CHAPTER 9

WOMEN IN SCRIPTURE: A SURVEY AND EVALUATION

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Introduction and Orientation

Some Bible readers contend that the Old Testament illustrates and the New Testament admonishes that all women are to be under the authority of all men. Others insist that this is not the case. Thus, it becomes of utmost importance to evaluate meticulously the evidence Scripture exhibits. In past eras of church history, this has customarily been a masculine endeavor, as women were generally excluded from theological studies. After centuries of male-dominated scholarship, the contemporary feminist movement has sought to redress what they perceive as male bias in both the Scripture documents and their interpretation.

Other factors beyond feminist concerns have also been operative. Biblical interpretation during this century has been largely dominated by the historical-critical method, in which the biblical text is dissected and varying amounts either discounted or discarded. Subtle linguistical nuances have been either unrecognized or ignored, rather than considered essential to the interpretive process. For example, the characteristic repetitions in Hebrew narratives have often been attributed to sloppy later redactors rather than appraised for their value within the narration itself.

The last twenty-five years or so have spawned further interpretive developments. Renewed attention is being focused on the biblical text as it reads. Meanwhile, those stressing pluralistic concerns often accept the Bible canon but place it on a parity with sacred texts of other religious traditions. Thus detailed exegetical involvement with Scripture is usually

not pursued. Other interpreters urge a closer reading of the text through rhetorical criticism and narrative analysis.[1]

Feminist authors mirror some of the same developments. One wing in feminism seeks to retain some vestige of importance for the Christian Bible. Others insist that any serious theological reflection must leave behind the Bible's perceived chauvinism if women are to have any prospect of ministry in the church.

Whether or not they accept some modicum of authority for Scripture, most feminists complain about what they perceive as its extensive and oppressive patriarchy.[2] As a result, some radical feminists seek to revise Scripture or to reconstruct its history.[3] Thus feminists seem to concur that Scripture, with its presumed male hierarchical posture, has been more of a curse than a blessing.

The modern feminist movement, though displaying many divergent currents,[4] insists that its authors are releasing themselves from forced domination of men throughout Judeo-Christian history. Their writing is often forceful and bitter, and many of the sentiments expressed are uncompromising.[5]

Included in their stance is a revulsion of much of the interpretation of Scripture by the Church Fathers and the myriad male-authored commentaries of both the Old and New Testaments.[6] Radical feminists scorn a wide-spread, long-held Christian conviction that all women must be submissive to all men. They deride this posture as being forged through the centuries by male-dominated theology. This, they insist, has denied them full citizenship in the Christian church.[7]

Some in the Seventh-day Adventist Church are concerned that feminist influences have subtly (or not so subtly) swayed many of those who are encouraging the ordination of women. Therefore, any movement in this direction demonstrates an obvious drift away from the eternal principles of Scripture which, they feel, instruct all women to be under the authority of all men.

However, other Seventh-day Adventists (SDAs) contend that the correct interpretation of Scripture reveals that women (when married) are under the headship of their husbands, but in the church men and women stand together in full equality under Christ. Still others argue that the Apostle Paul contradicts himself on this issue in his various New Testament writings and thus should be ignored—or that his counsel is outdated in this modern era.

Historically, SDAs have maintained that Scripture is an indivisible

unit and, when properly understood, presents no contradictions among the various authors.[8] I hold this position and therefore do not allow that Paul can be inconsistent with himself. However, though not a "feminist," I do acknowledge the deplorable treatment of women throughout Christian history. I resonate with Mary Kassian's sentiments:

> I am a woman. I have experienced the scorn and prideful superiority with which men have, at times, treated me. I have listened to insults against my capabilities, my intelligence, and my body. I have burned with anger as I have wiped the blood from a battered woman's face. I have wept with women who have been forcefully, brutally raped—violated to the very core of their being. I have been sickened at the perverted sexual abuse of little girls. I have challenged men who sarcastically demean women with their "humor." And I have walked out of church services where pastors carelessly malign those whom God has called holy. I am often hurt and angered by sexist, yes, SEXIST demeaning attitudes and actions. And I grieve deeply at the distortion of the relationship that God created as harmonious and good. As a woman I feel the battle. I feel the sin. Feminism identifies real problems which demand real answers.[9]

Realization of such conditions has influenced many feminists to turn away bitterly from the church and Scripture. Recently, however, there have been a number of female scholars who have returned to the biblical text and drawn attention to many details there regarding women, details that had previously been overlooked or ignored.

One valuable consequence has been a more accurate comprehension of Old Testament patriarchy. New concentration on minute details of the Old Testament narratives is modifying previous negative bias toward them. As a result, even a number of male scholars have begun to provide a much-needed corrective to previous perceptions of women in Scripture.[10] What is now being increasingly comprehended is that throughout both the Old and New Testaments women served not only in home and family administration but also in public and religious spheres. The roles of women in Scripture are varied and vigorous.

At first glance, the male may appear to predominate by sheer numbers. However, even this fact must be understood with a correct evaluation of historical writing itself.

No history book is exhaustive. Each historical document includes certain events/people/ideas deemed by that historian as the most crucial affecting subsequent human life. Scripture, though including much

historical material which spans multiple centuries, is not exhaustive, as seen in John 21:25 and Heb 11:32, 35, 36. One cannot help but observe time voids in the records.

Christians have long believed that the development of the canon has been superintended by God to include those people and events that, from the divine perspective, are the most decisive in salvation history. The historical panorama thus is lengthy yet basically narrow in scope. The reader is informed of patriarchs and matriarchs, kings and queens, prophets and prophetesses—couched between great gaps of information regarding other female and male personages and events throughout the many centuries connected by the biblical documents. In this light, it becomes more precarious to insist that males have *always* dominated women. This is not possible to substantiate from biblical history. Furthermore, new probing into the biblical text itself also suggests that this is not the case.

As Carol Meyers advises, patriarchy itself must be carefully defined in the light of its original context. Feminists often appear biased negatively against patriarchy in any form. But Meyers posits that perhaps they have not adequately informed their position from the biblical record. She even proposes that many of the details recorded in the Old Testament indicate a seemingly equitable situation between male and female up to the time of the Israelite monarchy. As a result of the establishment of the throne in Israel, she argues, great changes came to Israelite society, with the subsequent position of the female slowly diminishing.[11] She also carefully evaluates other factors contributing to the deteriorating status of woman, especially "the superimposition of Greco-Roman thought and cultural forms on the biblical world." She notes:

> Greco-Roman culture brought a dualistic way of thinking to the Semitic world: pairs such as body and soul, evil and good, female and male became aligned. Eve was the victim of this alignment: female was linked with body and evil. Relegated to a position of decreasing power as the household lost its prominence, she then became associated with negative aspects of life. The misogynist expansions of the Eden story in early Christian Jewish literature begin to emerge. A new concept of Eve associated with sin, death, and suffering is superimposed so indelibly on the assertive and productive figure of the Eden narrative that we can hardly see the original woman of Genesis 2-3.[12]

This paper proceeds on the basis of Meyers' basic assumption that women were more prominent in the Old Testament than past perception has generally acknowledged. Her reasoning appears valid in view of numerous intriguing features within the Old Testament narratives.

Beyond the Old Testament, Christ's treatment of women, in contrast with many in his society, was remarkable.[13] Furthermore, the Apostle Paul, whom feminists regard with scorn, mirrored Christ's own positive behavior toward women.

Old Testament Women

Women in Genesis

Eve. The discussion of biblical women rightfully begins with Eve, with careful consideration of the textual nuances regarding her before and after the Fall. Richard Davidson's contribution to this book, dealing with biblical headship, focuses extensively on this (see chapter 13).

Sarah. Abraham's life of faith has been extensively (and rightly) studied and admired. His wife, Sarah, though rarely acknowledged on a par with her husband, is equally remarkable.[14] Katheryn Darr invites one to ponder that

> as Sarai and Abram are approaching Egypt, he does not order her to comply with his planned deception. Rather, Abraham must ask her to say that she is his sister. He cohabits with Hagar because Sarah wants him to; and when she decides that Ishmael is a threat to her own son's inheritance, Sarah succeeds in expelling both mother and child. Indeed, God defends her demand; and this is not the only time that the Lord acts on Sarah's behalf. In Pharaoh's court, and within the household of Abimelech, God is concerned that Sarah be protected and returned to her husband.[15]

Janice Nunnally-Cox argues that, even within patriarchy, Sarah and Abraham were amazingly equal:

> She appears to say what she wants, when she wants, and Abraham at times responds in almost meek obedience. He does not command her; she commands him, yet there seems to be an affectionate bond between them. Abraham does not abandon Sarah during her barrenness, nor does he gain other wives while she lives, as far as we know. The two have grown up together and grown old together, and when Sarah dies, Abraham can do nothing but weep. Sarah is a matriarch of the first order: respected by rulers and husband alike, a spirited woman and bold companion.[16]

The narrator seems intent that Sarah be regarded as critical to the divine covenant as Abraham himself. For one finds the unwavering

indication that it will be *Sarah*'s offspring who will fulfill the covenant promise—even when Abraham contends with God that he already has a son Ishmael (Gen 17:18-19; cf. Isa 51:1, 2).

This particular era in biblical history of patriarchs and matriarchs deserves renewed attention. Savina Teubal rightly insists:

> In particular, women have traditionally been depicted as primitive and childish in their aspirations and generally lacking in vision. Fresh study of our female forebears, however, invalidates this view and shows us that the matriarchs were learned, wise women who were highly developed spiritually.[17]

Sarah's life itself demonstrates this:

1. When Abraham pleads with Sarah to misrepresent their marital relationship,

> His plea sounds apologetic. Instead of being a proud and overbearing patriarchal figure, Abraham begs Sarah to lie for him. This appears uncharacteristic for a totally dominant patriarchal society. Is Sarah a completely submissive wife, or does she retain some right and control? The text does suggest that she maintained some sort of authority and that Abraham was not the absolute master figure that might be assumed even though the story is set within the patriarchal period.[18]

2. When offering hospitality, Abraham the patriarch is depicted as sharing in the preparations along with his wife. Sarah is summoned to prepare the bread (Gen 18:6); Abraham, along with his servants, is involved in the preparations for the meal (18:7-8).[19]

3. Jack Vancil comments further on Sarah's significance on this occasion:

> The very first recorded utterance from the visitors after the meal was the question, "Where is Sarah your wife?" (v. 9), and then from v. 10 she is the leading subject.[20]

Hagar. She is the victim of a grave mistake by Abraham and Sarah. Yet the poignant details recorded in Genesis 21, after she and her son had been excluded from Abraham's family, show that this Egyptian slave woman was "more highly honoured in some respects than almost any other figure in the Bible."[21] For example, the "Angel of the Lord" appeared, for the first time in biblical history, to this rejected woman (Gen 21:17). Indeed, He even called her by name! Abraham and Sarah did not grant her this dignity but typically referred only to her status.[22]

God did not abandon Hagar or her son Ishmael in this devastating

situation caused by human error. His word regarding the covenant through Abraham was eternal, yet he pointedly provided for mother and son. He promised to make Ishmael a great nation. In fact, his promise to Hagar and her son is arrestingly similar to the one they had been hearing for years in Abraham's household (Gen 16:10; 17:20). This is also the only time that a covenantal-type promise was announced to a woman.

Trevor Dennis evaluates this poignantly:

> How very surprising is the honour which is bestowed upon Hagar (and upon Ishmael too) in Genesis 16. For a start, annunciations are a rare commodity in the Bible. . . . In only three cases is the promise of a son made to the one who will be the mother of the child. In only four cases does God make the announcement himself. . . . Only two women in the entire Bible receive annunciations from God himself, Hagar and the unnamed wife of Manoah.[23]

It is also significant that she, a woman, chooses the wife for her son. Moreover, Hagar is the only woman in the Old Testament, the only person in all of Scripture, to give deity a name, "El-Roi" (Gen 16:13a). As Dennis points out:

> The name El-Roi occurs nowhere else in the Old Testament. It is Hagar's name for God, and Hagar's alone. It arises out of, and speaks eloquently of, her own private encounter with him. . . . Let no one underestimate how extraordinary this naming is. . . . Moreover, Hagar does not name her God as an aside, or declare his identity to herself after he has left the stage. She names him to his face: "*You* are the God who Sees Me." The phrase the narrator uses for the naming is the usual one in Hebrew narrative. It is the same as the one used, for example, when the man in the Garden named his wife Eve, or Eve herself named her third son Seth.[24]

Hagar is one of only three women to engage in dialogue with God in Genesis—and she a rejected slave woman.

Rebekah. The next matriarch[25] in Genesis also exhibits the same force of character as Sarah. Sharon Jeansonne compels us to consider that

> rather than minimizing Rebekah's contribution to the Israelite people, the narratives that introduce and develop the portrait of the second of the matriarchs are striking in the way she is depicted. Although she is described as being a beautiful wife for Isaac, she is not appreciated solely for her appearance. Like Abraham, her independence and trust are demonstrated by her willingness to leave her family and travel to a strange land.[26]

Furthermore, the Rebekah narratives are structured to portray her as an important character in her own right. According to Jeansonne, techniques such as dialogue, narrative pace, genealogical notation, and other literary features suggest the prominence of Rebekah in Israel's history.[27]

When Abraham directs Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac, one of the instructions he gives his servant is a significant allusion to a woman's status during the patriarchal era. Abraham declares that "if the woman is not willing to come with you, then you will be free from this oath of mine" (24:8). Jeansonne contends "that Abraham assumes the woman will have the final say in the matter."[28] And indeed, ultimately Rebekah herself chooses to go with Eliezer. In fact, in the lengthy narrative of Genesis 24, Rebekah affirms her determination to travel with Eliezer directly; it is not just recounted by the narrator (Gen 24:55-58).

Rebekah arranges for the hospitality of Eliezer herself. Her father says hardly a word throughout. Eliezer asks for a place in her "father's house" (v. 24), but the narrator speaks of Rebekah's "mother's house" (v. 28).

Most importantly, there is noticeable correspondence of key terms between Rebekah's narratives and Abraham's. They both leave behind "their country," "their kindred," and their "father's house." Both will be "blessed" and "become great." James Williams underscores this significance by suggesting, "With this blessing the narrator quietly moves Rebecca into the cycle of God's promises to the patriarchs."[29]

After Rebekah marries Isaac and becomes pregnant, she is anxious enough "to inquire of the LORD" and she does this herself (Gen 25:22). Mary Turner notes:

> The critical issue of this story comes into play as Rebekah suffers through her pregnancy. The children struggle within her and, presumably on the basis of her discomfort, Rebekah "inquires (*darash*) of the Lord." This phrase is of great importance in the Old Testament. Only the great prophets like Moses and Elisha and the greatest kings of Israel inquire of the Lord. . . . Rebekah inquires and, as a result, receives the oracle from Yahweh which destines her younger son to rule the older.[30]

The formula used to announce Rebekah's delivery, "And her days were fulfilled that she should give birth" (Gen 25:24), is used of only three biblical women: Elizabeth and Mary in the New Testament and Rebekah of the Old Testament.

Later, when her son Esau married two Hittite women, this was a "grief of mind to Isaac and Rebekah" (26:35). Turner suggests that this inclusion of Rebekah's distress regarding Esau's marriage to pagan women reveals that Rebekah was just as concerned about the covenant promise/line as was Isaac.[31]

After examining Rebekah's narratives, Jeansonne correctly argues that

> the characterization of Rebekah yields a deeper understanding of her significance. . . . All of these actions are given without a polemical context, and the narrator does nothing to indicate that these were unusual activities for a woman to take. . . . The presentation of Rebekah shows that women in Israel were viewed as persons who could make crucial decisions about their futures, whose prayers were acknowledged."[32]

The Genesis matriarchs were not "wall flowers"! It would be unfair to the portraits of Genesis women to argue that women within patriarchy bowed in submission to all men. Rather, though respectful of their husbands, they were intelligent, willful, and directive. Meyers is right to insist:

> Feminists who condemn or bemoan the apparent patriarchy of ancient or other societies may be deflecting their energies from what should be the real focus of their concern: the transformation of functional gender balance to situations of real imbalance. . . . If our position with respect to biblical or Israelite patriarchy is revisionist, this is not to idealize ancient Israel but rather to free feminist critics from a misplaced preoccupation with biblical androcentrism and allow them to search for the dynamics that led to the dichotomizing of gender attributes by early postbiblical times.[33]

Deborah. The first Old Testament Deborah appears in the patriarchal period. Gen 35:7-9 records Jacob's return to Bethel. There, Deborah, Rebekah's nurse, dies. This woman is mentioned only twice in Genesis (24:59, 35:8). Yet, surprisingly, her death and burial are included in the scriptural record. Ellen White movingly comments:

> At Bethel, Jacob was called to mourn the loss of one who had long been an honored member of his father's family—Rebekah's nurse, Deborah, who had accompanied her mistress from Mesopotamia to the land of Canaan. The presence of this aged woman had been to Jacob a precious tie that bound him to his early life, and especially to the mother whose love for him had been so strong and tender. Deborah was buried with expressions of so great sorrow that the oak under which her grave was

made, was called "the oak of weeping." *It should not be passed unnoticed that the memory of her life of faithful service and of the mourning of this household has been counted worthy to be preserved in the word of God.*[34]

Women at the Time of the Exodus

A notable roster of women appears at the opening of the book of Exodus.

Shiphrah and Puah. These two midwives bravely disobeyed Pharaoh's command to murder newborn Hebrew baby boys. That these two courageous women are named (even Pharaoh himself remains unnamed) is highly significant in Hebrew narrative. Also noteworthy is the fact that they have two separate audiences with Pharaoh.

Trevor Dennis rightly concludes of these midwives:

> Of all the initiatives taken by human beings in Ex 1-14, it is those of the women, however, that display the greatest courage, invite our keenest admiration, and have the most powerful influence on events. . . . Shiphrah and Puah and the women of 2.1-10 together succeed in defeating the policy of genocide, and save Moses from drowning.[35]

Egyptian princess. Divine providence ironically enlisted strategic protection for Israel's future deliverer from the very Egyptian monarchy which issued the death decree! Ellen White describes how the daughter of the most powerful ruler of the world at that time was directed by angels to the basket with Moses in it.[36]

Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn are insightful:

> The actions of this non-Israelite are presented in direct parallel to those of the God of Israel: 'She "comes down," "sees" the child, "hears" its cry, takes pity on him, draws him out of the water, and provides for his daily needs' (cf. 3:7-8). What she does for Moses, God is soon to do for Israel.[37]

Jochebed. Biblical history records the unusual means she devised to spare Moses' life in spite of Pharaoh's grim decree. Her husband, after the brief mention in Exod 2:1, is never referred to again except in genealogical notation. Instead, attention is focused on his wife.

Miriam. The daughter of Jochebed exhibited intelligence, diplomacy, and courage to speak to the Egyptian princess, cleverly suggesting a "nurse" for the baby in the basket.

Apparently Miriam never married. The Old Testament includes no record of a husband or names of any children for her as it does for Moses

and Aaron. In Exodus the focus of attention often centers on her two brothers, Moses and Aaron. Any regard ever granted Miriam concentrates on her errors (Num 12:1-10). This single woman's position during the Exodus has perhaps been underestimated. However, Scripture includes an indicative genealogical mention of her. In 1 Chr 6:3 Miriam is listed among the sons of Amram; that she is mentioned in a chapter of fathers and male offspring confirms her prominence.

In the book of Exodus, she is presented as a prophet, the second person in the Pentateuch so identified (Exod 15:20). At the crossing of the Red Sea hers was a dual role: prophetess and musician at the side of her two brothers. Through Micah, God Himself insists:

> For I brought you up from the land of Egypt,
> I redeemed you from the house of bondage;
> And *I sent before you* Moses, Aaron, *and Miriam* (6:4, emphasis added).

Furthermore, as Rita Burns observes:

> First of all, the fact that Miriam's death and burial were recorded at all is striking. Whereas other figures in the wilderness community (Hur, Eldad and Medad, Moses' wife and father-in-law, etc.) disappeared without mention, the notice of Numbers 20:1b seems to be at least an implicit witness that Miriam was a figure of some significance. . . .
>
> It is noteworthy that Miriam is the only member of the wilderness community whose death is recorded without being explicitly connected with divine punishment (cf. Numbers 20:2-13, 22ff; Deuteronomy 32:48-52). . . . It can hardly be accidental that . . . the deaths of Miriam, Aaron and Moses coincide with the last three stops on the wilderness journey.[38]

Women during the Time of the Judges:

Ruth. Old Testament history records the history of a young, childless widow who chose to abandon her national identity, culture, and religion. She gave up all opportunity for wealth and security in her homeland to accompany her widowed mother-in-law.

Phyllis Trible suggests that Ruth's choice to serve the God of Heaven was just as radical a decision of faith as that of Abraham leaving Ur. While not minimizing Abraham's exceptional act of trust, one must take into account his circumstances: he traveled with his spouse, much wealth, and many household servants; he was sustained by a direct call from heaven and a divine promise. In this light, Ruth's radical decision to serve Naomi's God marks an extraordinary venture.[39]

Ruth's and Naomi's initiatives are evident in a book where men never assume major roles. Yet the narrator does not exhibit shock or distaste over such female enterprise. Naomi's name itself (meaning "my delight" or "my pleasantness"), given to her in such a time and culture where sons were often more welcome than daughters (Ruth 4:15), suggests that Naomi's parents were full of joy by the birth of their *daughter*.[40]

A close reading of this narrative discloses an even deeper meaning. Ruth is the epitome of abnegation. She acts in her mother-in-law's place in order to save an Israelite line from extinction, although she herself is a Moabitess. Veritable redeemer of an Israelite clan, her self-sacrifice is eventually revealed for what it is: a national salvation. The Moabitess is a vital link in the covenantal history between God and his people, not only with the Davidic king, but as an ancestor of the Messiah (Matt 1:4).[41]

Deborah. The book of Judges includes the narrative of the second Old Testament Deborah, described not only as wife and musician, but also as judge and prophet. Charme Robarts notes:

> Deborah is the only judge described as a prophet and, in the tradition of the other biblical prophets, she spoke the word of Yahweh. Her summons to Barak is couched in the command of Yahweh, and her prophetic competency is proved by the outcome of the battle and the extirpation of the enemy at the hand of a woman. In her song, Deborah proclaims the mighty acts of Yahweh.[42]

She is depicted as a military leader with the same authority as male generals, and a judge to whom other male Israelites turned for legal counsel and to settle court cases (Judg 4:5). She was a recognized political leader and one through whom God initiates a war. The narrative indicates that she arbitrated disputes, assembled people to combat, and was regarded as an oracle of the divine will.[43]

There seems to be no negative reaction to this woman, nor is she regarded as peculiar. She is merely introduced in the common Old Testament manner. No excuses or explanations are necessary that a woman should be in this prominent position. Vancil is correct to argue that "nothing in the narrative suggests that Deborah's gender improved or detracted from her status as judge/deliverer, nor is there indication that Yahweh had any reservations about her functioning in this role.[44]

Moreover, many have seen Deborah's narrative as the single positive episode in the otherwise dreary history of the other (male) judges in the Judges book. As Robarts observes,

> With few (but significant) exceptions, the development of each major judge narrative leads to a decline, . . . even during the judge's lifetime. Typically, after becoming a leader of the people and eliminating the source of oppression, the judge leads the people away from Yahweh. . . . The exception . . . is Deborah.[45]

Women during the Time of the Monarchy

Hannah. In the pivotal transition from judges to monarchy, the key transitional person is a woman. The Samuel narratives commence with an extended account of his mother Hannah. Trevor Dennis alerts the sensitive reader that

> The Books of Samuel are primarily concerned with . . . just one man, with David, for Samuel comes to prepare the way for him, while the account of the reign of Saul very soon becomes the story of David's own rise to power. . . . Hannah . . . appears right at the start of it all, when David is but a twinkle in the narrator's eye. Her story provides the beginning of this great chapter in Israel's story, just as Eve's began the whole work, and Shiphrah and Puah and the women of Exodus 2 presided over the accounts of Israel's beginnings as a people in Egypt. . . . Hannah will begin a tale which will lead Israel into the ambiguities of monarchy.[46]

In these narratives, Hannah's vow (1 Sam 1:10-11) is her first recorded speech. After this, she speaks more than anyone else. In her initial prayer, she vows to dedicate the promised son as a Nazirite. According to Num 6, men or women normally took this pledge for themselves. When Samson's birth was announced, God declared that the child would be a Nazirite (Judg 13:4). However, on this occasion, Hannah took the initiative. As Dennis points out, "What God commands in Judges 13, she herself vows at Shiloh."[47] Hannah

> does not need Elkanah to pray for her. *She* prays, and in doing so becomes the first woman, indeed the *only* woman, in the entire Bible to utter a formal, spoken prayer, and have her prayer quoted in the text for us to read. . . . In the narratives of the Old and New Testaments Hannah's prayer is unique—and no other woman pays God such a vow as hers, either.[48]

Only after Samuel is weaned do we learn of Hannah's earlier vow regarding him. As the text suggests, "Hannah has not asked Elkanah to confirm her vow. . . . She presents her plan to dedicate Samuel as something already decided upon (1 Sam 1:22)."[49] Elkanah is not asked for

his permission; he merely gives his blessing (1 Sam 1:23). Dennis notes:

> From now on he will have nothing to say, and nothing to do (he does not take any action in 2.20). Except for a few words of blessing from Eli in 2.20, all speech in the rest of Hannah's story will be put in her mouth, all the initiatives taken will be hers, all that is done . . . will be done by her.[50]

When Hannah brings Samuel to Shiloh in fulfillment of her vow to God, the narrative focuses solely on her. Ellen White notes that she travels with her husband; however, she takes all the initiatives (1 Sam 1:24).[51] This is significant, especially since Elkanah was a Levite (1 Chr 6:33-38) and Hannah's activities are generally thought of as belonging to the male. As Dennis points out, when Hannah journeyed to the house of the Lord with bulls, flour, and wine, she went

> expressly to perform her own vow. It is she who has come with such fine offerings for sacrifice, and, remarkably, with her own child to dedicate to the service of God. Hannah's offering of Samuel is without parallel in biblical literature.
>
> It is hard to respond adequately to such an act as Hannah's and Eli does not try. This time he does not answer her. Only Hannah herself can speak to what she has done. After noting that she left Samuel with Eli, the narrator takes us straight into her song. For the second time she pours out her soul to God.[52]

Hannah's exultant anthem is striking. One does not hear a gentle lullaby; instead, she gives

> a vigorous shout of triumph, enough to make Peninnah and Eli and their like tremble. There is nothing ladylike about it!
>
> Indeed, it does not look like the song of a woman in Hannah's position at all. At one point it uses the imagery of war. It speaks of the shattering enemies, and closes with a prayer for the king. That final reference is significant, of course. In Hannah's day there was no monarchy. . . . [yet] Hannah sings *a king's song*![53]

Many commentators see the glorious New Testament "Magnificat" of Mary (Luke 1:46-55) as but an echo of Hannah's triumphant hymn!

Shunamite Woman. Continuing in the Old Testament, one finds an extended narrative of a woman and her dying son (2 Kgs 4:8-37). The father plays a very minor role in these verses, and nothing more is known of the lad after the miracle of Elisha. He was not a son in the covenant line and is never named.

Generally, when this narrative is recounted, the emphasis is on the prophet Elisha and the miracle God brought through him. However, the narrative focus remains centered on the many determined actions of this earnest woman in caring for her stricken son. She does not seek her husband's permission for her decisive actions, but rather takes full initiative. Such a detailed portrait of this vigorous person corresponds to the description of the "woman of strength" in Prov 31:10-31.

Huldah. This prophetess comes into the foreground as a chief religious authority at the time of an intense religious revival (2 Kgs 22:14f). The text expresses no surprise that the King of Judah sends Hilkiah the priest and Shaphan the scribe and several other prominent officials to this woman to ask her concerning the meaning of the discovery of the Book of the Law. As John Willis comments, "The biblical text does not suggest that seeking divine revelation from a woman was in any way unusual."[54]

The scroll of Deuteronomy, dealing with crucial moral and political issues, was found as the Temple was being repaired and refurbished. Thus the authority that the King recognized in Huldah is profound. Ellen White explains:

> At that time the prophetess Huldah was living in Jerusalem, near the temple. *The mind of the king*, filled with anxious foreboding, *reverted to her*, and he *determined to inquire of the Lord through His chosen messenger*, to learn, if possible, whether by any means within his power he might save erring Judah, now on the verge of ruin.
>
> *The gravity of the situation, and the respect in which he held the prophetess, led him to choose as his messengers to her the first men of the kingdom.*[55]

Some commentators have suggested that perhaps Huldah was consulted because there was no male prophet available at the time. However, no less a prophet than Jeremiah was already established in his prophetic office. Others have considered that the role was too important for a female and have suggested that Huldah might have been a man. However, the Hebrew text specifically states that Huldah was a wife (2 Kgs 22:14)!

Other Old Testament women could be considered, such as Abigail, who embarked on a mission of "solo diplomacy" during a volatile family situation, only later notifying her husband. There is also the "wise woman of Tekoa," who was enlisted to influence King David.[56] In addition, one could elaborate on other textual indicators sprinkled throughout the Old Testament, such as Ps 68:11, that hint to wider involvement

of women in Old Testament religion than sometimes recognized: "The Lord gave the word; great was the host of those who proclaimed it;" (Ps 68:11) The Hebrew reveals this "host" to be a *female* company, but only a few translations indicate this.[57]

Moreover, as Alice Laffey comments on Deut 10:16 and 30:1-10,

> Buried in this text . . . is the directive: circumcise your hearts. The author here . . . thus transforms an essential sign of covenant partnership (cf. Gen 17:10-14; Ex 4:24-26) from one which can include only males to one which can include both men and women. . . . [Furthermore] verse 6 [of Deut. 30] transforms the phrase of Dt 10:16, "circumcise your hearts." It is now not they, the Israelites, who are to do it (an imperative), but rather the Lord who will do it for them. . . . Making circumcised hearts rather than circumcised bodies the appropriate sign of the covenant relationship with Yahweh [yields] that relationship more directly available to women.[58]

The Song of Songs represents full female equality in the marriage relationship. Meyers points to the situation there as

> one of relationships, and the primary orientation lies with the female of the pair. . . . There is no trace of subordination of female to male, and there is a presence of power images for the female and not the male.[59]

We turn now to the New Testament.

Women in the New Testament

Women in the Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John contain rich narratives regarding women.

Elizabeth. When Luke records Zechariah's priestly lineage (1:5), he immediately indicates that "his wife Elizabeth was also a descendant of Aaron." This is one of the rare times when a priest's wife is named in Scripture. Such significant mention links with Luke's immediate insistence that "they were *both* righteous before God, walking in all commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (1:6, emphasis added). Luke's pointed inclusion of the word "both" confers remarkable affirmation on Zechariah's wife.

Anna. At the time of Christ's birth, Luke refers to the widow and prophetess Anna (2:36-38). Perhaps Luke may be including her in this narrative of the presentation of the infant Jesus at the Temple because she was the second witness testifying of Jesus' significance. At that time the

Israelite injunction that in "the mouth of two or three witnesses the thing is established" (Deut 17:6; Matt 16:18) was taken very seriously. If so, Luke is thus assigning a vital position to this woman. Ellen White's passing comment seems to suggest this:

> Anna, also a prophetess, came in and *confirmed Simeon's testimony concerning Christ*. As Simeon spoke, her face lighted up with the glory of God, and she poured out her heartfelt thanks that she had been permitted to behold Christ the Lord.[60]

Luke also describes Anna as proclaiming the Incarnation in the city (Luke 2:38). Some have noticed a biblical pattern of God commissioning prophets to announce both the beginning and ending of timed prophecies. If so, near the end of the 490-year prophecy announcing the coming Messiah, God enlists a female prophet to draw attention to this climactic event in the city of Jerusalem.

In fact, three women prophets appear at this pivotal historical event. Anna is actually designated a prophet by Luke. However, Elizabeth and Mary also "prophesied" at this very time (Luke 1:41-45; 1:46-55).

Woman at the Well. Later, the Gospels include impressive portraits of Christ's dealing with women. The narrative in John 4 of the woman at the well in Samaria is a case in point. The conversation with her is the longest recorded discussion Jesus had with anyone—and she, a Gentile woman.[61] And yet, as Denise Carmody notes, "Jesus treated the woman as intelligent. He paid her the honor of assuming she could catch his drift. The more she pressed, the more forthcoming he was."[62]

Unfortunately, commentaries on John repeatedly classify this woman as the town slut at worst, or at least a woman of questionable reputation. True, as Jesus pointed out, she had had five husbands and her current relationship was not lawful. Yet, the narrative explicitly records that the men of the city returned with her to see Jesus when she recounted how he had "told her everything that she did (John 4:28-30)."

It is hard to imagine the male population of any city following a known harlot to see a person who could divine! It is unlikely that the men of a town would believe a prostitute's word about the Messiah or anybody, and go openly with her to see him. Perhaps this woman has not been given due credit for her true social position in Samaria. The narrative seems to indicate that she was a knowledgeable, informed woman. Her discourse with Christ reveals an intelligent familiarity with the foremost theological issues of the day. Commentators regularly

attribute major significance to this lengthy dialogue, but not to this woman. However, she is the first person recorded in Christ's public ministry whose witness brought a group of people into a believing relationship with the Messiah (John 4:39-42). Ellen White recounts how once she

> found the Saviour, the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples. . . . This woman represents the working of a practical faith in Christ. Every true *disciple* is born into the kingdom of God as a missionary.[63]

Moreover, this narrative's position in the Gospel, immediately following that of Nicodemus (John 3), perhaps is not coincidental. Is the narrator seeking to contrast the weak faith of a prominent male Jewish religious leader with that of a Gentile woman?[64] See how she at once hastens to spread her conviction regarding the Messiah, whereas Nicodemus did not publicly align himself with Jesus until Christ's death.

Martha and Mary. The narratives of Mary, Martha, and Lazarus contain rich insights regarding Christ's attitude toward women. Lazarus is miraculously raised from the dead, the greatest and last of the "signs" John records leading up to Christ's Passion.[65] However, no direct speech of Lazarus is ever recorded. Rather, it is Martha, as Frank Wheeler notes, who

> makes one of the premiere confessions of faith in the New Testament, "I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." . . . The confession by Martha in John 11 may be compared to the confession by Peter in the Synoptic Gospels at Caesarea Philippi. Martha's statement is very close to Matthew's account, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God" (Matt 16:16). The parallel confessions of Martha and Peter, according to Raymond Brown, are part of the tendency of the Fourth Gospel to give to women roles normally associated with Peter in the other gospels.[66]

On another occasion Jesus coaxed Martha to accept her sister's priorities of opting to study rather than assist in the kitchen. However, Martha herself apparently had also been an avid pupil of the Messiah, to issue the penetrating statement of faith that appears in John 11:23-27.

Her sister Mary has always been perceived as an earnest student of the Messiah. Christ's affirmation of this was noteworthy:

> Mary's choice was not a conventional one for Jewish women. She sat at the feet of Jesus and was listening to "his word." Both the posture and the reference to Jesus' "word" seem to imply teaching, religious instruction. Jewish women were not permitted to touch the Scripture; and they were not taught the Torah itself, although they were instructed in accordance with it for the proper regulation of their lives. A rabbi did not instruct a woman in the Torah. Not only did Mary choose the good part, but Jesus related to her in a teacher-disciple relationship. He admitted her into the "study" and commended her for the choice. A Torah-oriented role for women was not unprecedented in Israel . . . but the drift had been away from it.[67]

Mary was also the first to see the resurrected Jesus. And Christ gave her the commission to tell the disciples that he was ascending to the Father. She thus became the first to announce the resurrection.[68] Wheeler notes that "Mary's prominence among witnesses of the resurrected Jesus is significant for John's readers. Of the six resurrection appearances of Jesus in the Gospels, five of them include Mary."[69]

However, Wheeler is careful to suggest:

> While the focus in John is not to argue for greater recognition of women in terms of discipleship and ministry, that certainly could have been one of the results within the early Christian community. The focus, rather, appears to be on discipleship and giving testimony to Jesus as Messiah. In the fourth Gospel, women are shown to be capable of fulfilling that role as well as men. . . . However unexpected it might have been socially or religiously, women had a profound impact at crucial points in Jesus' ministry.[70]

The Gospels record no evidence of the Messiah ever treating women as inferior to men, or urging all women to be in submission to all men. Yet, at this time, though the status of women in Judaism was complex, the position of the female is generally conceded to have been restrictive. First-century rabbi Eliezer wrote: "Whoever teaches his daughter Torah is like one who teaches her lasciviousness."[71] Women did not count for the minimum number required for worship. They could not bear witness. However, Jesus repeatedly rejected these customs.

He also refused to limit a woman's horizon to nurturing family and cooking. When a woman once called to Jesus from a crowd, "Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts you sucked," Jesus widened this feminine perspective by responding, "Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it" (Luke 11:27-28). And yet Christ never belittled the role of a mother. In fact, he likened himself to a mother hen seeking to gather her baby chicks under her wings (Matt 23:37).

In one trilogy of parables, all of which revealed a likeness of God,

the Messiah placed in the center a woman seeking a lost coin.

Scholars, even feminists, have widely acknowledged that Christ treated both men and women with fairness and equality. But the question is often asked, Why did Jesus select twelve male apostles? One could respond, Why only *Jewish* men? Evelyn and Frank Stagg suggest:

> The twelve apostles included no women, nor did they include any Samaritans even though Jesus clearly repudiated the Jewish-Samaritan antipathy. Custom here may have been so entrenched that Jesus simply stopped short of fully implementing a principle that he made explicit and emphatic: "Whoever does the will of God is my brother, sister and mother (Mk 3:35). The Twelve could be offering a parallel to the twelve patriarchs or 12 tribes of Israel, each headed by a son of Jacob, and thus dramatize both the continuity with national Israel, now to include women, Samaritans and Gentiles. However, at this time this may have been an ideal awaiting its time of actualization. That Jesus did introduce far-reaching principles bore fruit even in a former rabbi who said "There is not any Jew nor Greek, not any slave nor free, not any male and female; for ye all are one in Christ Jesus (Gal 3:28).[72]

Women in the Epistles of Paul

In spite of Paul's explicit Galatians declaration (Gal 3:28, just above), he, of all the New Testament authors, receives the greatest scorn from feminists, especially for his supposedly extreme chauvinistic statements in 1 Timothy. Because of what they consider as Paul's sexist language these feminists often jettison all of Paul's teachings and many times the entire New Testament itself.[73]

However, it is very dangerous to construct any scriptural teaching from a single passage. Radical feminists and others seem to neglect to compare Paul's counsel to Timothy in Ephesus with numerous other Pauline passages portraying Paul's attitudes and dealings with women in churches in other cities. These varied details must be taken into account in the interpretation of 1 Timothy.[74]

Paul clearly acknowledges that in Corinth women pray and prophesy in church (1 Cor 11:5). He requires, however, that they do so appropriately dressed and coiffed, in a manner that would not bring dishonor to their husbands or to the church (vv. 5-15). If women are enjoined to refrain from speaking (1 Cor 14:34, 35), it is a ban on "disruptive verbal misconduct" of wives who were "giving free rein to 'irresistible impulses' to 'pipe up' at will with questions in the assembly.[75]

Paul's wish was that in the worship service all things should be done "decently and in order" (1 Cor 14:40).

Several studies on women in the Philippian church have appeared, arguing persuasively that "Philippi is perhaps the classic New Testament case study on the roles of women in the founding and developing of a local congregation."[76]

In Romans 16, Paul sends greetings to twenty-six people in the church at Rome. John Stott is instructive on this passage:

> Reflecting on the names and circumstances of the people Paul greets, one is particularly impressed by the unity and diversity of the church to which they belong. . . . The most interesting and instructive aspect of church diversity in Rome is that of gender. Nine out of the twenty-six persons greeted are women . . . Paul evidently thinks highly of them all. He singles out four (Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis) as having "worked hard." The verb *kopiaō* implies strong exertion, is used of all four of them, and is not applied to anybody else on the list. . . . The prominent place occupied by women in Paul's entourage shows that he was not at all the male chauvinist of popular fantasy.[77]

Three names of Paul's roster in Romans 16 call for special attention: (1) *Phoebe* functions as Paul's emissary, as did Titus and Timothy. Her designation as "deacon" (the Greek word is not "servant") does not imply the modern "deaconess" but rather the same position as that of the church leaders designated in 1 Tim 3:8-10. (2) *Priscilla*, in verse 3 (and in three other New Testament verses) is named first before her husband (Acts 18:18, 26; 2 Tim 4:19). Whatever the reason behind this ordering, Paul recognizes her leadership and her sharing in the instruction of Apollos. (3) *Andronicus and (female) Junia.* Paul mentions four details about them: that they are his kinsfolk and at some time have been his fellow prisoners. They were converted before he was, and they *are outstanding among the apostles.*[78]

Moreover, Paul's positive attitude toward women in the church is implicit in many of his writings. For instance, John Stott notes that Paul, in Rom 12:1-2, entreats the believers in Rome to

> "Offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God—this is your spiritual act of worship" (1b). Paul uses five more and less technical terms. He represents us as a *priestly people*, who, in responsive gratitude for God's mercy *offer* or present our bodies as living sacrifices. These are described as both *holy* and *pleasing to God*, which seem to be

> the moral equivalents to being physically unblemished or without defect, and a fragrant aroma [cf. Lev 1:3, 9].[79]

There is no differentiation here between men and women. All the believers are functioning in this "priestly" role.

Nevertheless, it is Paul's first letter to Timothy in Ephesus that the early Church Fathers and modern feminists cite most often as disparaging women in ministry. And because of this passage many feminists have forsaken Scripture and Christianity altogether, and many SDAs argue against women's ordination. But what if this particular perception of 1 Tim 2:9-15 has not taken account of the initial situation that Paul was addressing in Ephesus?[80]

It is now known that Ephesus was a major center for Mother Goddess worship ("Diana of the Ephesians," Acts 19:23-41), major tenets being that a female goddess gave birth to the world, that Eve was created before Adam, and that to achieve highest exaltation woman must achieve independence from all males and from child-bearing. Sharon Gritz suggests that such false teaching was endangering the faith of the new Christian converts in Ephesus. And Paul was likely counseling Timothy how to deal with such radical departure from the Christian faith.

Gritz argues persuasively that this seems to be behind Paul's counsel to Timothy.[81] Instead of exhibiting a negative attitude toward women, Paul is seeking to preserve their exalted position in biblical teaching.[82] Thomas Geer also concurs:

> Paul's concern in 1 Tim 2:8-15 is not that women might have authority over men in the church but that certain assertive women in the church who had been influenced by false teachers would teach error. For this reason, he charges them to "be silent."[83]

It is significant that Paul wrote this singular counsel to Timothy in Ephesus. When Paul appealed to the churches in Philippi or Galatia, a different situation existed, and such issues were not addressed.

One wonders what might have been the case if the Timothy passage had thus been understood throughout the history of the church. The interpretation of 1 Timothy 2 suggested by Gritz and others enables all aspects of Paul's personal ministry (including the women-organized and -led Philippian congregation), along with his written counsels, to be held together without contradiction. Paul can even be seen following in the positive example of Christ, who himself treated men and women with equal dignity, while preserving the marriage union. Moreover this view

also dovetails with the positive presentation of Old Testament patriarchal women as seen above.

Conclusion

Neither Old or New Testament women should be used to illustrate that "according to Scripture" all women must be in submission to all men. As we have seen, an entirely different situation exists in that women in Scripture are observed as functioning with competence and confidence in many different spheres, often including positions of leadership. Feminists have been right to force attention on the abuse of women inside and outside the church. But they have been wrong in their understanding of the Apostle Paul and Old Testament patriarchy.

Upon a closer reading of both Old and New Testament narratives, the entire canon can be seen to affirm women, whether in the home or in public ministry, or both.

Endnotes

1. Robert Alter's book, *The Art of Biblical Narrative* (New York: Basic, 1981), has been pivotal in showing how certain details within the narratives previously overlooked (such as who actually speaks in the dialogues, the amount of dialogue within a narrative, whether or not a person is named, the sequence of narratives, etc.) are critical in understanding the narrator's intention.

2. For example, Mary Daly affirms: "If God in 'his' heaven is a father ruling 'his' people, then it is in the 'nature' of things and according to divine plan and the order of the universe that society be male-dominated" (M. Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation,* 2d ed. [Boston: Beacon, 1985], 13). Carol P. Christ writes: "I left the church . . . because I concluded that patriarchy was deeply rooted in Christianity's core symbolism of God the Father and Son" (Aida Besancon Spencer, "Father-Ruler: The Meaning of the Metaphor 'Father' for God in the Bible," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 [September 1966]: 433).

3. Thus they postulate a period of glorious peace and harmony during the pre-patriarchy period of the Mother Goddess. See, for example, Riane Eisler, *The Chalice and the Blade: Our History, Our Future* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987).

4. Mary Kassian describes the movement as grouped "according to their political theories or historical mentors." They are "enlightenment liberal feminists, cultural feminists, Marxist feminists, Freudian feminists, existential feminists, and radical feminists. One religious woman-studies text delineates them as biblical (evangelical), mainstream (reformist), and radical (revolutionary)" (Mary A. Kassian, *The Feminist Gospel: The Movement to Unite Feminism with the Church* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1992], 219).

5. For example: "Every woman working to improve her own position in society or that of women in general is *bringing about the end of God*. All feminists are making the world less and less like the one described in the Bible and are thus helping to lessen the influence of Christ and Yahweh on humanity." Women in leadership will "change the world so much that He won't fit in anymore" (Naomi Goldenberg, *Changing of the Gods: Feminism and the End of Traditional Religions* [Boston: Beacon, 1979], 3, 10).

6. For example: "The infamous passages of the Old and New Testaments are well known. I need not allude to the misogynism of the church Fathers—for example, Tertullian, who informed women in general: 'You are the devil's gateway,' . . . or Augustine, who opined that women are not made in the image of God. I can omit reference to Thomas Aquinas and his numerous commentators and disciples who defined women as misbegotten males. I can overlook Martin Luther's remark that 'God created Adam lord over all living creatures but Eve spoiled it all'" (Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father*, 3).

7. "Someplace along the line, the effects of the sacraments are going to have to be able to be manifested in the ministries, as much for a woman as for a man. There's either something wrong with the present theology of ministry, or there is something wrong with the present theology of all the sacraments. If women qualify for baptism, confirmation, salvation, and redemption, how can they be denied the sacrament of ministry" (Joan Chittister, "The Fullness of Grace," in *Cloud of Witnesses*, ed. Jim Wallis and Joyce Hollyday [Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1991], 186).

8. "As several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony" (Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, v, vi).

"There is not always perfect order or apparent unity in the Scriptures. . . . Those who take only a surface view of the Scriptures will, with their superficial knowledge, which they think is very deep, talk of the contradictions of the Bible, and question the authority of the Scriptures. But those whose hearts are in harmony with truth and duty will search the Scriptures with a heart prepared to receive divine impressions" (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, 1:20).

9. Kassian, 242.

10. Trevor Dennis comments: "Looking at these texts consistently from the points of view of their female characters has for me been exhilarating and liberating, but it has shaken me and disturbed me more than I could have anticipated. It has put me in touch with my own sexism, with destructive stereotypes about women, and about men also, deep rooted within me. . . . Shall I conclude that God always gives his more important tasks to men? But that would be absurd. . . . Shall I believe that he calls men and not women to be the conspicuous bearers of his promises? But I for one have had more than enough of that belief in the Church, and wish to see no more of the great harm it does to those who hold to it, or of the greater harm it does to their victims" (Trevor Dennis, *Sarah Laughed: Women's Voices in the Old Testament* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1994], 176, 179).

11. "The rise of the state meant the gradual end of a society in which the household was the dominant social unit. The locus of power moved from the family household, with its gender parity, to a public world of male control. The establishment of a nation-state meant the growing prominence of the military and of state and religious bureaucracies controlling economic development. These institutions are typically public and male controlled; whenever they become an important part of a society's organization, female prestige and power recede" (A.D.H. Mayes, *Judges* [Sheffield, England: JSOT, 1985], 189-190).

12. Ibid., 196.

13. Even the most radical feminists, such as Mary Daly, speak with great appreciation of Christ's attitude toward women: "In the New Testament it is significant that the statements which reflect the antifeminism of the times are never those of Christ. There is no recorded speech of Jesus concerning women 'as such.' What is very striking is his behavior toward them. In the passages describing the relationship of Jesus with various women, one characteristic stands out starkly: they emerge as persons, for they are treated as persons, often in such contrast with the prevailing custom as to astonish onlookers" (Mary Daly, *The Church and the Second Sex: With a New Feminist PostChristian Introduction by the Author* [New York: Harper & Row, 1975], 37-38).

14. Savina Teubal has suggested that she may have been an early priestess. It is not possible or necessary to confirm that idea, but Teubal's assertion does draw attention to the exceptional portrait of Sarah that Genesis presents: Sarah is the only matriarch whose death age is recorded, her burial at Mamre receives great attention, and Isaac consummates his marriage to Rebekah in his mother's tent. Her theory could possibly help explain the interest Abimelech exhibited in Sarah though she was 90 years old (Savina Teubal, *Sarah the Priestess: The First Matriarch of Genesis* [Chicago: Swallow, 1984], 110-122).

Jack Vancil concurs regarding Sarah's importance: "Abraham's effort and negotiations to purchase a burial place for Sarah, as well as the site chosen raises more questions. . . . That an entire chapter would be devoted to her death and burial, and stressing such detail as it does has been observed by many commentators. . . . It is striking too, that after Sarah's death there is very little further told us about Abraham. The marriage to Keturah is told in order to mention Abraham's other descendants, but we do not even know where they lived" (Jack W. Vancil, "Sarah—Her Life and Legacy," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carroll D. Osburn [Joplin: College Press, 1995], 2:61-63).

15. Katheryn Pfisterer Darr, *Far More Precious Than Jewels* (Louisville, KY: John Knox, 1991), 9.

16. Janice Nunnally-Cox, *Foremothers: Women of the Bible* (New York: Seabury, 1981), 9.

17. Teubal, xii.

18. Vancil, 48-49.

19. In Genesis there does not seem to be a distinct division of labor between men and women in the household. Either gender could be a shepherd. Rebekah and Laban shared farm chores and the particulars of family hospitality (Gen 24). Both sons of Rebekah knew how to cook (Gen 25:29).

20. Vancil, 56.

21. Dennis, 176.

22. Sarah does not use Hagar's name but refers only to her position: "Go, please, to my slave-girl" (Gen 16:2b). Up to this point only the narrator has given Hagar's name.

23. Dennis, 68.

24. Ibid., 71.

25. Keturah, Abraham's wife after Sarah's death, is mentioned without any of the impressive detail of Sarah's narratives.

26. Sharon Pace Jeansonne, *The Women of Genesis: From Sarah to Potiphar's Wife* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990), 53.

27. The genealogy in Gen 22:20-24 "presents the names of the children born to Abraham's brother Nahor and his sister-in-law Milcah. Nahor and Milcah's eight sons are listed, but the offspring of these eight sons, the third generation, are mentioned only in two cases. The offspring of Kemuel and Bethuel alone are deemed significant. The name of Kemuel's son, Aram, is given only in a parenthetical phrase. In contrast Bethuel's offspring is given greater attention. A separate phrase announces, 'Bethuel begat Rebekah' (22:23). Moreover, her name is arresting in this context because she is the first offspring who is mentioned." Even the placement of this genealogy after the account of the testing of Abraham (22:1-19) emphasizes the importance of Rebekah (Jeansonne, 54-55).

28. Ibid., 57.

29. James G. Williams, *Women Recounted: Narrative Thinking and the God of Israel*, Bible and Literature Series, vol. 6 (Sheffield: Almond, 1982), 44. Danna Nolan Fewell and David M. Gunn concur: "It is she [Rebekah], not Isaac, who follows in Abraham's footsteps, leaving the familiar for the unknown. It is she, not Isaac, who receives the blessing given to Abraham (22:17). 'May your offspring possess the gates of their enemies!' (24:60)" (*Gender, Power, and Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* [Nashville: Abingdon, 1993], 73). See also Mary Donovan Turner, "Rebekah: Ancestor of Faith," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 20 (April 1985): 43-44.

30. Turner, 44-45.

31. Ibid., 47.

32. Jeansonne, 69.

33. Meyers, 45.

34. Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 206, emphasis added.

35. Dennis, 114.

36. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 243.

37. Fewell and Gunn, 93.

38. 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, 1987), 120.

39. Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978). Denise Lardner Carmody reflects similarly on Ruth: "Her pledge itself is religiously remarkable, because in it Ruth completely throws in her lot with Naomi's faith. A Moabite, Ruth presumably had her own gods and religious ways. . . . So her dedication to Naomi is extremely radical. . . . By the grace of God, she had chosen to join the chosen people. . . . What an example she gave of daughterly devotion and religious discernment!" (*Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts* [New York: Crossroad, 1989], 33-34).

40. Louise Pettibone Smith, "Introduction to Ruth," *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Parthenon, 1992), 829-832.

41. Andre LaCocque concludes: "In the book of Ruth, however, it must be noted that the genealogical motif, culminating as it does with the advent of King David, corresponds perfectly with the mention at the beginning of the story of Bethlehem, the home city of King David" (*The Feminine Unconventional: Four Subversive Figures in Israel's Tradition* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1990], 111).

42. Charme E. Robarts, "Deborah—Judge, Prophetess, Military Leader, and Mother in Israel," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carroll D. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1995), 2:74.

43. Fewell and Gunn rightly remark: "Deborah is introduced by the epithet *'eshet lappidot*, . . . wife of Lappidoth. We might expect her importance to the story to lie in her role as wife. Yet we soon discover that wifehood reveals little about Deborah. It is not her relationship to her husband that will prove significant, but her relationship to Israel and to her appointed commander" (Fewell and Gunn, 122).

44. Vancil, 80.

45. Robarts, 76.

46. Dennis, 115-116.

47. Ibid., 123.

48. Ibid., 124.

49. Ibid., 130.

50. Ibid.

51. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, 571.

52. Dennis, 132.

53. Ibid, 133.

54. John T. Willis, "Huldah and Other Biblical Prophetesses," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. Carroll F. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1995), 2:112.

55. Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, 398, emphasis added. Duane Christensen argues that the narratives of Deborah in Judges 4 and Huldah in 2 Kings 22 frame the Deuteronomic history of life in the promised land, forming an inclusio:
A–Deborah: a "Prophetess" of YHWH alongside Barak (Israel)
B–Jezebel: A royal advocate of Baal in Israel
B'–Athaliah: a royal advocate of Baal in Judah
A'–Huldah" a Prophetess of YHWH alongside Josiah (Judah)
(D. L. Christensen, "Huldah and the Men of Anathoth: Women in Leadership in the Deuteronomic History," *SBL 1984 Seminar Papers* [Chico, CA: Scholars, 1985], 399-403).

56. Jacques Doukhan (see chapter 2) draws further attention to the whole tradition of Old Testament women in teaching functions, instructing males and females.

57. Jack Blanco's *The Clear Word* recognizes this: "You, our Lord, spoke and victories were won. The women spread the news and everyone knew" (Jack J. Blanco, *The Clear Word: A Paraphrase to Nurture Faith and Growth* [Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 1994], 675). The *New Living Translation* also: "The Lord announces victory, and throngs of women shout the happy news" (*New Living Translation* [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House], 605).

58. Alice L. Laffey, *An Introduction to the Old Testament: A Feminist Perspective* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1988), 64-66.

59. Meyers, 180.

60. Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages*, 55, emphasis added.

61. Another extended conversation was with the Syrophoenician mother (Mt 15:21-28; Mk 7:24-30). Ellen White writes of Christ's discussion with the Samaritan woman that it is the "most important discourse that Inspiration has given us" (*Testimonies for the Church*, 3:217).

62. Denise Lardner Carmody, *Biblical Woman: Contemporary Reflections on Scriptural Texts* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), 106.

63. White, *Desire of Ages*, 194-195, emphasis added.

64. The juxtaposition of narratives is increasingly seen as significant in the larger structure of biblical books.

65. Frank Wheeler notes: "The location of this story in the Gospel of John is significant. Just as the first sign was initiated by a woman, Jesus' mother, the last sign is initiated by women, Martha and Mary" (Frank Wheeler, "Women in the Gospel of John," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity* (Joplin: College Press, 1995), 2:215.

66. Ibid., 216, 217. He continues, "Martha's statement may also be compared to the confession of Thomas in John 20. . . . Actually, Martha's confession is more powerful than Thomas' for she had not yet seen Jesus' or even Lazarus' resurrection."

67. Evelyn Stagg and Frank Stagg, *Women in the World of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 118.

68. It almost seems that the two disciples traveling to Emmaus are disparaging the fact that the "women" have been the only ones to proclaim the resurrection: "*Certain women of our company*, who arrived at the tomb early, astonished us. When they did not find His body, they came saying that they had also seen a vision of angels who said He was alive. And certain of those who were with us went to the tomb and *found it just as the women had said; but Him they did not see*" (Luke 24:22-24, emphasis added).

69. Wheeler, 219.

70. Wheeler, 223. He continues, "The Fourth Gospel may not have as much to say directly about the public or official roles of women in the church as one might like. Nevertheless, this Gospel does make it clear that the faith, testimony, and discipleship of women is equal to that of men and is equally as important to the Christian community. The value of women's discipleship and influence has been tremendously overlooked" (224).

71. Mishnah *Sotah* 3:4.

72. Stagg and Stagg, 123.

73. Carmody shows an example of outrage at Paul because of 1 Tim 2:11-15: "But the prejudicial, if not outrightly vicious, interpretation of Yahwist mythology we find in this text triggers my bile. How arrogant and self-serving! What a dangerous precedent, as generations of patriarchal Christian leadership have proved! . . . Among the biblical wrongdoers, he stands out as a paramount oppressor."

74. Nancy Vyhmeister deals extensively with this passage in chapter 16 of this book.

75. Carroll D. Osburn, "The Interpretation of 1 Cor 14:34-35," in *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. C. D. Osburn (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1993), 1:242. On the matter of women in the Corinthian church, see Larry Richards' chapter in this book. See also Willis, "Huldah and Other Biblical Prophetesses," 2:120-121; and William F. Orr and James Arthur Walter, *1 Corinthians*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NJ: Doubleday, 1976), 263-264.

76. A. Boyd Luter, "Partnership in the Gospel: The Role of Women in the Church at Philippi," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 39 (September 1996): 411. See also: W. D. Thomas, "The Place of Women in the Church at Philippi," *Expository Times* 83 (1972): 117-120; F. X. Malinowski, "The Brave Women of Philippi," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 15 (1985): 60-64; L. Portefaix, *Sisters Rejoice: Paul's Letter to the Philippians and Luke-Acts as Received by First-century Women* (Stockholm: Almqvist and Wikgren, 1988). Significant attention to the circumstances in Philippi is also found in such broader studies of New Testament women as E. M. Tetlow, *Women and Ministry in the New Testament* (New York: Paulist, 1980); B. Witherington, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1988).

77. John Stott, *Romans: God's Good News for the World* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1994), 394-396.

78. Robert Johnston studies this significant detail and also the example of Phoebe in chapter 3 of this book.

79. Stott, 321.

80. Leon Morris reminds us that Paul's epistles were truly letters. "What Paul wrote was a series of genuine letters addressing specific situations in which he and his converts found themselves. He was not setting himself to produce literary works. Each of these missives was clearly written in the light of what was needed in a given situation; none was written with a view of adding to the stock of Jewish literature. They all focus on the situation confronting Paul at the time he wrote them" (Leon Morris, *Galatians: Paul's Charter of Christian Freedom* [Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1996], 13).

81. Sharon Hodgin Gritz, *Paul, Women Teachers, and the Mother Goddess at Ephesus: A Study of 1 Timothy 2:9-15 in Light of the Religious and Cultural Milieu of the First Century* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1991).

82. Angel Rodriguez reaches a similar conclusion through a New Testament word study of the terms Paul is using. He concludes: "Having examined the New Testament evidence, we can now take a closer look at 1 Timothy 2:11, 12. There is no doubt that Paul is concerned about controversies in the church. In verse 8 he exhorts men to pray 'without anger or disputing.' In the case of the women, the apostle is also concerned about behavior and attitudes that could be disruptive. . . . Why did Paul single out women? Possibly because some of them had become the target of false teachers and their instructions (2 Tim. 3:6). As a result, they were bringing controversies into the church. Paul forbids this type of controversial and divisive speech when he says that 'a woman . . . must be silent'" (Angel Manuel Rodriguez, "Women's Words," *Adventist Review*, 14 November 1996, 27).

83. Thomas C. Geer, Jr., "Admonitions to Women in 1 Tim 2:8-15," *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, ed. C. D. Osburn (Joplin: College Press, 1993), 1:281-302.