becomes less of an option.

The issues surrounding being a single woman in ministry are many and complex. There are many myths to be corrected. Biblical women can help us correct these myths. Throughout both the Old and New Testaments God called women to lead Israel, protect their nation, counsel their kings, and to minister to his son. Women remained with him while he died, and they were the first to proclaim his resurrection. They also helped to establish the early church. In all of these accounts of women answering God’s call is their marital status relevant? Most of the women I will look at are married, but that does not seem to have bearing on their calling from God, which was not to be wives, but to obey. There are a few single women who are called and obey, and doubt is never raised as to their ability to lead and minister because they are single.

We have seen a history of women in church history, now we will turn to the women of the Bible, our spiritual mothers.

Methodology

¹⁸ Winner, 30.

The women I have chosen for this study were leaders. They led Israel in battle and in worship; they confirmed God's word to kings. In the Old Testament I will look at Deborah, Jael, Miriam, Zipporah and Huldah. Women also followed Jesus as disciples, and Jesus taught them just as he did his male disciples. Teaching women was unheard of in first century Judaism when women were confined to the house and to the roles of wife and mother. Women were not even required to learn the Torah--only to send their husbands and sons to learn it. Jesus would first appear to women after the resurrection and send them to witness to his disciples. In the Gospels I will look at Mary and Martha, the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene. Their witness was not valid in a court of law, yet Jesus used them to bear witness to who he was--the Messiah. I will end by looking at women leaders in the New Testament: apostles, prophets, teachers, and church overseers who functioned as pastors. These women include Priscilla, Lydia, Phoebe and the elect lady in 2 John. I will also look at Paul's recommendation to the Corinthian singles to remain single in order to better serve the Lord.

I will do an exegetical study of the passages that tell the stories of these women leaders. From the exegetical study I will evaluate whether or not marital status played a role in their ministries. For those women who were married, I will see if their husbands acted in the same position, or if their husbands were connected at all to their ministry. If most of their ministries were not dependent on being married or on being connected to their husband's ministries, then it is not valid to assume that a woman's primary purpose in life is marriage, and her ministry is not dependent on being

connected to a husband's ministry.¹⁹

Is it valid to base theology on biblical narratives? Biblical narratives show theology in action. If one wants to know about a kinsman-redeemer, one can read through the laws in the Pentateuch, or one can read Ruth and see a kinsman-redeemer in action, and how the theological concept worked in the real world. Narratives show us how our relationship with the God of the universe works out in daily living. In biblical narratives we see how “the whole range of biblical narrative . . . embodies the basic perception that [humanity] must live before God, in the transforming medium of time, incessantly and perplexingly in relation with others.”²⁰ Narrative shows how the law codes work out in the real world while serving a very real God who chooses to work within our history.

¹⁹ I will not be looking at 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 or 1 Timothy 2:11-15 because they are specific instructions written to two problematic congregations and are not normative for a biblical view of women in ministry. There is a textual problem that makes it questionable if 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 was part of the original letter. If it is a part of the letter, Paul's command for women to be silent cannot be in leadership positions in the church, since he gives counsel for how women should pray and prophesy in worship services in chapter 11, see chapter 6.

In 1 Timothy 2:11-15, Paul told the Ephesian women to learn in silence because they had no formal religious education, and they needed to learn sound doctrine before they taught others. In verse 12 where Paul says he does not permit a woman “to have authority over a man” he is combating the pagan mythology that said woman was created first and therefore superior to man whom she was to rule over. We need to remember the opposite extreme where man is made superior is just as unbiblical as the view Paul was correcting. See Richard Clark Kroeger and Catherine Clark Kroeger, *I Suffer Not a Woman: Rethinking 1 Timothy 2:11-15 in Light of Ancient Evidence*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1992).

²⁰ Alter, Robert, *The Art of Biblical Narrative*, (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1981), 22.

CHAPTER TWO

HELPMATE OR POWER EQUAL TO HIM?

“So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them” (Gen. 1:27).²¹ So begins the story of the human race. In three simple clauses the narrator tells us that God created humanity in his image, and humanity is made up of both male and female. Neither is subordinate to the other; there is no hierarchy, no roles, no power structure of any kind. They are equally created in the image of God, and in the next verse God gives them the same commands: to procreate and to subdue the earth. They were created equally and share equally the responsibility of stewardship over creation.

Genesis 2:5-25 offers an augmented account of creation from the account in 1:1-2:4. In this account a human being is created from the dust; God then breathed the breath of life into its²² nostrils, and the human being became a living being. The human is then placed in the garden to serve and keep it. God saw it was not good for the human to be alone, so he brought the animals, which were created out of the dust of the ground and made living as the human was to it. The human named them, but there was no עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ found for the human (v. 23).

God then caused the human to fall into a deep sleep, removed part of the

²¹ Unless otherwise noted all Scripture references are taken from *The New Revised Standard Version*.

²² Since sexual differentiation does not occur until the creation of the women, I will use the neuter pronouns to show the original creation was a human being as opposed to a male.

human's side and created woman. After God brought the woman to the man he proclaimed, "This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; this one shall be called Woman, for out of Man this one was taken" (Gen. 2:23).

Now the questions begin. Is "helpmate" or "helper as his partner" (NRSV) an accurate translation of עֵצֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ? Does the apparent creation of "man" before woman mean that man is somehow superior to woman? Since woman is created second does that automatically make her subordinate to the man? Are roles delineated in this account? How these questions are answered are as various as the questions themselves. What does this have to do with single women? Aren't this couple "married"? Is there any room for single women if this is how humanity began?

This is the passage that is foundational for those in the church who believe a woman should only be in "helping" roles within in the church. Women were created to "help" men, and therefore should not perform leadership roles within the church. Susan T. Foh presents the classical complementarian argument in her book *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism*. Man was created first, and therefore, has the temporal priority. Woman, being created second, and to be the helper to the man is, then subordinate to the man. She is only qualified to help. She is needed, equally human, equal in standing before God, but there "is a functional subordination of the wife to her husband."²³ Combined with woman being created from man, supposedly named by man before the Fall, and woman being "created for man," complementarians draw the conclusion that women should never lead men.²⁴

²³ Susan T. Foh, *Women and the Word of God: A Response to Biblical Feminism* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1979), 61-2.

²⁴ Grenz with Kjesbo, 161.

This is the same conclusion Foh reaches in her book.²⁵

The complementarian argument for female subordination breaks down at several points. If man has temporal priority over woman does that mean all of creation has priority over man based on Genesis 1? If kept within the account of Genesis 2 then dirt and dust have priority over man. Given that we have two accounts of creation in Genesis 1 and 2, both with a different order of creation, temporal priority cannot be read into the text.²⁶

Another place the complementarian view breaks down is their belief the woman is subordinate because she was made from man. Again this implies man would be subordinate to the dirt he was formed from. As Phyllis Tribble points out both man and woman are made from raw material that God fashions into something else.²⁷ When God is done there is no longer dirt--there is man; there is no longer a side--there is woman. In both cases it is God's creative activity that creates and sustains both man and woman. Woman is not dependent on man, but on God, for her creation and her being.

Complementarians say that in Genesis 2:23 when the man recognizes the woman as someone comparable to him and calls her "woman," he names her as he named the animals earlier. They interpret this to mean as man has dominion over the animals, now he has dominion over the woman, and this is God ordained.²⁸ But the

²⁵ See Foh, ch. 9. For an abbreviated form of Foh's argument see her chapter "A Male Leadership View: The Head of the Woman is Man" in *Women in Ministry: Four Views*, eds. Bonnidell Clouse and Robert G. Clouse (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1989).

²⁶ Foh explains the differences in the creation accounts by saying that Genesis 1 is an overview and Genesis 2 gives a "blow-by-blow account of creation." But Foh never explains why the sequence is different between the two. See *Women and the Word of God*, p. 59.

²⁷ Phyllis Tribble, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 96.

²⁸ Grenz with Kjesbo, 162-3.

normal naming formula that can denote authority over another is not used here. Normally *call* is immediately followed by the *naming* of a name, and here the text does not say the man named the woman--he only recognized her as one like him and called her “woman.”²⁹ The first time the female is called “woman” is by the narrator in verse 22: “And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman.” She is recognized as “woman” before the man sees her. He is simply affirming what God has done: given him an עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ .

What does עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ mean? Foh interprets it as a helper corresponding to man.³⁰ Most modern translations say “helpmate.” *Young’s Literal Translation* says “an helper -- as his counterpart” (sic.); *The New American Bible* translates it as “suitable partner.” All of these translations make woman’s function dependent on her relationship to the man. Foh goes so far as to say, “The woman is created to be a help to her husband; her function is dependent on him.”³¹ Is this what the Hebrew words mean?

עֵזֶר is used 20 times in the Old Testament: seventeen times to describe God and three times to describe a military ally or aide.³² “Help” or “helper” is an adequate translation, but English has different connotations than Hebrew does. In English “helper” implies someone who is learning, or under a person in authority. In the Hebrew “help” comes from one who has the power to give help--it refers to someone

²⁹ Tribble, 97, 99 and Grenz with Kjesbo, p.163.

³⁰ *Women and the Word of God*, 60.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 61.

³² Grenz with Kjesbo, 164.

in a superior position. That is why God can help Israel: he has the power to do so. God helps Israel because they do not have the power to help themselves.

There is another possible definition for עֶזֶר: “power” or “strength.” Both words are from the same Hebrew root and the nouns would be identical.³³ This is seen in how עֶזֶר is translated as either “helper” or “power/strength” as in the Judean king Uzziah, which means “God is my strength,” as well as the other name he is known as, Azariah. There are also poetic passages where “power” or “strength” are the only logical translations of עֶזֶר. From this it can be inferred that in some passages the root for עֶזֶר is “helper,” and in others it is the root for “power.”³⁴

כְּנִגְדּוֹ is two prepositions, and together their literal meaning is “facing.” כְּ is the first preposition and it means “like” or “corresponding to.”³⁵ נִגְדּוֹ means to stand in someone’s presence.³⁶ Together these two prepositions shows the relationship between two people: it means they are standing or sitting facing each other which denotes they are equals.³⁷ עֶזֶר כְּנִגְדּוֹ does not mean or even imply one who is subordinate or inferior--in creation or in function. Woman was created to be a power equal to man; an autonomous being that God created so that the man would have someone like him and equal to him to share his life with.

³³ Joseph Coleson, “*Ezer Cenegdo: A Power Like Him, Facing Him as Equal*” (Grantham, PA: Wesleyan/Holiness Women’s Clergy, 1996), 6, www.messiah.edu/WHWC; accessed 18 November 2001.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ Francis Brown, S.R. Driver and Charles A. Briggs, *The Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 453.

³⁶ Coleson, p. 6.

³⁷ Ibid.

The man acknowledges this when he sees the woman. In the second poetic passage in the Bible he proclaimed: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh”! He knew at last an עֵזֶר כְּגִבּוֹרָה had been brought to him. His speech reinforces the woman as his equal. Unlike the animals she corresponds to him--she is like him; there is mutuality, unity and solidarity.³⁸ The man recognized what God had done by calling her woman and saying she came from man. The narrator then stated, “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and clings to his wife, and they become one flesh” (v. 24). This seems odd--in all Near Eastern cultures it was the woman who left her family to live with her husband and his family. Again we see that one is not above the other; flying in the face of patriarchal culture, the mandate for marriage is one where the man leaves his family and clings to his wife.

There still is no obvious or implied hierarchy, neither are there obvious or implied gender roles. In Genesis 1 both male and female were given the mandates to procreate and to have dominion over the earth. The human had been placed in the garden to tend it and guard it, and one assumes the male and female will now do what the human was created to do, and they will fulfill the mandates given in chapter 1 together and as equals.

Things will drastically change for the couple in chapter 3. Genesis 2 leaves us with the mutuality, trust and innocence of the man and woman in stating they were naked but not ashamed. Genesis 3 jumps right into the question of how the world and the relationship between the sexes changed so dramatically. The serpent started a conversation. It wanted to know if God really said they could not eat from any of the

³⁸ Tribble, 99.

trees. At this point some complementarians like to overlook a little detail we find in verse 6--the man was with the woman the whole time: “she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was *with her*, and he ate” (emphasis mine).³⁹ The serpent did not address the woman alone but the couple. If woman was created as subordinate then why was the woman the one who responded? If man was the superior then why didn’t he answer the serpent? Again their solidarity and mutuality is shown. Because they were equals the woman could speak for both of them.

Other complementarians that acknowledge the couple is together say the woman overstepped her boundaries and usurped the role of her husband as being her head, and that is her sin. In fact, they interpret the story to say the sin of the couple is not eating the forbidden fruit: their sin is not living in their God-ordained hierarchal roles. The woman’s sin was acting in her husband’s place. The man’s sin was passively letting his wife take the lead and not exerting his role as head of the woman in responding to the serpent.⁴⁰ Their sin is role reversal and lies less with disobeying the only command Yahweh gave them.

The text does not support their interpretation or conclusions. Yahweh’s only command to the human (before the creation of woman) was not to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the penalty for eating from this tree was death (Gen. 2:17). Since the woman knew of the command and its consequences, we can assume the man told her or Yahweh at some point gave the command again. The couple knew

³⁹ Foh goes so far as to use the RSV translation of Genesis 3:6, which is the only modern translation that leaves out “with her” and reads “she also gave some to her husband, and ate.” She then constructs a scene of Eve taking the fruit, hunting Adam down, and making him eat, 65.

⁴⁰ See Grenz with Kjesbo, 165.

of the prohibition and its consequences.

The woman engaged the serpent in an intelligent theological discussion of the prohibition. There is much ado made over her addition “nor shall you touch it” (Gen. 3:3). The accusations range from her making her own additions to the divine command to her, not only usurping her husband’s role, but also now usurping God by adding to his “law.” She could have added it for the simple reason Tribble cites: she was faithfully interpreting the command--she cannot eat what she does not touch; it is a safeguard to insure obedience.⁴¹

But she gave in to the temptation to be like God, knowing good and evil, and ate. The man who was with her did not say a thing or try to stop her, and when she offered him the fruit, he ate too. It was only then *their* eyes were opened, and they both knew they were naked, and they both were ashamed. Together they sewed fig leaves for clothes, and they hid from God together. The text never assigns more blame to the woman; both the man and woman sin, and the consequences affect them after they both have eaten.⁴²

Then God came to the garden and told the serpent, the woman, and the man what the world and relationships will now be like because of their disobedience. They have chosen separation from God, which will separate them from each other and shift all of their relationships. There will be enmity between the woman and the serpent; the ground will now be cursed and require hard work and toil to bring forth the food they will need. The relationship between the man and the woman will no longer be one of equals. “Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you”

⁴¹ Ibid., 110.

⁴² See Grenz with Kjesbo, 166; Tribble, 114-5.

(3:16). This is the first mention in the text of a hierarchal social pattern. It is here the subordination of the woman under the man begins. It is not by divine design. The subordination of woman is a consequence of disobedience, and the result of the Fall.⁴³

In the beginning man and woman were both created in the image of God, and they were created to be equals. They were both given the commands to be fruitful and to rule over the earth. The woman was not created to be a subordinate helper to her husband. She was created as an autonomous being; she was a complete human being, just as the man was. Her existence was not dependent on him as his existence was not dependent on her; their existence depended on God alone who created them both.⁴⁴

This leads to the next assumption. Since woman was made because it was “not good that the man should be alone” (Gen. 2:18), and the first marriage covenant⁴⁵ comes after man’s declaration of woman being “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23), it is then assumed a woman’s primary purpose is marriage and that should be her primary goal in life as well. Even though woman was created to alleviate the man’s loneliness and provide him a *עֵזֶר כְּנֶגְדּוֹ*, in our society men are not raised to believe marriage should be their primary purpose and goal in life; they are raised to believe that a career will also be an important part of their lives. How are single women with a call to ministry to react to the attitude they are just “playing ministry” until Mr. Right comes along? After all isn’t Genesis 2 clear that marriage is the God-ordained, and therefore, the “natural” state to be in?

⁴³ See Coleson, “*Ezer Cenedgo*,” 9; Grenz, 167-8; Tribble, 127-28.

⁴⁴ See Tribble, 102.

⁴⁵ See Victor P. Hamilton, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament: The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990), 180-1.

Many women have been counseled to put off their dreams of continuing their education or pursuing a time-consuming career because what happens when they meet their “perfect husband” who will be “God’s perfect plan” for them?⁴⁶ If the women are more educated or make more money how will their potential spouses feel? Women have been told “you are called to be a wife first,”⁴⁷ based on Genesis 2. Whether or not they want to marry is irrelevant--they will, that is God’s plan for every woman. Is this what Genesis 2 says?

Could the comment that it is not good for man to be alone simply be an admission that human beings are meant to live in community? Scanzoni and Hardesty note marriage isn’t the only relationship possible where human beings are concerned.⁴⁸ No one person is self-sufficient--we are dependent on God and on each other. Human beings were created to have relationships with God and with each other. We are designed to be in community, and no one person can be whole and complete apart from communion with God and one another.

Certainly marriage is a part of God’s design, and marriage is one of the most significant expressions of love, fidelity, and sexuality, but it is just one of many relationships. As Christians we must remember marriage is not the supreme relationship--the supreme relationship of any believer’s life is with God; our relationship with God is what makes us whole and complete.

Although I have tried to keep this study within the narrative of Genesis, I now

⁴⁶ Grady, 138.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Letha Dawson Scanzoni and Nancy A. Hardesty, *All We’re Meant to Be: Biblical Feminism for Today*, 3rd rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992), 23.

want to look at it in the broader biblical frame, particularly New Testament. As Christians we believe Jesus Christ came to redeem all people--both men and women, and now “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:28). We also believe “in Him [Christ] you have been made complete” (Col. 2:10, NASB). In the new creation of the church where redemption restores us to the original creation relationships, there is no room for the subordination of the fall. The doctrine of salvation through Christ alone means any hierarchal structure that is a result of the Fall is now done away with--all of us have equal standing before God. Our relationship with God through Christ is what completes us and makes us whole. Single women do have a place in the church because God created them, redeemed them, and has made them to be complete and whole persons in Christ.

At Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled all the believers who had been gathered--both men and women, and they went out to the streets proclaiming all the things that had happened in the last few weeks. It is reasonable to believe the women who were at the foot of the Cross were in the upper room as well. In the Synoptic Gospels, those women are all identified by their sons, not their husbands (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; Luke 23:49, 55; 24:10). This leads me to believe they were widowed; they were single. It is possible there were single women proclaiming the death, resurrection and ascension of Christ on the day that 3,000 were saved.

When the Holy Spirit came, he came to all: men, women, married, single, old, and young alike, which Peter affirms in his sermon (Acts 2:17-18). All that God required of these believers was obedience: they stayed in Jerusalem until the Holy

Spirit came, and then they all went out and proclaimed what he had done. Whether one is married or single, male or female, is irrelevant in the Kingdom of God. The only requirement is obedience to the call and the will of God.

CHAPTER 3

JUDGE AND PROPHETS

The Old Testament records several women who obeyed by serving God in leadership positions.

Deborah

Deborah is such a woman. During the time of the judges Deborah arose as a judge and prophet to lead the people of Israel against an enemy that had cruelly oppressed them for 20 years: King Jabin of Canaan and his general Sisera. Judges 5 is Deborah's song of victory over the forces of Jabin and Sisera, which climaxed in Sisera's death.

In her analysis of Judges 5 Ackerman shows how Hebrew parallelism is used to show Deborah and Yahweh worked together to win this victory.⁴⁹ Verses 1-2 set the stage--the people were waiting for Yahweh, they were ready to obey what he said. Deborah called kings and princes to listen to her song for Yahweh had spoken to her. In verses 3-4 Deborah sang of Yahweh's coming. He came from Seir and Edom; from the place where God met his people at Sinai and made a covenant with them. God was marching north to fight for his people. It was a cosmic event: the earth trembled, the heavens and clouds poured water, the mountains quaked when Yahweh came.

Verses 6-7 transition to show us what happened on earth--people could not

⁴⁹ The following is based on Ackerman's exegesis found on pp. 32-47.

travel safely and caravans stopped until Deborah arose as “a mother in Israel,” then the people, even peasants, prospered on the plunder that was taken. This poetic diptych shows this war is a holy war--God was coming to fight for his people, and it did not take place on the cosmic level alone--it happened on the earth so he could deliver his people. The diptych also shows that Deborah was Yahweh’s counterpart on earth; she is the one he is speaking through and working through to accomplish his purposes on earth.

In verse 7 Deborah is referred to as “a mother in Israel.” Judges 5 does not mention Deborah being married, so it is unlikely we are to take this phrase to literally mean Deborah had children. The only other place “mother in Israel” is used in the Old Testament is 2 Samuel 20:19 to describe the city of Abel of Beth-maacah where Sheba hides after he has instigated a rebellion against David. When Joab besieged the city a wise woman appeared at the wall wanting to know why he was attacking a city that was “a mother in Israel.” Although a city referred to as a mother could mean a major city with daughter villages around it, Ackerman sides with Claudia Camp’s interpretation that “a mother in Israel” should be interpreted within the wise woman’s speech.⁵⁰ Abel was a city that was known for its wisdom in settling matters between conflicting parties. In the past it had been said, “Let them inquire at Abel” (2 Sam. 20:18). Abel was renowned for its ability to resolve conflicts. It was a peaceful city faithful in Israel, which could be a reference to its support of David. The wise woman also called Abel “the heritage of the LORD” (v. 22). Earlier in 1 Samuel when the mother of Tekoa pleaded her case to David she called her son “the heritage of the

⁵⁰ Susan Ackerman, *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel* (New York: Doubleday, 1998), 39.

LORD” (14:16). The heritage of Yahweh is something that Yahweh has given to his people whether it be children or land, and it is viewed as worth fighting for. The conclusion is drawn that “a mother in Israel” is more than just a central city and its auxiliary villages. It is a city renowned for its wisdom and negotiating skills: it is able to bring about resolutions that protect the heritage of Yahweh.⁵¹

By extension the wise woman herself is “a mother in Israel.”⁵² She showed all of the characteristics of her city: wisdom, negotiating skills, and she is a leader. She wanted to protect her city, which is the heritage of Yahweh, and she would have a man killed in order to secure the well-being of her city. This is seen in the fact Joab spoke to her and didn’t demand to see someone else. This woman was an elder, and this is why Joab negotiated with her: she was his equal.⁵³

For Judges 5 to call Deborah “a mother in Israel” is to show that she was known for her wisdom and ability to negotiate peace. It also shows her passionate commitment to bring peace to Israel and well-being to the heritage of Yahweh.⁵⁴ She will insure that her people have peace and can prosper, and so she is willing to go to war with Jabin and Sisera at the command of Yahweh to accomplish this goal. She is “the perfect human counterpart of Yahweh, who as ‘the God of Israel’ likewise displays a passionate commitment to the Israelite community.”⁵⁵ In the past Yahweh has fought for his people and delivered them out of slavery and oppression, and

⁵¹ Ibid., 40.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid., 41.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 43.

⁵⁵ Ibid.

Deborah boldly announced that he is about to act to free Israel again. Deborah will obey all the commands of her to see his will done.

The next stanza where the cosmic/earth and divine/human dichotomy is implied is in verse 12: “Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, utter a song!” Normally the cry to “awake” is cried out by the people to God--they are calling for him to awake and come to their aid.⁵⁶ This pattern is seen in both the Psalms and the Prophets. Here we see it was Deborah who is called to “awake.” This call can come to Deborah because she was Yahweh’s human representative on earth.

In Judges 5 Deborah’s marital status is never mentioned. She is also clearly the military leader with Barak as her second-in-command. This is seen in the following ways: first her name is mentioned more often. Second Barak’s name never appears independent of Deborah’s, and her name is always first. The text also says the oppression happening in Israel did not stop until Deborah *arose* in Israel--Barak is not mentioned. The verb “arose” also implies it was Deborah who arose to lead Israel’s troops against Sisera and his army.⁵⁷

This changes in Judges 4. Chapter 4 is part of the Deuteronomistic history, which was written and compiled between the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.E.⁵⁸ Deborah is now identified as a prophet and judge. She is the only female judge in the Old Testament, and one of the few named female prophets.⁵⁹ She could also be identified as a wife. אִשָּׁת לְפִדְוֹת in verse 4 is normally translated “wife of

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 31.

⁵⁸ Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing*, trans. Jonathan Chipman (Leiden: Brill, 1999), 375.

⁵⁹ Miriam, Huldah, and Noadiah are the other three women named as prophets in the Old Testament.

Lappidoth,” but it can also mean “a fiery woman”⁶⁰ or “spirited woman.”⁶¹ So Deborah’s marital status remains questionable.

Her role as military leader has been considerably minimized. Yahweh’s role in the battle and the defeat is also curtailed. In chapter 5 Yahweh marched north to Israel causing cosmic upheaval in order to free his people. The only mention of Yahweh’s participation in chapter 4 is in verse 15 where Yahweh threw Sisera’s troops into a panic so Barak and his soldiers could come and win. Barak led the troops although he would not go into battle unless Deborah accompanied him. His reticence to believe Yahweh spoke through Deborah would cost him the glory of killing Sisera himself: that honor would go to a woman.⁶²

Before the monarchy and the cult were institutionalized in Jerusalem, a woman could be portrayed as a military leader leading troops into battle to execute Yahweh’s holy war on earth. Due to the mythic nature of the poem Israel could look beyond gendered roles for women to accept a female military leader.⁶³ This has changed in the seventh century. Both the monarchy and the temple cult are set in place and acceptable gender roles are established. It is still acceptable for a woman to function as a prophet, but a female military leader is unacceptable. Therefore Deborah, the military leader, fades into the background and Barak takes the lead. Barak also takes the glory in the rest of the canon (1 Samuel 12:11; Hebrews 11:32). In the lists of judges who are commended Barak is always mentioned; Deborah is forgotten.

⁶⁰ Ackerman, 38.

⁶¹ E. John Hamlin, *Judges: At Risk in the Promised Land* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1990), 83.

⁶² Jael and other women who acted in a cultic role will be discussed in the next chapter.

⁶³ Ackerman, 68.

Efforts have also been made to insure Deborah is portrayed as a “good, little wife.” This is seen in the translation of אִשָּׁת לַפִּירוֹת as “wife of Lappidoth,” and not as “fiery woman” or “spirited woman.” This also is seen in commentators who have tried to marry her off to Barak to explain why they go into battle together. The text does not support a marriage between the two. If Deborah was indeed the wife of Lappidoth, he did not seem to play a part in her calling as a leader. According to the text he did not even have anything to say about his wife going off to war. He could have been one of the warriors who went into battle, but apparently he supported his wife’s ministry, and had no trouble with Deborah being a judge over Israel and a prophet.

Miriam

Deborah was not the first to sing a song of victory to Yahweh. Miriam began the tradition after the crossing of the Reed Sea. Miriam was also a prophet, worship leader, and a co-leader with Moses and Aaron (Micah 6:4). Tradition says she was the unnamed sister who kept watch over Moses and arranged for their mother to nurse the child for Pharaoh’s daughter. Jewish tradition also reports that it was Miriam’s well which provided the Israelites with water during the wilderness wanderings. She was the first woman named as a prophet and every verse, which describes women going out to sing and dance victory reflects back to her.

Exodus 15:19 is the first place Miriam is named. She was called a prophet and the sister of Aaron but not Moses. At first reading it appears that she led only the women in a fragment of the song which Moses led the people in worship in 15:1-18.

But a closer look at the whole literary structure of the passage offers a different interpretation. Exodus 15:21 ends the first major unit of the book. It began with women in chapter one--midwives who, instead of obeying Pharaoh, feared God. The narrative continued with the mother, sister, and daughter who saved Moses. The unit now ends with the sister and daughters worshipping the God who just delivered them from the hand of Pharaoh; if Miriam is the unnamed sister of chapter 1 she is an *inclusio* to the Exodus narrative.

Although Miriam was named a prophet in Scripture, she does not function in the traditional prophetic role of speaking forth the word of God. She did start a liturgical tradition.⁶⁴ It is agreed Exodus 15:21 is one of the oldest texts in the Old Testament; it is also believed the original “Song of the Sea” is Miriam’s. Verse 19 recounts Yahweh’s deliverance of the Israelite people and the destruction of Pharaoh’s troops at the Reed Sea. In the next verse Miriam apparently led the women in dancing and celebrating Yahweh’s victory, but שִׁירָה is a masculine plural, which implies that she led all the people in celebrating and worship.

In *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses?* Rita J. Burns shows that not only was dancing part of celebrating victories in Israel’s life, it was also part of its liturgical life. The distinguishing feature in Miriam’s dance and song from those of Deborah, Jephthah’s daughter, and the women in 1 Samuel 18:6 is that there is no human component in this fight and victory. Yahweh alone acted on Israel’s behalf--none of the Israelites fought against the Egyptians; they stood and watched Yahweh defeat their enemy.

⁶⁴ The following analysis is taken from Rita J. Burns, *Has the Lord Indeed Spoken Only Through Moses? A Study of the Biblical Portrait of Miriam*, SBL Dissertation Series 84 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1987), 11-40.

Another way dance was used within the life of Israel and surrounding nations was re-presenting past victories.⁶⁵ The battle was re-enacted through dance to celebrate the victory. There is no doubt the Exodus is the foundation of Israel's faith confession. The Exodus would be the definitive act of God among them for the rest of the Old Testament, and would undergird their belief that Yahweh would act on their behalf. This victory would become the paradigm for Israel's worship.

In her analysis Burns uses the Exodus 32 narrative⁶⁶ of the golden calves and the celebration happening around them to show that victory celebrations re-enacted the battle itself. In verse 17 Joshua heard the people's revelry and thinks there is a war going on in the camp. The people's celebrations, which included dancing, sounded like a battle. The reason for the dancing and celebration in Exodus 32 is the same as in Exodus 15--Aaron told the people the calves were the gods who had brought them out of Egypt, and the people were worshipping them and celebrating the victory at the Reed Sea. In fact throughout the Old Testament dance is a "recurring feature in celebrations of victory."⁶⁷

In Israelite worship dance was used as a way of re-enacting the battle Yahweh fought for them, so they could remember his deliverance and salvation and pass their faith to the next generation. There are no instances of war dances in the Old Testament where the celebration happened before the battle to insure victory.⁶⁸ These dances always happened after Yahweh had acted, after he had saved the people and

⁶⁵ See Burns, 18-20.

⁶⁶ See Burns, 19-22.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 29.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 30.

delivered them from their enemies.

This is the context of Miriam's dance--she began the Israelite tradition of celebrating God's victories through dance. I agree with Burns that since the context is not one of warriors coming home the dance may not have been a spontaneous activity on the shores of the Reed Sea.⁶⁹ It is very likely it was enacted later, and used in shrine worship during the wilderness wanderings.⁷⁰ Miriam began a liturgical tradition that not only would remind the people what God had done for them, but also would introduce future generations to the power and strength of the Warrior God who would come and fight for them.

In the end I think Miriam was a prophet.⁷¹ Instead of proclaiming God's words, she proclaimed his actions, and in so doing called on Israel to worship and obey the God who delivered them out of oppressive slavery to the Egyptians and gave them the freedom to be his people.

Scripture never tells us whether Miriam was married. The only men she was connected with were her brothers, Moses and Aaron. Since these verses are from the earliest known traditions, it is clear Miriam did play a major role in Israelite belief and life before the entrance into Canaan. Scripture also shows her as a leader among the people, and leading them in their first cultic celebration of God's deliverance from the Egyptians.⁷² She was also a co-leader with Moses and Aaron during this time as seen

⁶⁹ Ibid., 39-40.

⁷⁰ Ibid., p. 40.

⁷¹ Contra to Burns who believes Miriam was not a prophet proper because she never spoke forth the word of God or is presented as an oracular figure. She believes Miriam is presented as strictly a priestly figure. See Burns, ch. 3. I will look at Miriam as a cultic figure in the next chapter.

⁷² Burns, 40.

in the prophetic tradition, which remembers, “For I brought you up from the land of Egypt, and redeemed you from the house of slavery; and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam” (Micah 6:4). As part of the triumvirate God used to deliver his people, Miriam played an integral role from watching over her brother on the Nile to leading the people in celebration of what God had done for them to establishing a liturgical tradition so the people would remember the power and strength of their God.

Huldah

The last female prophet I want to look at in this chapter is Huldah. Huldah was a prophet in Jerusalem during the reign of Josiah, and her story is found in 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34. Although noteworthy male prophets lived in Jerusalem at the time (Jeremiah, Zephaniah, and Nahum⁷³), Josiah sent the high priest to inquire of Huldah after a scroll was found in the temple. Huldah verified the scroll was the word of God, and that its words would come to pass, but Josiah would be spared since his heart was grieved over the sin of his people. After he heard her words, Josiah stepped up his reforms and led the people in celebrating the first Passover that included all of the people since before the time of the judges (2 Kings 23:22).

Huldah was the first prophet to declare written words to be the word of God--Scripture.⁷⁴ She was the first whose “words of judgment are centered on a written document as no others have been before her.”⁷⁵ She was the first to authenticate

⁷³ William E. Phipps, “A Woman Was the First to Declare Scripture Holy,” *Bible Review* 6 (April 1990): 14.

⁷⁴ Phipps, 14 and Claudia V. Camp, “1 and 2 Kings” in *Women’s Bible Commentary*, expanded ed., eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 115.

⁷⁵ Camp, 115.

Scripture. Manuscripts had been accumulating for years, if not centuries, but for the first time a prophet proclaimed the writing to be God's word, and this prophet was a woman--the last female prophet before Judah fell to the Babylonians.⁷⁶ She started the process that would eventually give us canonized Scripture.

Huldah was married to Shallum who was the "keeper of the wardrobe" (2 Kings 22:14). But when Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah came to her home, they did not ask for her husband, and there was no embarrassment over inquiring God's will of a woman. The high priest did not have an issue with a woman prophet. In fact, her gender was irrelevant in the text as was her marital status.

As Miriam frames the Exodus narrative so Deborah and Huldah frame Deuteronomistic history.⁷⁷ Deborah appeared at the beginning as a prophet in Judges and another female prophet, Huldah, appeared at the end in Kings. Both women declared God's word to leaders who responded. Unfortunately by Huldah's time the nation had gone so far into idolatry exile was inevitable, so there would be no songs of victory as in the days of Deborah. Although her words did compel the king to continue in his reforms, and they may have held the tide for a few more years.

Each of these women stands on her own in Scripture although various attempts have been made to subsume them under men. Deborah is given a husband in the Deuteronomistic history, and there have been various attempts to wed her to Barak as well. In later traditions she would be forgotten while Barak would be the one applauded for delivering Israel (1 Samuel 12:11 and Hebrews 11:32). Although

⁷⁶ Huldah's prophecy would happen within 35 years.

⁷⁷ Athalya Brenner and Fokkelen Van Dijk-Hemmes, *On Gendering Texts: Female and Male Voices in the Hebrew Bible* (New York: E.J. Brill, 1993), 64.

Miriam was not married in Scripture, Jewish tradition would later give her a husband.⁷⁸ There have been attempts to make Huldah's authority dependent on her husband by arguing "her authority is secondary, derived from her marriage."⁷⁹ Her authority is said to be derived from her husband's position as "keeper of the wardrobe."

Scripture tells a different story. In each account it is clear that Deborah, Miriam and Huldah are leaders because of God's anointing, and their obedience to his call. They are leaders in their own right, and if they are married, their husbands do not appear to have a place in their ministries. Can the implication they had nothing to say mean that they supported their wives in the leadership positions God called them to?

⁷⁸ Ellen Frankel, *The Five Books of Miriam: A Woman's Commentary on the Torah* (San Francisco: HarperCollins Publisher, 1996), 113.

⁷⁹ Ackerman, 108.

CHAPTER FOUR

OF THE CULT AND PRIESTS

In the last chapter I examined how women had been called into the roles of judge and prophet in order to lead the people of Israel back to God or in response to God's deliverance. The biblical texts showed these women were leaders in their own right apart from husbands; in fact Miriam apparently was not married, and Deborah's marital status was questionable.

In this chapter I want to look at how women functioned in a cultic or priestly role. There are three Old Testament examples: Jael, Zipporah and Miriam. Each woman acted as a mediator on behalf of another or the community. I will also look at how women functioning in a cultic role was curtailed in the story of Miriam in Numbers 12.

In the last chapter I looked at Deborah and how she had functioned as a prophet and judge. Now I will look at her counterpart in the story, and the woman who would destroy Israel's enemy--Jael. Again I will look at Judges 5 first since it is the older tradition and text.

Jael

Jael is first mentioned in Deborah's song in verse 24: "Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, of tent-dwelling women most blessed." The only other woman in the Bible who is called "most blessed of women" is Mary when

she went to visit Elizabeth after finding out she would be the mother of the Messiah (Luke 1:42). But Jael is being blessed for killing a man, and according to chapter 4 this man was the general of the king her husband had made an agreement with. She is being praised for killing an ally. Why would she kill Sisera in the first place?

In chapter 5 it is debatable if Jael is married. אִשְׁתּוֹ חֵבֶרֶן is normally translated “wife of Heber.” But Abraham Malamat has given an alternate translation of 5:24. “Most blessed of women be Jael, A woman of the Kenite community, Of tent-dwelling women most blessed.”⁸⁰ He explains that from other texts written during the time of the Bronze Age a cognate of חֵבֶרֶן can mean “a community unit, a clan, a band, or a tribe.”⁸¹ There are places in the Old Testament where חֵבֶרֶן does mean to be part of a group. In Hosea 6:9 it is used to describe a company of priests, and in 2 Samuel 2:3 the phrase “cities of Hebron” could mean “Hebron” itself originally meant a group of towns or communities that settled close to each other.⁸² Jael could have simply been part of the Kenite community and not necessarily married.

Judges already established the Kenites were descended from Moses’ father-in-law (1:16). Although there is variance in what his name was, all the traditions agree on one thing concerning Moses’ father-in-law: he was a priest. Judges 4:11 is the first time we have seen “Kenite” since chapter 1, and the writer once again points out the Kenites were descended from Moses’ father-in-law. It can be assumed the writer

⁸⁰ Abraham Malamat, “Mari and the Bible: Some Patterns of Tribal Organization and Institutions,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 82 (1962), 144-46 qtd. in Ackerman, 99.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

wants us to connect Heber and Jael with their priestly ancestor.⁸³ If this is the case by connecting Jael to the Kenite community the writer is giving her actions priestly authority. By inserting one word he is telling his readers Jael is functioning in a cultic role parallel to Deborah's prophetic role.

The later redactor of chapter 4 elaborates on the priestly theme. Now Jael was the wife of Heber, and there was peace between her husband and King Jabin of Hazor. This peace was probably the result of a work arrangement: Heber being a smith was needed to keep Jabin's chariots in good working order.

We also found out in 4:11 that Heber moved away from the Kenites and he and Jael have encamped at Elon-bezaananim, near Kadesh. Probably to be closer to where good business would be. Another way the narrator shows Jael is functioning in a priestly role is given in the name of the place where Jael is camped--Elon-bezaananim, which means "the oak of Zaananim."⁸⁴ This is a clue the place where they encamped is sacred space, because oaks were often used to symbolize the holy. Oaks are used in other places in Scripture to denote a theophany, and they are also places where divine revelations and teaching occur.⁸⁵ Ackerman also notes in the Hebrew that the root for oak is derived from the same root that "God" or "gods" comes from, **אל**.⁸⁶ For Jael's tent to be pitched by or under an oak tree is to signify that it was a sacred spot, holy ground.

This is further confirmed in the next place name given to show where Heber

⁸³ The following is based on Ackerman's exegesis found on pp. 89-102.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 96.

⁸⁵ Ibid. For texts regarding the oak tree as a sacred place see Gen. 12:6; 13:18; 14:13; 35:8; and Jud. 9:6.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

and Jael lived; they lived near Kadesh. In Joshua Kadesh had been designated as one of the cities of refuge where someone who unintentionally committed murder could flee to escape the revenge of the kinsman redeemer (Josh. 20:7). It was also a city whose lands were given to the Levites, so they could graze their animals. Kadesh was identified with both a sanctuary and Israel's cult. It was the only city in Naphtali that had this dual claim.⁸⁷

The redactor of Judges 4 has given us three major markers that Jael is to be seen in a cultic role: she was a Kenite, descended from Moses' father-in-law; her tent was under or near a sacred oak, and she lived near Kadesh. The poem of Judges 5 used the single word "Kenite" to clue the reader to her cultic status. Whether or not Jael was married, her tent was seen as sacred ground, and this was the reason why Sisera entered it in both stories. In Judges 4 he was given the additional assurance that there was peace between Heber and Jabin. Sisera believed himself to be safe for both reasons.

Jael appeared to be the perfect hostess at first--she offered him luxuries to drink and eat. In Judges 5 no mention is made of Sisera lying down to sleep. Jael gave him food and drink, and while he was still on his feet she struck him with the tent peg and mallet. He fell at her feet with imagery of sex and death being intertwined.⁸⁸ In Judges 4 after she fed Sisera, Jael covered him with a rug and waited until he fell asleep before she silently crept to him and killed him.

There has been some debate over Jael's flagrant disregard for her husband's

⁸⁷ Ackerman, 98.

⁸⁸ See Susan Niditch, "Eroticism and Death in the Tale of Jael," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel*, ed. Peggy L. Day (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1989), 43-57.

treaty and for the laws of Near Eastern hospitality.⁸⁹ The question is why would she do this? Why would she kill her husband's ally? Why would she break the laws that governed hospitality? A lot has also been written on the danger she was in if Barak did find Sisera in her tent. She would then be seen as Israel's enemy. In chapter 5, the verses following Jael's murder of Sisera have Sisera's mother saying he was delayed because there was a woman (literally "womb") or two for each man to rape, and Jael did not want to have the same fate befall her. It is also worth noting that if Sisera's intentions were honorable, he would have gone into her husband's tent and not hers.⁹⁰ There was no reason for Sisera to be in her tent. If her husband came home, she would have been accused of adultery. She was protecting herself from possible rape as well as the possibility of being killed.

With Ackerman I agree there is another way to interpret Jael's actions. In staying with the possibility she is functioning in a cultic role, she acts because she is doing what Yahweh has told her to do.⁹¹ She knows this is a holy war Yahweh is waging against the Canaanites to deliver his people from their oppression. This suspends the rules of sanctuary she could provide for Sisera. Jael is acting as Moses, Phineas, and the leaders of Israel acted when the men of Israel had sexual relations with women of Moab and yoked themselves to Baal of Peor by worshipping him (Numbers 25). Phineas' zeal for upholding the covenant by killing an Israelite man and Midianite women he brought into camp is commended by God, and he and his

⁸⁹ See Alice Ogden Bellis, *Helpmates, Harlots, Heroines: Women's Stories in the Hebrew Bible* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1994), 119-123 for an overview of the debate.

⁹⁰ The tradition of the time was for the husband and the wife or wives to have their own separate tents. This is taken from a class discussion. The class was "Judges" taught by Dr. Joseph Coleson in the Spring 2000 semester.

⁹¹ Ackerman, 102.

family receive a blessing (vv. 10-13). As Moses and Phineas protected Israel's heritage as the people of Yahweh, so Jael does. She knows the deeds of this man--his arrogance, brutality, and what he would do if she were a woman of a tribe he defeated.

How can Jael know all this? As a person functioning in a cultic and priestly role she would be able to know what the divine wanted.⁹² It was her job to know the will of God and see that God's purposes were done on earth as he moved and worked in the heavens. Jael knows God has ordained for this man to die because she too is a representative of God on earth. This gives her the license she needs to suspend the normal traditions of religious sanctuary and kill Sisera on holy ground.⁹³ She would finish the battle Deborah started and help to insure 40 years of peace in Israel. With Deborah she would bring *shalom* to God's people by obeying what she knew to be the will of God.

Zipporah

"On the way, at a place where they spent the night, the LORD met him and tried to kill him. But Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin, and touched Moses' feet with it, and said, 'Truly you are a bridegroom of blood to me!' So he let him alone. It was then she said, 'A bridegroom of blood by circumcision'" (Exodus 4:24-26). With these three verses we turn to the next woman I want to look at who functions in a priestly role, Zipporah. These are three of the most mythic, problematic verses in the Bible. Commentators have had many and various ways these verses should be read and interpreted.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

Zipporah was the wife of Moses. She, Moses, and their sons had just left Midian and were on their way to Egypt in obedience to what God had told Moses to do. Then Yahweh came against either Moses or one of their sons to try to kill him. Although the NRSV supplies Moses' name and "her son," in the Hebrew only third singular pronouns are used for the man or men referred to, so it is uncertain whom Yahweh came against. Quick thinking and quick acting Zipporah circumcised either her husband or her son, applied the bloody foreskin to one of their feet/genitals, and the wrath of Yahweh is averted. Zipporah is the only human named and the only human to act in this account.

In the verses right before this incident Yahweh told Moses what he was to say to Pharaoh; he was to let Yahweh's people go, and if he did not release Yahweh's firstborn son then Pharaoh's son shall die. In light of the context these verses foreshadow the Passover.⁹⁴

But why should Yahweh come against Moses or one of his sons to try to kill him? Robinson thinks the reason is Moses' reluctance earlier in chapter 4 to obey God's calling to go and demand Pharaoh to release his people.⁹⁵ He seems to think that either Moses or his son not being circumcised would not warrant this action on Yahweh's part. Fretheim thinks it is a combination of both: "Moses' continued resistance to the divine call, occasioning God's wrath (4:14), and his failure concerning circumcision are signs that do not bode well for the future."⁹⁶ Is Moses

⁹⁴ Terrence E. Fretheim, *Exodus* (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991) 79. Bernard P. Robinson, "Zipporah to the Rescue: A Contextual Study of Exodus 4:24-6," *Vetus Testamentum* 36 (October 1986): 452-3.

⁹⁵ Robinson, 456.

⁹⁶ Fretheim, 81.

still having apprehensions? Is Yahweh growing tired of his excuses? We will never know.

What we do know is how Yahweh's wrath was averted and Moses (or his son) was spared. Zipporah quickly circumcised either Moses or her son and touched the bloody foreskin to the feet or genitals of one of them. She acted as a mediator between Yahweh and her family. She also acted as a priest. In a salvific moment that would foreshadow the Passover she circumcised one of the men in her life and applied the blood to save one or both. This is one of the few written records we have of a woman performing an act of blood sacrifice in the Bible or in Near Eastern religion.⁹⁷

Ironically the priesthood who would later go on to minimalize Miriam's role in the wilderness traditions as a cultic leader begins with a woman, and not even an Israelite woman. A foreign woman was the first person in Exodus to offer a blood sacrifice that averted the wrath of God and once again saved Moses.

Miriam

The book of Numbers categorically eliminates all other contenders to the priesthood, so Aaron and his sons will be the rightful priests of the Israelite nation.⁹⁸

Korah and his followers, although from the line of Levi, are denied the priesthood or

⁹⁷ Dorah O'Donnell Setel, "Exodus," *Women's Bible Commentary*, exp. ed., eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 35. According to Setel this is the only account we have, but Carol Myers notes another. Myers points to the sacrifice Hannah gave when she brought Samuel to dedicate him to the Lord. Myers notes the MT of 1 Samuel 1:24 only has Hannah going, and Elkanah appears in later redactions. Given the informal family worship of the time, it is likely Hannah made her own sacrifice, which was allowable before the more formalized cult came into power. See Carol Myers, "The Hannah Narrative in Feminist Perspective," *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, eds. Joseph E. Coleson and Victor H. Matthews, (Winona Lake, WI: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 122-23.

⁹⁸ Claudia V. Camp, *Wise, Strange and Holy: The Strange Woman and the Making of the Bible* (Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 230.

any leadership role in Israel; they and their families die for their insubordination to Moses and Aaron (Num. 16). The line is further narrowed to Phineas, son of Aaron, after his two older brothers, Nadab and Abihu offer “illicit fire” before Yahweh (Num. 3:4). Nestled between these two accounts is another elimination: Miriam.

The account in Numbers 12 is after the anointing of the seventy elders to help Moses govern the people along with Moses’ wish that more were called to be prophets. It comes before the twelve spies were sent to spy the land in chapter 13, and the people’s subsequent rebellion in chapter 14. The people refused to go up and take the land that God had promised them, condemning themselves to wander another forty years in the wilderness.

Numbers 12 is another passage in which it is hard to understand exactly what is happening. In verse 1 it appears that Miriam and Aaron had a complaint against Moses’ Cushite wife, but then in verse 2 they said, “Has the LORD spoken only through Moses? Has he not spoken through us also?” It was this complaint Yahweh answered to. Although there has been much speculation about the first complaint regarding Moses’ Cushite wife, I will focus on the second complaint and its consequences.

As soon as the words in verse 2 were out of Miriam and Aaron’s mouths, Yahweh heard and appeared. He called the three siblings to the tent of meeting and rebuked Miriam and Aaron for their audacity to claim equal leadership with Moses. Yes, Yahweh has spoken through prophets and priests like Miriam and Aaron through visions and dreams, but his relationship with Moses was unique: “With him I speak face to face--clearly, not in riddles; and he beholds the form of the LORD” (v. 8). First, Moses’ special place within the Israelite cult was affirmed--he was not just a prophet:

he was *the* prophet of Yahweh. Yahweh spoke to no one else as he did to Moses.

After the cloud left the tent of meeting, Miriam was found to have leprosy. She was the only one punished, and her co-instigator not only got away without punishment, Aaron was the one who interceded on her behalf to Moses. As in the sin of making the golden calf and leading the people to worship it, once again the high priest Aaron was not punished or even rebuked for his sin.⁹⁹ The Aaronic priesthood insured its forefather maintained his purity to perform his duties as high priest. Once again another contender for leading cultic ritual is eliminated; this time it is the sister of the high priest, Miriam.

It is possible these verses are a polemic against the worship of female deities. Within the prophetic tradition the worship of the goddesses Astarte, Tammuz and the Queen of Heaven were denounced as idolatry, and the people were called to repent of worshipping deities other than Yahweh. Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel called women who worshipped these deities to repent of their idolatry (Jer. 7:17-18 and Ez. 8:14), and both of them blamed the exile on idolatry and the forsaking of Yahweh for other gods. In the postexilic redaction of Numbers any female leader, especially one with cult associations and the sister of the greatest prophet and the first high priest in Israel, would be open to the diminishment of her leadership role. As noted above the prophetic tradition also remembers her being an equal with Moses and Aaron in leadership (Micah 6:4).

The fact the people did not move on until Miriam came back into the camp

⁹⁹ Katharine Doob Sakenfeld, *Numbers: Journeying with God*, The International Theological Commentary (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1995), 83. Sakenfeld also notes it would have been unthinkable for Israel's cult to have imagined the great, first high priest could have been impure for even a short period of time, p. 83.

signified her importance within the community. It is also significant this passage comes right before the people's rebellion that would lead them back into the wilderness for another forty years. Miriam could symbolize Israel in these verses.¹⁰⁰ Israel sinned against God and its leaders, and the adults would pay for it by dying in the wilderness and not entering the land. But they were forgiven, as was Miriam.

Miriam's flesh being half-consumed is also a picture of one hanging between life and death.¹⁰¹ As Moses would stand in intercession between life and death many times for the people, and as Aaron would run between life and death with a censer of incense to stop a plague (Num. 16:41-50), so Miriam would stand between life and death foreshadowing the grave sin the people would commit in chapter 14.¹⁰² Although punished for her rising against her brother and put out of the camp, she symbolizes the people who would rebel against God and yet live. As one who has lived between life and death, she also stands as an intercessor for them, mediating the grace and forgiveness she received from God.

As Tribble has noted, although later redactors would reduce Miriam's role and push her to the margins, they could not diminish her role absolutely.¹⁰³ She would remain the first woman to be named prophet, and her liturgical tradition of dancing and singing Israel's victories would continue for generations to come. The liturgical tradition she started in her celebration of Yahweh's victory at the Reed Sea would continue through the ages re-telling the story of Yahweh's deliverance to each new

¹⁰⁰ Mary Douglas, *In the Wilderness: The Doctrine of Defilement in the Book of Numbers* (Sheffield, England: JSOT Press, 1993), 199.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 212.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Phyllis Tribble, "Bringing Miriam Out of the Shadows," *Bible Review* 5 (February 1989), 23-4.

generation.

Numbers 20:1 records Miriam's obituary: she died and is buried at Kadesh: a city that is named "holy."

Three women all with ties to the cult. Zipporah is married. Miriam is single. Jael's marital status is debatable. Yet all three women stand on their own in their stories. As we saw in the previous chapter these women hear God's voice, see his actions, and respond, not only in obedience, but two of them with actions that save the lives of others. They are all mediators and intercessors standing between life and death. One also oversteps perceived bounds, but she is forgiven and becomes a symbol of the forgiveness Israel would receive from God after they disobeyed him.

The traditions of Jael, Zipporah and Miriam remind us as women, we, too, are called to stand between life and death in the world we live--for our families, our communities, and even those who consider us to be outsiders. They were called, not because of who their husbands were or what their husbands did, but because they were available and open to God's calling in their life. They heard his voice and they followed.

CHAPTER FIVE

WOMEN IN THE GOSPELS

In the previous two chapters I looked at women in leadership positions in the Old Testament, and how the ministries God called them to were not dependent on whether they were married or what their husbands did, if they were wives. Now I will begin to look at women in the New Testament.

In Luke's gospel the ministry, death and resurrection of Christ is surrounded by women. Beginning with the annunciation to Mary (Luke 1:26-38) and Anna's prophecy in the temple (Luke 2:36-38) up to the women who were at the crucifixion (Luke 23:55-56) and discovered the empty tomb (Luke 24:1-12), the life of Christ is surrounded by female disciples.

Luke 8:1-3 says:

Soon afterwards [Jesus] went on through cities and villages, proclaiming and bringing the good news of the kingdom of God. The twelve were with him, as well as some women who had been cured of evil spirits and infirmities: Mary, called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out, and Joanna, the wife of Herod's steward Chuza, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for them out of their resources.

Mark 15:41 also says the women at the cross were among those who followed Jesus and "provided for him." The verb in Mark is from ἀκολουθέω the same word the Gospel writers used over seventy-five times to show following Jesus meant being a disciple of Christ.¹⁰⁴ The twelve weren't the only disciples who followed Jesus as he

¹⁰⁴ Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight and I. Howard Marshall, eds. *Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1992), 882.

traveled through Galilee and Judah teaching, healing and proclaiming the coming of the kingdom of God. A group of women also followed and witnessed Christ's miracles and preaching throughout the region.

These women “provided for them out of their resources” in Luke 8:3 and “provided for him” in Mark 15:41. The word translated “provided” is διακονέω, which means “to wait on someone at a table, to serve, to support, or to serve as a deacon.”¹⁰⁵ It was used in the early Christian community to describe “eucharistic table service and proclamation of the word.”¹⁰⁶ This was not a one-time contribution to the ministry of Christ. The tense of διακονέω is imperfect, which “describes a continuous action normally occurring in the past.”¹⁰⁷ They supported and served Christ throughout his earthly ministry. They too were in service to the kingdom along with Jesus and the twelve.

Mary and Martha

In Luke 10:38-42 we meet Martha and Mary who are apparently two single sisters living together.¹⁰⁸ When Jesus and the twelve came into their village Martha welcomed them into her home. Then this pericope is normally interpreted to pit sister

¹⁰⁵ William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, revised and augmented by F. Wilbur Gingrich and Frederick W. Danker, second edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1957, 1979), 184.

¹⁰⁶ Jane Schaberg, “Luke,” *Women's Bible Commentary*, exp. ed., eds. Carol A. Newsome and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 376.

¹⁰⁷ William D. Mounce, *Basics of Biblical Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1993), 177.

¹⁰⁸ Lazarus is not mentioned in the Lucan account.

against sister to elevate “being” with the Lord above “doing” for the Lord.¹⁰⁹ This interpretation misses what Luke is doing in this narrative. As Craddock points out the “radicality” of this story should not be overlooked: “Jesus is received into a woman’s home (no mention is made of a brother) and he teaches a woman.”¹¹⁰

For the first century Jew sitting at someone’s feet did not bring to mind children sitting at the feet of adults listening to stories; sitting at someone’s feet meant higher, formal education.¹¹¹ Jesus was known as a rabbi, a teacher; to sit at his feet meant one was being trained as a disciple. Mary was not quietly sitting contemplating all Jesus said. She was in active training with the other disciples.¹¹² This was not a usual activity for women. Martha was doing what women were supposed to do: be good homemakers.

In first century Jewish thought the women’s sphere was the home. A woman learned everything she would need to know to be a wife, mother and run a household. She was not required to learn the Torah or to engage in religious activity that would take her out of the home for an extended period of time, which included the three feasts men were commanded to attend in Jerusalem.¹¹³ Jewish thought also believed something done that was obligatory carried more merit than an act that was not

¹⁰⁹ See Virginia Stem Owens, *Daughters of Eve: Women of the Bible Speak to Women of Today* (Colorado Springs, CO: NavPress Publishing Co., 1995), 143-6.

¹¹⁰ Fred B. Craddock, *Luke*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1990), 152.

¹¹¹ The following is taken from Aida Besançon Spencer, *Beyond the Curse: Women Called to Ministry* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 43-63.

¹¹² Grenz with Kjesbo, 75.

¹¹³ Spencer, 47.

obligatory, so learning the Torah and studying carried no merit for a woman.¹¹⁴ The only way a woman could earn merit was to perform those acts that were obligatory for her: be a wife and mother, and make sure her sons went to learn at the synagogue and her husband at the Beth Hamidrash.¹¹⁵ In Jesus' time there was no reason for a woman to be sitting at a rabbi's feet; Mary should have been helping Martha.

When Martha came to Jesus in verse 40 and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me," she was expecting Jesus to agree with her and send Mary to help her. The verbs used to describe Martha show that this was probably no small gathering: Martha is distracted, she asks for someone to help her, and Jesus tells her she is worried and distracted by many things. Martha was doing exactly what she should be doing: entertaining and feeding her guests, and by all the morés Mary should have been helping her; that was her proper place.

But Jesus responded, "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her" (vv. 41-42). With these words Jesus set the traditional belief of a woman's place on its head. With these words "Jesus affirmed the right of women to hear God's Word!"¹¹⁶ Jesus turned the priorities of a woman's life upside down with his belief women should learn the word of God. By placing the study of the word of God above the socially and culturally imposed gender role of homemaker, Jesus

¹¹⁴ Epstein, I. (ed.), *The Babylonian Talmud*, 35 vol. (London: Soncino, 1948), *b. Ber.* 17a, qtd. in Spencer, 48.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹¹⁶ C. S. Cowles, *A Woman's Place? Leadership in the Church* (Kansas City, MO: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1993), 86. Spencer notes while *The Talmud* explains "men came to [synagogues] to learn the Torah, women came to hear, but not to study it fully," 50.

made it clear “a woman is greater than what she does. She has worth and dignity apart from childbearing. Her status is not dependent on her relationship to a man but is dependent on her relationship to God.”¹¹⁷ Jesus affirmed what God had done in creation: woman was “a human being in her own right”¹¹⁸ apart from any roles imposed on her since creation.

In John’s Gospel we meet Mary and Martha again. This time they are mentioned with their brother Lazarus. In chapter 11 Jesus raised Lazarus from the dead. In chapter 12, six days before Passover, Jesus returned to Bethany and was having dinner with the siblings. As in Luke, Martha was serving. Mary was once again at Jesus’ feet. In a wanton display of affection Mary anointed Jesus’ feet with perfume that costs a year’s wages. When she was condemned for this waste of good money, Jesus defended her explaining she had prepared him for his upcoming death. There are those who say this anointing for death is an unintentional or an “unconscious”¹¹⁹ prophetic act; Mary simply anointed his feet out of her gratitude for the raising of Lazarus. Jesus was the one who gave it the prophetic meaning. But is it that simple? In Luke we saw Mary sitting at Jesus’ feet as one of his disciples, and given that John elaborates on the intimate relationship between Jesus and the three siblings, we can assume Mary was a disciple in the Johannine tradition as well. Jesus had been telling the disciples he was going to Jerusalem and would die there by the hands of the religious leaders and be raised on the third day--it is not unreasonable to

¹¹⁷ Cowles, 86-7.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 87.

¹¹⁹ See Raymond E. Brown, *The Gospel According to John*, vol. 29, The Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 1966), 454.

think the three siblings also heard Jesus' predictions of his future death. His male disciples had not listened to this teaching or understood that Jesus was going to Jerusalem to die. What if Mary got it? What if she had heard his predictions and she believed what Jesus said? He was going to Jerusalem to die. Her act of extravagant love was not solely one of gratitude, it was a symbolic prophetic act.¹²⁰ Mary could have seen what the others did not and prophesied what lay ahead for Jesus: the grave.¹²¹ The single woman who sat as a disciple at the feet of Jesus now anointed his feet, proclaiming what was ahead for him. As Jesus defended her right to be a disciple, he now defended her prophetic act, which prepared him for his death.

Martha's faith and understanding of Jesus are seen in the previous chapter. When Jesus arrived four days after Lazarus had been buried, Martha was the first to meet him. She stated her absolute conviction that Lazarus would not have died if Jesus had come sooner. Jesus assured her that Lazarus would be resurrected, and Martha voiced her belief in the resurrection of the last days. Jesus then said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26). Martha responded in faith, "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world" (v. 27). "Martha's statement in John is virtually identical to Peter's confession reported in the other three Gospels."¹²² Peter's confession does not appear in John; Martha's does. Martha's

¹²⁰ Owens, 145 who compares Mary's act to the symbolic acts of the Hebrew prophets.

¹²¹ Ibid., and Grenz with Kjesbo, 76.

¹²² Loren Cunningham and David Joel Hamilton, *Why Not Women? A Fresh Look at Scripture on Women in Missions, Ministry, and Leadership* (Seattle, WA: YWAM Publishing, 2000), 121. See also Grenz with Kjesbo, 75-6.

statement of faith also equals John's purpose for writing this gospel (see Jn. 20:30-31). In the Matthean version of Peter's confession, Jesus said his church would be built upon the rock of this confession of faith.¹²³ The foundational confession of the church was declared by both Martha and Peter. "Both understood who Jesus was," and both Martha and Peter declared the truth, which had been revealed to them by the Holy Spirit.¹²⁴ If we accept the foundational confession of the church from a married man, we must also accept the same confession of faith from a single woman. And if that confession of faith is part of Peter's qualification for spiritual leadership, shouldn't the same be true of Martha?¹²⁵

The Samaritan Woman

Mary and Martha are not the first women in John's Gospel who knew Jesus as the Messiah. One of the first women Jesus revealed himself to was the Samaritan woman at the well in chapter 4. In fact, in John's Gospel she was the first person to whom Jesus openly proclaimed himself as Messiah. The pious Jewish leader, Nicodemus, did not hear the words Jesus told this foreign woman when she stated her belief in the coming Messiah: "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (v. 26). This is also the longest private conversation Jesus had with anyone in a biblical account.¹²⁶

Verse 4 says that Jesus "had to go through Samaria." The ἔδει makes it clear this was a divine appointment; it was not geographically necessary for Jesus to go

¹²³ Cunningham and Hamilton, 121.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Ibid.

through Samaria, and Jewish travelers normally traveled around Samaria.¹²⁷ Jesus and his disciples entered a Samaritan village, and the disciples left to buy food while Jesus sat by the well because he was tired. A woman from the village came for water. Jesus did something that was a cultural taboo: he spoke to a woman in public, and not just a woman, but a Samaritan woman. A Jewish man would also assume her multiple divorces were due to her immorality. She was three times an outcast in Jewish thought. Jesus asked her for a drink of water. She was understandably shocked: a Jewish man was speaking to her, a Samaritan woman? He should not have wanted to share a vessel with her for drinking water since it would be considered unclean. She was right to be confused.

The conversation then proceeded to a discussion of living water versus the water in the well. The woman is just as confused over living water as Nicodemus was over being born again in the previous chapter.¹²⁸ Both the woman and Nicodemus were confused because Jesus was introducing them to new spiritual truths. Whereas Nicodemus never quite “gets” what Jesus was telling him in chapter 3, the woman did come to understand who Jesus was and what he was telling her.

Although the woman still was not sure what this living water was, she wanted it. When Jesus told her to go get her husband we find out this woman has had five husbands, and was now living with a man who was not her husband. As noted above Jewish men would have concluded only an immoral woman would have been divorced five times. There are at least two other reasons why this woman has had five husbands

¹²⁷ Raymond Brown, 169.

¹²⁸ I have heard preachers say that she was confused because she did not have the intelligence to keep up with a theological conversation.

(John 4 never says she was divorced). If she were five times divorced the reason could have been barrenness. They married, found out she couldn't have children, and divorced her to marry more fertile women. She also could be trapped by the Levirate marriage law.¹²⁹ Her five husbands could have been brothers she was supposed to produce an heir for. Either the family ran out of sons or the next son could have refused to marry her. She was living with a man now, which could have been the lesser of two evils: her only other choice after husband number five died or divorced her could have been prostitution. Regardless of why the woman had had five husbands the implication is still she is a woman who cannot keep a man.

After Jesus told the woman about her life, she knew he was a prophet. Then the woman asked what was probably the most pressing theological question of the Samaritans in the first century: where is the proper place of worship? The Samaritans were descended from the Israelite people who had not been deported in the exile and the other peoples who were imported to the region. They continued to worship Yahweh. Alexander the Great allowed the Samaritans to build a temple on Mt. Gerizim, which became a point of contention when the Jews returned and rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem. Tensions continued to degenerate until the temple on Mt. Gerizim was destroyed by the Jews in 128 B.C.¹³⁰ Both groups believed they were worshipping Yahweh and both believed they had the right place to worship Yahweh. The woman had met a prophet--someone who knew what has happened in her life, and one she was sure could answer the most pressing theological question of her heart and

¹²⁹ Gail R. O'Day, "John," *Women's Biblical Commentary*, exp. ed., eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998), 384.

¹³⁰ Green, McKnight and Marshall, 726-7 and Gerard Sloyan, *John*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1988), 52-3.

of the time.

Jesus did not accuse her of changing the subject; he answered her question. It did not matter where one worships God--it is how God is worshipped. There will no longer be limitations of geography in worshipping God for God is spirit, and he will be worshipped in spirit and truth. The woman stated her belief in the coming Messiah who would reveal all things to them. Jesus then proclaimed something to this unnamed, foreign woman that he did not reveal to Nicodemus, "I am he, the one who is speaking to you" (Jn. 4:26). The Samaritan woman was the first person Jesus revealed himself as Messiah to in the Gospel of John, and this is the first "I am" statement in the gospel as well.¹³¹ Why did Jesus reveal himself to this woman and not to Nicodemus? The woman was not expecting a political Messiah. The Samaritans were looking for the *ta'eb* or "restorer."¹³² The Samaritans were not looking for a political Messiah from the line of David; they were looking for a prophet like Moses who would restore the observance of the law of Moses as it should be.¹³³ Jesus could reveal himself as Messiah to her without worrying about the political misunderstandings that would have arisen in Judah.

The disciples returned with food and wondered why Jesus was speaking to a foreign woman in public. Meanwhile the woman went to her people and said, "Come and see a man who told me everything I have ever done! He cannot be the Messiah, can he?" (Jn. 4:28). She became the first evangelist in the gospel of John. She went and told her people about Jesus and brought them to him, so they could see and hear

¹³¹ Cunningham and Hamilton, 122.

¹³² Sloyan, 54.

¹³³ Ibid.

for themselves. Jesus never approached people “randomly or casually but as possible bearers of witness to him to whole populations.”¹³⁴ A foreign, single woman, who had five husbands and was now living with a man, was the one Jesus chose to bring a town in Samaria to him so that they too could say, “We have heard for ourselves, and we know that this is truly the Savior of the world” (Jn. 4:42).

Mary Magdalene

Near the beginning of John a woman proclaimed Christ to her town, and at the end of John another woman proclaimed the risen Christ to his disciples and other followers. Mary Magdalene “was a prominent disciple of Jesus who followed him in Galilee and to Jerusalem. She is always listed first in groups of named female disciples.”¹³⁵ Mary was one of the women Luke named in chapter 8 as, not only following Jesus, but serving him from her own means. She stood at the cross with the other woman and saw where Jesus was buried.

In all the Gospel accounts women were the first to the tomb Sunday morning, and they were the first to see the risen Christ and commanded to carry the good news to the disciples. In all four accounts different women are named, but one name is constant in all four gospels: Mary Magdalene. In John 20 she was the first to the tomb on Sunday morning, and the first person Christ revealed himself to. After Mary discovered the empty tomb she ran to where the disciples were staying and reported someone had removed Jesus from the tomb, and she did not know where they had put him. Peter and the beloved disciple ran to the tomb where the beloved disciple

¹³⁴ Ibid., 54.

¹³⁵ Green, McKnight and Marshall, 884.

stooped down and looked in, then Peter arrived and entered the tomb. Peter saw the linen wrappings and the head cloth, then the other disciple entered and saw the same thing. After seeing the linen and cloth the beloved disciple believed but did not understand because he did not realize the reality of the resurrection. Then Peter and the beloved disciple left.

Mary remained at the tomb weeping. She leaned down and looked in to see two angels who asked her why she was crying. She answered, “They have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid him” (Jn. 20:13). She then turned and saw Jesus but did not recognize him. Jesus asked her, “Whom are you looking for?” (v. 15). The first words Jesus said at the beginning of John were to the disciples of John: “What are looking for?” (Jn. 1:38). Looking for Jesus is “one of the marks of discipleship in John.”¹³⁶ The repetition of the question in this chapter “establishes continuity between Mary and the first disciples of Jesus.”¹³⁷ Mary still did not recognize Jesus and would not until he spoke her name. In something as simple and intimate as saying her name “the reality of the resurrection is revealed,”¹³⁸ and Mary became the first person to see the risen Christ.

Apparently she tried to hug him, but Jesus told her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet ascended to the Father” (v. 17). It is not as harsh as it sounds. The resurrection was real. Mary did not have to worry about Jesus disappearing. She did not need to cling to him to keep him where he was. She also could not cling to him because the relationship between Jesus and his disciples cannot remain as it was.

¹³⁶ O’Day, 389.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

¹³⁸ Ibid., 390.

Jesus will not remain on earth in physical form--he will ascend to the Father who will send the Spirit. Jesus told the disciples the night he was arrested the Spirit could not come to empower them and teach them until he had gone back to the Father (Jn. 14:26, 16:5-15). Things will not go back to how they were before the resurrection, and that is why Mary cannot cling to him.

Jesus then commissioned Mary to proclaim his resurrection: “Go to my brothers and say to them, ‘I am ascending to my Father and your Father, to my God and your God’” (v. 17). Mary obeyed. She returned to Jerusalem to proclaim, “‘I have seen the Lord’; and she told them that he had said these things to her” (v. 18). She was the first preacher of the good news of the resurrection to the same men who had just been at the tomb before Jesus appeared to Mary. In fact in all four gospel accounts Jesus appeared to women and commissioned them to go proclaim his resurrection to his male disciples. The tradition Christ appeared first to women was well established by the end of the second century when Celsus, a pagan critic, discounted the gospel and resurrection by saying an account given by a hysterical woman could not be trusted.¹³⁹ Origen responded by saying there was more than one woman who witnessed the risen Christ, and none of them were hysterical in the Gospels.¹⁴⁰

It is ironic given the low status of women in that day, Jesus chose to appear to them and that “the first Christian preachers of the Resurrection were not men, but women!”¹⁴¹ Jesus did not first appear to the “vicar” of the church--Peter, or even to

¹³⁹ Green, McKnight and Marshall, 883.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid., 883-4.

¹⁴¹ Cowles, 95.

the beloved disciple; the women who followed him and served him saw him first and received the central tenet of the Christian faith: “He is risen!”¹⁴² They were the first to proclaim the good news, or gospel, of the resurrection. Since Jesus just as easily could have appeared to Peter and the beloved disciple or to the disciples cowering behind locked doors, that he did appear to the women first can only mean this was by divine appointment and was a deliberate act on his part.¹⁴³ Women as well as men were credible witnesses to the gospel and were commissioned to preach it to all they came into contact with. . . which is what they did.

All of these women were single. As noted in chapter one, even the women who stood at the cross and then went to the tomb are identified by their sons, not their husbands. They were probably widows. If these women were connected to men, it was as a sister or mother, not a wife. The man their lives revolved around was Jesus. He was the one who raised them to the equal standing that was their right through creation. He restored them to their rightful place as daughters of Abraham and daughters of God. He healed them, taught them and spent time with them. He entrusted to them the greatest news humanity has ever heard: “He is risen!”

In this chapter we have seen four women who were followers of Christ and preachers of his words and resurrection: Mary and Martha, the Samaritan woman and Mary Magdalene. Mary learned at Jesus’ feet like the rest of his disciples. Martha made the same proclamation of faith the church is built on that Peter did. The Samaritan woman brought her village to Jesus. Mary Magdalene was the first to see

¹⁴² Scanzoni and Hardesty, 81.

¹⁴³ Cowles, 95 and Scanzoni and Hardesty, 80-1.

the risen Christ and proclaim the gospel of his resurrection. All of them were single, but that did not matter to Jesus. He did not require them to have husbands before he allowed them to minister. He only required that they follow and obey--and they did.

CHAPTER 6

WOMEN IN THE EARLY CHURCH

Before Jesus ascended to the Father he told his followers to wait in Jerusalem until the Holy Spirit came empowering them to continue building the kingdom of God on earth. They obeyed him. Acts 1:14 tells us the disciples and “certain women” including Mary, the mother of Jesus, waited in the upper room and prayed. In Acts 2 the Holy Spirit fell on both men and women, and both genders were empowered to proclaim the word of God on the day of Pentecost. Peter confirmed this when he quoted Joel in his sermon that day: “In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams” (Acts 2:17). As we have seen throughout this paper God has never discriminated between calling and empowering both men and women to lead his people and accomplish his plans on earth. This will not change with the coming of the new age. Now God’s Spirit would not be for the called few, but for everyone--all flesh, and both sons and daughters would prophesy, only now in greater numbers.

In Galatians 3:28 Paul proclaimed “there is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus.” In Christ every human-erected barrier comes down. Because Christ died for all and all are saved through grace there can no longer be superficial hierarchies of

race, class, gender, or marital status. In Ephesians 4:8 Paul told the church Christ had given them gifts. In verse 11 he tells us the gifts are “that some would be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, some pastors and teachers.” These gifts are given “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (v. 12). Paul never says some or all of these gifts are for men only. In fact, the New Testament goes on to describe women in these places of leadership within the Early Church.

Apostles

The meaning of ἀπόστολος in the New Testament is someone who has been sent, “and sent with full authority.”¹⁴⁴ It also denotes a “commissioned representative of a congregation,” and “bearers of the New Testament message.”¹⁴⁵ The term also referred to the first missionaries, especially those who were prominent, who were not among the original group of disciples.¹⁴⁶ In the New Testament an apostle could refer to one of the Twelve. It could also refer to all of those “who had accompanied the original twelve from the time that John baptized until Jesus ascended (Acts 1:21-22).”¹⁴⁷ This would include Barnabas, James the brother of the Lord, and Silvanus who were not among the Twelve. It would also include the women we saw in the previous chapter who followed Jesus: Mary Magdalene, Mary, mother of James; Mary, mother of Jesus; Joanna, and Salome.

¹⁴⁴ Karl Heinrich Rengstorf, “Apostolis,” *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 1, ed. Gerhard Kittel, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1964), 421.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 422.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ Spencer, 100.

There is a woman in the New Testament specifically named as an apostle: Junia. In Paul's personal greetings to the believers in Rome he tells them to "Greet Andronicus and Junia, my relatives who were in prison with me; they are prominent among the apostles, and they were in Christ before I was" (Rom. 16:7). In the Roman world, Junia was a common name for women.¹⁴⁸ Junia was assumed to be a woman by the early church fathers such as Origen and Jerome. In the fourth century John Chrysostom said of her: "Oh! how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle!"¹⁴⁹ Up until the thirteenth century when Aegidius of Rome referred to both Adronicus and Junia as "men,"¹⁵⁰ most commentators assumed Junia was a woman.¹⁵¹ Since then there have been many textual variations trying to turn Junia's name into a male form.¹⁵²

Another way that Junia's role as an apostle has been marginalized is by watering down the translation of "prominent among the apostles." Opponents of women in leadership positions have suggested Junia was only admired by the apostles, or she was well known to them.¹⁵³ She was not one of their number. The word normally translated "prominent" is ἐπίσημος. Its proper meaning is "a sign or mark upon," and is used to describe an inscription on money; "it implies selection *from* a

¹⁴⁸ Ibid., 101 and Grenz with Kjesbo, 94. Whereas what would be the male form of Junia "Junias" is completely unknown in the Roman world, and therefore it is very unlikely that is the form here, *ibid.* See also James D.G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 38a, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas TX: Waco Books, 1988), 894.

¹⁴⁹ John Chrysostom, "Homily on the Epistle of St. Paul the Apostle to the Romans XXXI" qtd., in Spencer, 101.

¹⁵⁰ Aegidius of Rome preferred the variant reading of "Julian." Spencer, 101.

¹⁵¹ Spencer, 101 and Grenz with Kjesbo, 95.

¹⁵² See Spencer 101-2 and Grenz with Kjesbo, 94-5.

¹⁵³ Spencer, 102.

group.”¹⁵⁴ Coupled with the preposition ἐν, which means “among” in the plural,¹⁵⁵ it is clear Adronicus and Junia are prominent or notable “from *among* the apostles.”¹⁵⁶

As apostles in Rome they were Paul’s counterparts. They apparently had witnessed part of Jesus’ ministry and his resurrection, and were sent by God and the church to proclaim this news in Rome. These two apostles “apparently laid the foundation for the churches”¹⁵⁷ in Rome, just as Paul had planted and laid the foundation for churches in Asia Minor and Eastern Europe. They would have done this through preaching the gospel and teaching the way of Christ. It is possible they were married and operated as a ministerial team like Priscilla and Aquila.¹⁵⁸ This does not change the fact that Junia was named as an apostle. Since there is no mention of any of the apostle’s wives being named “apostle” simply by being married to one, it is safe to assume Junia was an apostle because she functioned as one in the early church.

Prophets

As we saw in previous chapters female prophets who spoke God’s word and led in worship were part of Israel’s history and theology. The tradition continued through Anna in Luke 2 and Philip’s four unmarried daughters in Acts 21:9. From Paul’s correspondence with the Corinthian church we find women praying and prophesying during services was an accepted part of the worship service in the early

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Arnt and Gingrich, 258-9 who lists this use of ἐν under “to denote a rather close relation” (ibid).

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., see also Dunn, 895.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid.

¹⁵⁸ Grenz with Kjesbo, 96-7.

church. Paul does not condemn the women for taking an active part in the service, which would have included authoritative prophetic utterance of God's word. He only exhorts the women to do so in a manner that will not be scandalous to outsiders. If they are married, they are to keep their symbol of marriage on--their head was to be covered with a veil or worn up as was the custom for married women in that day. This way they would not be confused with the temple prostitutes that were numerous in Corinth due to the temple of Aphrodite-Melainis.¹⁵⁹ The temple prostitutes were identified by wearing their hair loose or shaving it off. Christian women were not to bring shame onto their husbands by looking like prostitutes, but were to keep their "wedding rings" on, and prophesy and pray in a socially acceptable manner.

Whether widowed as Anna, never married as Philip's daughters or married as some of the Corinthian women were, Christian women continued the ancient tradition of speaking God's word to his people.

Teachers

The primary female teacher in the New Testament is Priscilla. It is understandable that there are not many women teachers given the predominant attitudes of both the Jewish and Roman worlds toward women receiving formal education; few women had the training needed to be able to teach and educate.¹⁶⁰ Priscilla was one of those women. Both Paul and Luke break with the customary form of addressing couples by citing Priscilla's name first four out of six times she and her husband Aquila are mentioned in Acts and the Pauline epistles (Acts 18:18, 26; Rom.

¹⁵⁹ Patricia Gundry, *Woman Be Free!* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1977), 65-66 qtd. in Spencer, 105.

¹⁶⁰ Spencer, 106.

16:3; 2 Tim. 4:19).¹⁶¹ This could mean that either Priscilla's social rank was higher than Aquila's, or she was the more prominent leader within the early church.¹⁶²

Priscilla's role as teacher is most clearly seen in Acts 18:24-28 where she and Aquila instructed Apollos and "explained the Way of God to him more accurately" (v. 26) because "he knew only the baptism of John" (v. 25). Again that Priscilla's name comes first is an indicator she was the primary instructor.¹⁶³ The verb ἐκτίθημι means to "explain, set forth."¹⁶⁴ More broadly it means "I expound, set forth, declare, exhibit publicly, explain by means of abstraction."¹⁶⁵ This word is not used to mean a simple explanation, "rather, it connotes a public declaration and exposition."¹⁶⁶ This is the same word Luke used to describe Peter defending himself in Acts 11:4, and Paul's explanation of the gospel to the Jews who daily came to listen to him while he was a prisoner in Rome (Acts 28:23).¹⁶⁷ This was not informal teaching or unofficial guidance;¹⁶⁸ it was teaching in the proper sense of the word in order to equip believers and build up the body of Christ, so that it would grow into maturity. That this was instruction of the highest level is intimated by the fact Apollos himself was "well-versed in the scriptures" (18:24).

¹⁶¹ Grenz with Kjesbo, 82.

¹⁶² Ibid. See also Dunn, 892.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Arnt and Gingrich, 245.

¹⁶⁵ Henry George Liddel and Robert Scott, *A Greek-English Lexicon*, eds. Henry S. Jones and Roderick McKenzie, 9th ed. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1968), 522 qtd. in Spencer, 107.

¹⁶⁶ Spencer, 107.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Grenz with Kjesbo, 83 who note this is how complementarians interpret this passage.

Later in his epistle to the Romans the first people Paul personally greets are Priscilla and Aquila “who work with me in Christ Jesus” (v. 3), which suggests their instruction of Apollos was not an isolated event. Their home was one of the house churches in Rome where believers met for worship and instruction. Again Priscilla’s name comes first suggesting she might have been the “pastor” of this congregation. Although Priscilla and Aquila served in ministry together it is obvious Priscilla was a leader and teacher in her own right. As John Chrysostom said of her in the fourth century A.D.:

This too is worthy of inquiry, why, as he addressed them, Paul has placed Priscilla before her husband. For he did not say, “Greet Aquila and Priscilla,” but “*Priscilla and Aquila.*” He does not do this without a reason, but he seems to me to acknowledge a greater godliness for her than for her husband. What I said is not guess-work, because it is possible to learn this from the Book of Acts. [Priscilla] took Apollos, an eloquent man and powerful in the Scriptures, but knowing only the baptism of John; and she instructed him in the way of the Lord and made him a teacher brought to completion (Acts 18:24-25).¹⁶⁹

For far too long Priscilla’s gifts and ministry have been marginalized by the church. If a man like Chrysostom, who normally is not known for positive statements toward women, can recognize Priscilla as a leader and teacher in the early church, then why can’t we?¹⁷⁰

We have seen from the examples of Junia, the female prophets, and Priscilla that women did function as apostles, prophets and teachers in the early church the same way men did. That their ministries are so casually mentioned, and there is no question of the validity of what they were doing, shows the early church did not

¹⁶⁹ John Chrysostom, “First Homily on the Greeting to Priscilla and Aquila,” trans. by Catherine Clark Kroeger, *Priscilla Papers* 5.3 (Summer 1991), 18 qtd. in Cunningham and Hamilton, 145.

¹⁷⁰ Cunningham and Hamilton, 145.

consider it strange or against God’s created order for women to hold these positions. Women operated in four other leadership roles I would like to look at next: elder, co-worker, church overseer, and minister.

Elders

Titus 2:3 says, “Likewise, tell the older women to be reverent in behavior, not to be slanderers or slaves to drink; they are to teach what is good.” The Greek word normally translated “older women” is *πρεσβυτιζ'*, the feminine form of the noun normally translated as “elder” when it is describing a man.¹⁷¹ It is very likely these women are not “older women” but female elders. They would have been older since the Jews would not consider someone to be an elder until the age of 60. They are told in the verse “to teach what is good.” Although the instruction goes on to tell them to train the younger women to love their husbands and children, there is no reason to believe younger women are the only ones in Titus’ congregation they taught.

In 1 Timothy 5:1-2 *πρεσβύτερος* is used as an adjective for both men and women and is translated as “older man” and “older women.” Since this section is dealing with the established order of ministry within the church, as seen in the instructions of enrolling widows, these two groups could be the elders.¹⁷² In verse 17 the plural form, *προεστῶτες*, is used of those who preach and teach in the church, and Paul tells Timothy they are worthy of double honor. There is no reason to believe this group was comprised of only men, especially since Paul used both the masculine and feminine form of the adjective a few verses earlier (1 Tim. 5:1-2).

¹⁷¹ Spencer, 107.

¹⁷² Scanzoni and Hardesty, 89.

It appears women functioned as elders in the church who taught and preached to the younger generation. Since these women were older, some of them were probably widows.

Coworkers

There are a great number of people whom Paul called co-workers with him in the gospel. Coworkers were those Paul considered to be colleagues.¹⁷³ These coworkers ministered in a variety of ways: they helped Paul compose his letters and carried them to the churches; they were sent by Paul to encourage and instruct congregations, and they also hosted churches in their homes.¹⁷⁴ They worked with Paul in preaching and teaching the gospel and were often itinerant workers in different churches.¹⁷⁵ It is obvious they possessed authority in Paul's eyes and the eyes of the early church. Among those named as Paul's coworkers are Timothy, Silas, Apollos, Luke, Epaphras, Mark and Titus. Woman named as coworkers include Priscilla, Euodia and Syntyche.

As we have seen, Priscilla and her husband worked side by side with Paul and traveled with him on occasion. They instructed Apollos and hosted various churches in their homes wherever they lived.

Euodia and Syntyche are named as Paul's coworkers in Philippians 4:2-3 where he says, "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to be of the same mind in the

¹⁷³ Spencer, 118-9.

¹⁷⁴ Grenz with Kjesbo, 84.

¹⁷⁵ E. Earle Ellis, *Prophecy and Hermeneutic in Early Christianity: New Testament Essays* (Tübingen: J.C.B. Mohr, 1978), 6-7.

Lord. Yes, and I ask you also, my loyal companion, help these women, for they have struggled beside me in the work of the gospel, together with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.” It is obvious these two women played an active and important role in the churches of Philippi, and it is very possible each opened her home for different congregations to meet and worship in.¹⁷⁶

Whatever was dividing them was causing enough disruption for Paul to make a personal appeal for the church to do everything they could to reconcile these two women.

The reason is not for peace alone. Paul respected and cared for these women because they “struggled beside me in the work of the gospel.” συλλαμβάνω literally means to fight and strain, or contend as a gladiator does in the arena or an athlete does in a competition.¹⁷⁷ It implies a united effort to achieve victory.¹⁷⁸ They worked side by side with Paul in making the gospel known in Philippi. This may have included actively preaching and teaching the gospel side by side with Paul. Regardless of their precise ministry and role in Philippi, Paul regarded them as equals who had worked just as hard as he did in establishing the church and the gospel in Philippi.

Church Overseer

Church overseers were what we traditionally think of as a pastor, and they were normally the person or people who opened their homes for believers to meet for

¹⁷⁶ Gerald F. Hawthorne, *Philippians*, vol. 43, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1983), 179.

¹⁷⁷ Grenz with Kjesbo, 84 and Hawthorne, 180.

¹⁷⁸ Ibid.

hearing God’s word and worship. Women who were overseers include Priscilla, Phoebe, Euodia, Syntyche, and possibly John Mark’s mother, Chloe, Lydia, and Nympha.¹⁷⁹ The church overseer I would like to focus on is the “Elect Lady” of 2 John.

John’s second epistle is addressed “The elder to the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth,” (v. 1). Most of the debate focuses on who the elect lady is. Is she the overseer of the church or is “elect lady” a metaphor for the church? It would be redundant to address the church twice as “elect lady and her children.” In both 1 and 2 John, “the elder” uses “children” to designate the church he is writing to (1 Jn. 2:1). “Elect lady” is singular and “children” is plural, also denoting they are referring to different set(s) of people. In 3 John the almost identical greeting is given as 2 John: “The elder to the beloved Gaius, whom I love in truth” (v. 1). Given the uniformity of John’s writing the elect lady then would be the overseer of the church that most likely met in her house.

The phrase “elect lady” also points to this. “Lady” is used to translate the Greek word κυρία. Its male counterpart is κύριος, which is translated as “lord” or “master,” and is the word used to describe Jesus as Lord. The feminine form κυρία is only found here and in verse five of 2 John in the New Testament.¹⁸⁰ The male form denotes the head of the household, a guardian, or trustee; people who own and oversee slaves are also called κύριος.¹⁸¹ This woman is in a place of authority--she is probably

¹⁷⁹ Spencer, 108.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid., 109.

¹⁸¹ Ibid., see Gal. 4:1 where Paul uses the word to describe someone who owns an estate and is a guardian or overseer, *ibid.*

both the head of her household, and the overseer of a congregation that met there.¹⁸²

She is not only a lady with authority but she is ἐκλεκτός; she has been called or chosen for her position of authority. Spencer gives “elect lady” an alternate translation: “the woman chosen to be master.”¹⁸³ If the elect lady was married then we see again her role as a leader in the early church did not derive from her husband. She alone is called “master” and “chosen,” and she, along with the church, is given instructions to safeguard against false teachings.

Another woman who may have been a church overseer is Lydia. In Acts 16:11-15 Paul and the company he was traveling with arrive in Philippi. Because there was no synagogue there they decided to go to the river on the Sabbath where there was a place of prayer. Lydia was at the river. She was “a worshiper of God” (v. 14), and listened to Paul’s teachings. In fact, we are told “the Lord opened her heart to listen eagerly to what was said by Paul” (v. 14). In the next verse she and her household were baptized and she urged Paul and his travelers to stay in her house. She was the first convert to Christianity in Europe.

Lydia was a businesswoman, “a dealer of purple cloth” from Thyatira (v. 14). Purple dye, “a symbol of power and honor,” was the most expensive and sought after dye in the Roman world, and Thyatira was the capital of the industry, renowned for its purple dyes.¹⁸⁴ One had to have plenty of capital to deal in purple dye and the making of purple garments for sale. Lydia was a career woman, rich and the head of her household. Acts 16:40 implies by the end of Paul’s stay in Philippi a new church was

¹⁸² Ibid., and Grenz with Kjesbo 91.

¹⁸³ Spencer 109.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid., 112.

meeting in Lydia's home. All of this could mean Lydia was the overseer of the first church plant in Europe.

Minister and Patron

“I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well” (Rom. 16:1-2). Another woman Paul highly commended and respected is Phoebe. She is a “sister,” “deacon,” and “benefactor” to the church at Cenchreae as well as a sister and benefactor to Paul.

The odd thing about *διάκονος* being used to describe Phoebe is that it is the masculine form used to describe a woman. Most versions translate it as “servant,” whereas, when it is used of men it is translated as “deacon.” Although one of the meanings of *διάκονος* can be serving another's physical needs for food and shelter, that it is paired with “of the church of Cenchreae” makes it unlikely this is the meaning Paul is using here. This is the only place in the New Testament where *διάκονος* is followed by a specific congregation in a genitive construct.¹⁸⁵ This is the only place linking a specific person's ministry with a specific church. This seems to indicate Phoebe served as a deacon in the church at Cenchreae.

Paul uses another word to describe Phoebe: *προστάτις*. This is the only occurrence of the word in the New Testament.¹⁸⁶ It is also another word that is translated in such a way its main meaning is not obvious in the translation. The

¹⁸⁵ Grenz with Kjesbo, 88.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, 89.

normal translation is “helper” (RSV and NASB) or someone who has helped (NIV). But the basic and most obvious translation of the word is patron or benefactor, and women in this role are well attested in the Roman world.¹⁸⁷ Phoebe was likely another wealthy woman who served the church out of her means as the women in Luke 8 served Jesus out of theirs.

Spencer has also suggested that προστάτις could be derived from the root verb προΐστημι, which means to “to stand, place before or over,” or “to help by ruling.”¹⁸⁸ The times the verb appears in the New Testament it has the meaning of ruling or governing (Rom. 12:8; 1 Thes. 5:12-13), and in the Pastoral Epistles both bishops and deacons were to govern their households well.¹⁸⁹ In other Greek sources, such as Josephus, the masculine form of προστάτις is used to describe rulers and leaders like Moses, Herod, and Agrippa.¹⁹⁰ This word could mean that Phoebe was a ruler or another overseer in the church.

Phoebe was another independent woman who had her own means, and served the church in a leadership role. Again we see if she was married, her husband was not mentioned, and she was probably single. Paul comes very close to commanding churches he had no hand in planting, and Christians, most of whom had never met him, to welcome her and provide anything she needed because she was both a deacon and a benefactor/ruler in the church, and not only of the church, but Paul himself had also benefited from her generous rule.

¹⁸⁷ Dunn 888.

¹⁸⁸ Spencer, 115.

¹⁸⁹ Ibid.

¹⁹⁰ Ibid., 116.

The women we end with in the New Testament continued the tradition of being leaders among God's people through their obedience to God and love for others. Lydia, Phoebe, and Philip's four daughters were not married. Priscilla and Aquila ministered together, but Priscilla seems to be the dominant of the two. If Junia was married to Adronicus, it did not affect her calling as an apostle, but she stood side-by-side with her husband in ministry. Again we see none of their ministries was dependent on being married or connected with what their husbands did. Once again their ministries and roles as leaders in the early church were dependent on obedience to the God who called them to proclaim the gospel in the cities and world.

Miriam started a rich heritage when she led the children of Israel in worship and taught them a liturgy that would define them as the people of God. Deborah and Jael carried on this ministry through their roles as judge, prophet, and priest along with Zipporah and Huldah. The women in Jesus' life were active disciples who learned at the Master's feet and served him out of their own means. They were also the first witnesses of the resurrection and the first to proclaim the gospel that would become the definitive liturgy of the church, "He is risen!" Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, and the elect lady opened their doors to the early church and provided a place for preaching, teaching and worshipping; they also provided leadership by overseeing and pastoring these churches. Euodia and Syntyche were coworkers with Paul and instrumental enough that their disagreement sent reverberations through the congregations of Philippi. Both Lydia and Phoebe were wealthy, independent women who chose to serve the church with their means, and Junia was prominent among the apostles.

God has always called women to serve him in leadership positions regardless

of their marital status or what their husbands did. As we have seen through both the Old and New Testaments all he required of them was to follow him and obey.

CHAPTER 7

PAUL AND SINGLENESS

“And the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband” (1 Cor. 7:34). 1 Corinthians 7 begins the part of the epistle in which Paul answers questions from the congregations in Corinth. This chapter has to do with marriage and celibacy. Apparently in Corinth it was being taught that it was better to remain celibate, and the celibate life would make one more holy. In the first 16 verses, Paul counsels those who are married to remain so--it is not a sin, and it does not make one less holy. In fact, marriage is a divinely sanctioned union and has been from the beginning. In verses 17-24 Paul tells the Corinthians to be content with the status they were called in; whether it be Jew, Gentile, slave, free, married or single. A person’s status has nothing to do with their relationship with God--they can serve God regardless of what their social status and standing are, and they are to serve God in that status and standing.¹⁹¹ The rest of the chapter addresses those who are single and whether or not they should marry.

Paul begins by stating, “I have no command of the Lord, but I give my opinion as one who by the Lord’s mercy is trustworthy” (v. 25). What he is about to say is

¹⁹¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary of the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), 321.

advice and not a commandment from the Lord, but it is advice from one of the apostles, and Paul believes his advice to be trustworthy and accurate. In verse 26 he again gives counsel “to remain as you are.” But Paul cites a different motivation and reason for remaining single than some of the Corinthians are espousing. The Corinthians are concerned with standing and making ascetic practices a means of attaining a higher standing in the community and before God. Paul casts his advice for remaining single in eschatological terms: “I think that, in view of the impending crisis, it is well for you to remain as you are” (v. 26). This theme runs through this section. Other reasons Paul gives for remaining single are “the appointed time has grown short,” (v. 29) and “the present form of this world is passing away” (v. 31). Paul recasts the motivation for remaining single in terms of living in the last days instead of asceticism.

It is at this point many Protestants have discounted Paul’s counsel to singles. They believe “this impending crisis,” and the other phrases Paul used show Paul believed the second coming of Christ was near, and that was why the Corinthian believers should remain as they were. We now know the second coming was not right around the corner as Paul supposedly believed, so we can take these verses with a grain of salt. Coupled with the Protestant response to Catholic asceticism and required celibacy for the priesthood, many modern Protestants have taken the opposite view of the Corinthians and believe marriage is the preferred and more mature state to live in.

Was Paul’s eschatology so narrowly defined as to only include the second coming or *parousia*? And is the only suffering Christians face in the world the suffering and tribulation that would come before Christ’s return? For Paul the

Christian life was to be eschatological. The death and resurrection of Christ are the two eschatological events that have taken place in history.¹⁹² The final consummation of the eschatological age, which began with the resurrection, will happen when Christ returns. Because Christians now live in the time between these two events, we now live in an age and world that are passing away. This was true of Paul's time, and is even more so in our time. For Paul, because Christ has already inaugurated the age to come through his resurrection, Christians now live in the new age although they still live in this present world.¹⁹³ They live "in a tension of experienced and anticipated eschatology."¹⁹⁴

There are two ways to interpret Paul's three eschatological phrases in 7:25-35: first "Paul is here saying that the end of the world is imminent," or "in a period when the old regime is beginning to disintegrate, Christians must expect some unpleasant death pangs."¹⁹⁵ Which way one interprets these phrases depends on one's definition of "world" in verse 31. If we take it to mean the old order of things, which is the meaning of "world" in most of Paul's writings, then Paul is instructing the Corinthians not to be concerned with their present status or the present state because it was passing away.¹⁹⁶ Paul wanted the Corinthian Christians "to be free from anxieties" (v. 32) that would result from marriage while living in a time when an old order was passing and a new one was being born. He also wanted them to be free to serve the Lord, but in

¹⁹² George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed., (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998, 1974), 596.

¹⁹³ Ibid.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 597.

¹⁹⁵ G. B. Caird, *New Testament Theology*, ed., L.D. Hurst, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 253.

¹⁹⁶

Ibid.

stating his reasons for them to remain single he never specifically mentioned the *parousia*.¹⁹⁷

“The impending crisis” can also be translated as “the present crisis.”¹⁹⁸ When Paul uses ἐνίστημι in his other letters it describes something that is happening in the present.¹⁹⁹ What is “the present crisis” that Paul alluded to here? Since this is in an eschatological context, it probably refers to the suffering of the church. For Paul the end has begun, and “the present form of this world is passing away.” Christians are now living their lives in the new age as well as in this dying age. Since Christians are in the world, but not of the world, until the final consummation happens, the community of faith can expect troubles, distresses, and crises in their lives.²⁰⁰

The word for crisis, ἀνάγκη, can also be translated as “necessity” or “urgency.”²⁰¹ This is the same word Paul used in 1 Corinthians 9:16 when he said, “for an obligation is laid on me, and woe to me if I do not proclaim the gospel!” Paul’s “obligation,” his ἀνάγκη, was to “proclaim the gospel.” The “present necessity” of the Corinthians and every Christian is to “proclaim the gospel,” and in light of the urgency of the task at hand, it is better to remain single, so as to obey the Great Commission.²⁰²

Another reason Paul gave the Corinthian believers to remain in the state they

¹⁹⁷ Ibid., 254.

¹⁹⁸ Fee, 328-9.

¹⁹⁹ Fee, 329.

²⁰⁰ Fee, 330.

²⁰¹ Richard B. Hays, *First Corinthians*, Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching, (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1997), 129.

²⁰² Ibid.

were in is because “the appointed time has grown short” (v. 29). Again many people have taken this as Paul’s belief in the imminent return of Christ. Because of the eschatological events of the crucifixion and resurrection we now know the future God has in store for his people and this world.²⁰³ We know we are living in the last days because of Christ and the pouring out of the Holy Spirit on all people. This does not mean “the final consummation is imminent,” but the future has been set into motion by the Christ event and Pentecost, so now the end is in view.²⁰⁴ The time is short, not because the future consummation is imminent, but because we know the final consummation is nearer than it was before Christ, and it is nearer now than in the days of the early church. This works well with “the present necessity,” and makes it more urgent for the Corinthians’ first priority to be the proclamation of the gospel. The end is in view, and the time is short, so the gospel must be proclaimed in this intermittent time between the world that is passing away and the age which has come and is coming.

Although Christians live in the world they are not to live by the world’s standards nor be concerned with worldly status as seen in verses 29-31:

I mean, brothers and sisters, the appointed time has grown short; from now on, let even those who have wives be as though they had none, and those who mourn as though they were not mourning, and those who rejoice as though they were not rejoicing, and those who buy as though they had no possessions, and those who deal with the world as though they had no dealings with it. For the present form of this world is passing away.

Because the present world is passing away, Christians are not to be concerned with their standing in the world. It matters not if one is married or single, mourning or

²⁰³ Fee, 338-9.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 339.

rejoicing, rich or poor. None of these states has merit in God's eyes, and one is not above the other. So although Paul does endorse the Corinthian view that being single is preferable to marriage, it is not for reasons of "spiritual status"; it is because in the present time with the distresses that accompany Christians living in two worlds, there will be trouble enough without adding marriage on top of the rest. Fee notes these are remarkable words "from a Jewish man, in whose culture marriage was not only normal but in some cases viewed as next to obligatory."²⁰⁵

In verses 32-35 Paul gives practical reasons for the unmarried to remain unmarried: they can better serve the Lord. Paul prefaces his comments with "I want you to be free from anxieties" (v. 32). He does not want to burden the Corinthians with needless worries as those who were pushing an ascetic lifestyle on them. He wants them to be free to serve the Lord. He does believe this is more easily done if one is single because one's loyalties are not divided.

The NRSV translates the cognates ἀμέριμος and μεριμνάω as "anxieties" and "anxious." The NASB picks up on another meaning these two words have: "concern." This captures the aspect of where our attention is focused. Fee says these cognates also can be translated "cares for."²⁰⁶ In this context the words do not mean what we are worried about as much as they point to where our attention is focused. A married man cares for both his wife and for "the affairs of the world" (v. 33), and his interests are divided. A single man's only concern is on "the affairs of the Lord, how to please the Lord" (v. 32). Because of the present distresses and because the time is short, the single man can better serve the Lord because his interests and time are not

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 332.

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 344.

divided.

Likewise, “the unmarried woman and the virgin are anxious about the affairs of the Lord, so that they may be holy in body and spirit; but the married woman is anxious about the affairs of the world, how to please her husband. I say this for your own benefit, not to put any restraint upon you, but to promote good order and unhindered devotion to the Lord” (vv. 34-35). Again this sounds strange coming from a Jew and a man of that time. As we have seen, a woman’s sole purpose in Judaism and within the Roman world was to be a wife and mother. For Paul to say that being single in order to serve the Lord is as valid for women as it is for men is as revolutionary as Jesus letting women learn at his feet instead of confining them to the kitchen. Once more we see a woman’s sole purpose is not to be a wife and mother; her primary roles are not confined to being a homemaker; her “calling” is not to be “a good little wife.” Her calling is to do the work of the Lord, regardless of her marital status. Just as a married man’s interests are divided, so are a married woman’s. The married woman cares for both “the affairs of the Lord,” and “the affairs of the world, how to please her husband” (v. 34). Marriage does not exempt her from serving the Lord; it only divides her interests. The single woman’s interests are not divided--she cares for “the affairs of the Lord, so that [she] may be holy in body and spirit” (v. 34). The single woman can so dedicate herself to the Lord she only cares about reflecting him in every area of her life through holy living.

Although Paul does think single life is preferable to marriage, he does not set one above the other. He makes it clear at the beginning of this pericope that this is not a commandment, but it is trustworthy advice from one of the apostles and not to be

taken lightly. He makes sure the Corinthians know celibacy is his personal preference. His reasons for preferring celibacy are practical: there will be less distress and the single person can better serve God because his or her interests are not divided. Because the time is short and there is an urgency to preach the gospel, Christians should be more concerned with their calling to proclaim Christ than with their social status. This is why Paul tells the Corinthian believers to remain in the state they were called in. They were not to worry about the worldly status symbols and lifestyles; they were only to be concerned with living the Christian life where they were at because God was with them there.

In Paul's eyes both marriage and celibacy are valid lifestyles for the Christian. One is not above the other, and one is not better than the other. Both extremes have been seen in the church. At one time only celibates could be holy people. Now in Protestantism we see marriage is considered the better and "holier" lifestyle. Paul told the Corinthians either extreme is wrong. "There is more than one way to live a holy life. A marriage with full and mutual sexual activity is holy (7:14-15), and celibate life is holy too (7:34)."²⁰⁷

There is also more than one way to minister. Paul's foundational argument for staying single is to serve the Lord better. Single women are better able to serve the Lord because they do not have to divide their time between family and their calling. As we have seen in the previous chapters a woman's calling is not dependent on being married or marrying a man in whose calling she shares. We have seen throughout the Bible that God has called and used women to lead his people, and outside of Priscilla

²⁰⁷ Jouette M. Bassler, "1 Corinthians," *Women's Bible Commentary*, exp. ed., eds. Carol A. Newsom and Sharon H. Ringe (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Know Press, 1998), 416.

and Aquila,²⁰⁸ there is no mention of the woman's husband having a role in her ministry. Now we see Paul believed single Christians are better able to serve the Lord because they do not have divided interests.

Instead of viewing the single seasons in a woman's life as purgatory until she weds, we should be viewing it as a time when she purposefully, and with undivided interest, works to serve the Lord and be concerned with his affairs. Instead of viewing a single woman in a leadership position as "biding her time" until "Mr. Right" comes along, the church should be encouraging her to use this time in her life to devote to the Lord's work while she is still free from the cares of a husband and children.

What wonderful gifts and talents we are wasting because we are restricting women to the false teaching that their sole purpose in life is to be wives and mothers! Yes, that is a part of most women's lives and those are important roles, but as with men, those are not the only roles in a woman's life. As a man can have a calling outside of "father" and "husband," so a woman can have a calling outside of the roles of "mother" and "wife."

Paul's main concern was that Christians do not let the social statuses of the world make us think there are "holier" lifestyles than others. God is with those who are single and those who are married. The Holy Spirit indwells both the celibates and the married. Christ died for all--single and married. One's marital status, financial standing or social standing is not what is important in a believer's life. God is the one who makes us holy and who calls us from all walks of life to build his kingdom. We are dependent on him alone for holiness, contentment and purpose.

²⁰⁸ Possibly Adronicus and Junia were another ministerial couple. See ch. 6.

CHAPTER 8

SUMMARY AND CALL TO REPENTANCE

This study has attempted to show women are called to ministry in their own right. They do not have to be married or in relation to a husband's ministry in order to serve in a leadership position within the church. This study has tried to give an overall Biblical perspective beginning with the creation of human beings as equals then looking at women leaders throughout the Bible, and finishing with Paul's counsel that staying single was a valid choice in order to serve God in the last days.

Summary

In Genesis 1-2 we saw man and woman were both created in the image of God. Both were given the commands to multiply and subdue the earth. We looked at Genesis 2 to determine whether woman was created solely to be a wife and subordinate to the man, or if she was created as an autonomous human being, equal to the man in both standing and role. We established woman was created an equal--a power equal to him, and gender roles were not established in this creation account. When the man called the woman, "woman" he was not naming her as seen from the absence of the naming formula, but was recognizing finally there was another who corresponded to him--a power equal to him. Gender roles happened as a result of the Fall when both the man and the woman disobeyed the only command God gave them.

The woman's subordinate condition was a result of disobedience and not God-ordained in creation.

In the Old Testament we looked at women who functioned as leaders. Deborah was a judge and prophet. Miriam was a prophet and worship leader. Jael and Zipporah acted in priestly roles. Huldah was the prophet the king sent the high priest to in order to verify the scroll found in the temple was indeed God's word. Zipporah and Huldah were married, but Huldah's husband was not a prophet and she did not derive her calling or her authority from him. Zipporah's priestly action of sacrifice saved her husband and son. It is debatable if Deborah and Jael were married. If not, then God had no qualms about using single women to lead his people into war and punish his enemies. If they were, again we see their power and authority did not derive from their husbands (who play no part in these stories), but from the God who called them. Scripture never tell us if Miriam was married; she was a leader with her brothers during the wilderness wanderings. She began the tradition of dancing to the Lord and re-enacted Israel's defining moment as the people of God. It was a re-enactment that would become a liturgical tradition in Israel and call future generations to remember what God had done and call them into a relationship of obedience with him.

In the New Testament we saw how Jesus ignored the accepted gender roles of his day for women and treated women as the equals they were created to be. They were among his disciples, he taught them, and he sent them to proclaim his resurrection. We saw from Luke a group of women followed Jesus serving him out of their means. Jesus threw every convention regarding women out the window when he

allowed Mary to sit at his feet and train with his male disciples and began a conversation with a Samaritan woman in public. The Samaritan woman became the first evangelist and the first in John's Gospel to whom Jesus revealed his identity as Messiah. We saw Martha's confession of faith in Jesus as the Christ that mirrors Peter's confession in the Synoptic Gospels: a confession that is the bedrock of the church. We also saw Mary Magdalene, the first to see the risen Savior, and the first to proclaim the gospel of the resurrection.

In the early church we saw God poured out his Spirit on both sons and daughters, and the daughters were apostles, prophets, teachers, coworkers, and overseers as were their brothers. Junia is the only named female apostle in the New Testament. Philip's four unmarried daughters carried on the prophetic tradition Miriam began. Priscilla is a teacher *par excellence* in the New Testament who also co-pastored with her husband congregations that met in their home. Lydia and Phoebe were women of wealth and power. They were rulers of their households and women who used their talents, money and power to further God's kingdom. The elect lady of 2 John was another woman of means who opened her doors to the church and trained them against the false doctrines of the day. Priscilla is the only one we know who was married, but she takes precedence over her husband, which points to her being the dominant leader of the two in the church. The others we assume were not married. If they were, we expect to see their husbands' names since that is how women were normally identified in that day. God's Spirit fell on single women who were anomalies in their day. Lydia, Phoebe and the elect lady were women of means who ran their households and stood on their own in a world that said women were best kept

in the house being good little wives. Against her culture Lydia ran her own business and managed her home as well. Her house became the meeting place of the first church established in Europe, and she was probably its first pastor. Phoebe was a wealthy woman known for her generosity and leadership skills in the church of Cenchreae, and she was highly endorsed by Paul to the Roman believers. They were uncommon women at a time when women were considered to be nothing more than property.

Paul, contrary to today's belief that marriage and motherhood are the primary callings of a woman, states even for women, it is better to remain single to serve the Lord. The present necessity of proclaiming the gospel and the shortness of the days due to the death and resurrection of Christ call for all to be wholly devoted in serving the Lord. Since this present age is passing away and this causes much trouble, it is better to remain in the state one was called, which includes celibacy, than to ask for more trouble than is already happening. Although marriage is not a sin, one's loyalties are divided between the Lord and family, which hampers service. This is especially true of women on whom the largest responsibilities of keeping the home and taking care of the children normally fall. Single women are much more able to serve the Lord. They do not have divided loyalties, and they can focus more of their time and energy on serving God and building his kingdom.

Call to Repentance

So why today do we insist on marrying women off as soon as possible? Why don't we take advantage of the time before women become divided by having a

husband and children, and encourage them to seek out ways to serve the Lord purposefully? For those women who believe that marriage is not for them, why do we marginalize their belief by patting them on the head and saying, “You’ll change your mind when you meet Mr. Right, dearie”? Why do we treat them like three year olds instead of acknowledging that God might call them to remain single so they can better serve him? Why is that not even an option in today’s evangelical church?

This attitude should permeate our belief about single women in ministry all the more. Single women whom God has called into leadership positions can fully devote their time to their calling. They do not have the distractions of balancing their calling with a family. They have more time to devote to building God’s kingdom and proclaiming his word through various ministries of the church. It seems a waste for the church not to recognize the potential of the single women in its ranks.

The Church of the Nazarene has a strong tradition of ordaining women. The church has recognized that God has poured out his Spirit on both sons and daughters. In the early decades of our denomination women were ordained as pastors, evangelists and deacons. This culminated in the 1930s and 1940s when 30 percent to 40 percent of ordained ministers were women.²⁰⁹ Unfortunately, this trend would not continue. We would forget our strong egalitarian roots and let the fundamentalist wave with its backlash against modern feminism inform our thinking on women in ministry more than the Bible or our own tradition.

In their books C.S. Cowles and Rebecca Laird have shown how women in the Church of the Nazarene have not only been utilized in leadership positions, but have

²⁰⁹ Cowles, 22.

been rejected in the positions of authority that it states we have.²¹⁰ Laird's book *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation* looks at the women who were ordained and strong leaders in the early days of the Church of the Nazarene. Both she and Cowles note when fundamentalism with its emphasis on biblical literalism and traditional gender roles started to dominate evangelicalism is when the numbers of women in ordained roles of pastor and evangelist began to decline.

This shows up in an interesting way in the denominational publication *Come Ye Apart*. One of my assignments last year was reading through the past editions of the devotional for a project at work.²¹¹ Before the 1950s almost all of the women who wrote for the publication were ordained elders, deacons, pastors or evangelists. After 1950 most of the women who wrote for the publication were pastor's wives.²¹² This trend continued for over 20 years before another ordained female leader wrote again. One of the denomination's most influential publications illustrates how the fundamentalist belief that a woman's place was in the home and not the pulpit was accepted as normal by the denomination. The statistics that record the gradual decline of ordained women in the 1950s is graphically seen in *Come Ye Apart*.

During the time ordained women were decreasing, women going out as missionaries was on the rise. In fact, the Church of the Nazarene has a strong tradition of sending out, not only female missionaries, but single female missionaries. I wonder

²¹⁰ Cowles, ch. 8, and Rebecca Laird, *Ordained Women in the Church of the Nazarene: The First Generation*, (Kansas City: Beacon Hill Press of Kansas City, 1993), ch. 6.

²¹¹ I am an assistant editor at Nazarene Publishing House.

²¹² Other titles for women included teacher, missionary, wife and mother, and writer. In the 1970s Mildred Bangs Wynkoop is the one notable exception to this trend.

if these women went to the mission field because there they could be what God called them to be: pastors and preachers. Overseas, they could do what God called them to do.

I also wonder if that is why we see the increase of “pastor’s wives” in publications such as *Come Ye Apart?* I wonder if those women were really called to be pastors but married pastors instead because of the dominant theory that a woman’s place was in the home and not the pulpit?

It is my dream churches would wake up and realize what they are doing to gifted, talented women God has called into ministry. I would like churches to re-evaluate their belief concerning women, and acknowledge marriage is not for all women. I would also like to see churches become open to the idea of women in leadership positions as senior pastors and associate pastors over an area not related to children. I would like our churches to learn about our strong tradition of ordained women, and look to our own roots for our beliefs on women in ministry instead of other traditions where we part company in more than one area of theology and practice.

It is my dream our church would wake up and affirm its single women and its single women in ministry, so the following letter to the editor in *Christianity Today* will not become normative in our church. This letter was written in response to Lauren F. Winner’s article “Single Refinement” in the June 11, 2001 edition.

Living as a single evangelical for 12 years, I shared many of Lauren Winner’s concerns about the ways singleness is viewed in evangelical churches. ... Three years ago, after much prayer, study, and deliberation, I became a Catholic. One of the many things I found appealing about the Roman Catholic Church is that it sees the single life as a vocation, and not just for priests, monks, and nuns.

I would have become a Catholic in any case, but it's awfully nice to be part of a church in which my singleness is looked on as a vocation and I'm not "you poor thing."²¹³

Actually I would like this letter to become normative: I would love to hear both single women and men say the Church of the Nazarene is a place where "singleness is looked on as a vocation,"²¹⁴ and the "poor thing syndrome" would be non-existent within its walls. I dream the next generation of women at Nazarene Theological Seminary won't be asked, "Are you going to seminary to be a pastor's wife?" I dream they will be asked, "Are you going to seminary to be a pastor?"

²¹³ Marilyn Martin, "Letters," *Christianity Today*, (6 August 2001), 13.

²¹⁴ Ibid.

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