

# Christian Distinctives--

## *Women in the Heart of God*

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(Updated: 01/25/97)

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### Suggested reading

- *Feminism and the Bible*, Mardi Keyes, IVP: 1995. [This small booklet is the best thing I have read on this subject! Outstanding work...I recommend it to all thoughtful folk.]
- *Apology to Women: Christian Images of the Female Sex*, Ann Brown, IVP: 1991. (The best book I have seen on this subject.)
- *Woman in the Bible* by Mary J. Evans, IVP: 1983.
- *A Dictionary of Women in Church History*, Mary L. Hammack, Moody: 1984. [Incredible book--lists snapshot bios of outstanding extra-biblical women, by period: Ancient Church History (ad 33-590, 47 entries), Medieval (ad 590-1500, 50 entries), Reformation (ad 1500-1650, 70 entries), Expansion and Denominationalism (ad 1650-1800, 80 entries), Revivals, Missions, Further Expansion (ad 1800-present, 580 entries).]
- *Essays on Women in Earliest Christianity*, volume 1, Carroll Osburn (eds), College Press: 1993.



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# Women in the Heart of God (Intro)

## Introduction

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I am amazed at God's heart for women.

I had a precious woman recently tell me--with a wondrous joy--that she "knew God the Father in a way that ONLY daughters could." I have pondered this much, for as a father of daughters myself, I know EXACTLY what she means.

I have noticed that in the confrontation between Nathan the prophet and King David in 2 Samuel 12 that Nathan's parable has the man loving the precious sheep "as a man loves his daughter."

I have noticed the challenging examples of the female leaders of the early church--their ferocious commitment to the Lord of Love.

Yet I have noticed the abuses against women, as well as the slander against God, and the inflammatory (yet groundless) attempts to label God 'misogynist' or 'Male supremacist'. Writers of all persuasions make strange claims about the Living and Loving Lord, when it comes the subject of women.

The two MAIN arguments I hear (from outside of Christian circles) is that (1)The OT Law treated women like sub-humans (e.g. property); and that (2) in the NT, Paul carried on this great tradition!

The arguments I hear from WITHIN Christian circles concern (1) women leadership roles in the church; and (2) the 'authority' relations between husband and wife.

This study will try to surface the data and make some initial assessments on those positions. It will be essentially inductive from the text, and will in main confine itself to the 'canonical approach'--I will start with the Book that the early church gave us. I will not try to sort through potential sources and the like, but focus on the finished product--the literary product we call the Bible.

**What I have discovered so far--my main thesis.....is that God has revealed in this Book an incredible heart of love and appreciation and respect for His daughters, and He has used them to accomplish great acts of honor for His Name in biblical history.**

The sources of data we will use for this study:

- The Bible (primarily)
- Information from the Ancient Near Eastern literary and inscriptional remains
- Extra-biblical literature (e.g. Apocrypha, Pseudepigrapha)
- Other historical writings



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# Christian Distinctives--

## *Women in the Heart of God*

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(Updated: June/2001)

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### **Pushbacks, Objections, Stereotypes**

These are some of the more common mis-understandings that I see voiced in the literature and in coffee-house conversations. I used to wonder to what extent these might true, but after having completed this study, I began to wonder how closely the people who make these statements have examined the biblical data...

The detailed data for my responses to these are in the syllabus, and here I only give a few verses to show what the actual evidence is.

1. ["God's choice to be incarnated as a man IMPLICITLY de-values women"](#)
2. ["Weren't women considered property in the OT, like cows or something? Didn't the Law said a father could even SELL his daughter?!"](#)
3. ["Women were non-persons back then--they had NO legal rights in the system at all!"](#)
4. ["The bible teaches that women had NO access to God--except through the male..."](#)
5. ["The patriarchy system that God apparently condoned subjected women by restricting their access to social and cultural power."](#)
6. ["Doesn't God order women to "obey" their husbands--a clear support for Graeco-Roman patriarchy?!"](#)
7. ["Doesn't the bible teach that God cursed women by making them subject/subordinate to men?"](#)
8. ["Wasn't there a HUGE double standard in biblical sexual ethics?--weren't women supposed to be 'good', but men didn't have to?"](#)
9. ["All the books of the bible were written by men--see, God de-values women again"](#)
10. ["The VAST MAJORITY of Israelite/Church leadership is by MEN--see, God de-values women again"](#)
11. ["Wasn't Miriam punished for questioning male authority, while Aaron was not?"](#)
12. ["Why do men get all the glory in the bible? Why are women only minor characters?!"](#)

13. "Sure, women could be prophets, but they couldn't participate in government."
14. "But, women were excluded from being priests..."
15. "Women are always pictured as being servile or passive or evil or stupid..."
16. "God is ALWAYS portrayed as a male--women had no way of identifying with Him"
17. "Weren't women always kept separate from the men in worship? They weren't even allowed in the Temples or synagogues. The OT religion just didn't seem to include women."
18. "None of the disciples or apostles were women--a bit unfair, aint it?!"
19. "Paul OBVIOUSLY had a "sit down and shut up" attitude toward women--and we are supposed to trust HIM?!"
20. "The early church was 'by, for, about MEN--women were barely even there, much less significant players (and ESPECIALLY not leaders)."
21. "Weren't OT women WORSE off than even their Babylonian counterparts?"
22. Does female "pain-prone" reproductive physiology indicate that God apparently hates women?



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## Pushback....

*"God's choice to be incarnated as a man IMPLICITLY de-values women"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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A few things come to mind...

- The first thing that struck me odd about this issue was in the Incarnation. I have never personally assumed that Jesus came as a male due to the alleged fact that God liked males better(!!!!), and it not at all clear how one could defend that position.

I personally have always assumed that the gender-choice was an 'incidental' of the incarnation, and not one of any specific revelatory import. When I began thinking of OTHER incidentals:

1. Jesus was also born in a manger/cave; would that fact have 'devalued' being born in a hospital or home? Probably not?
2. Jesus was also a carpenter; does that 'choosing' de-value ALL OTHER OCCUPATIONS?! Probably not.
3. Jesus was born in the 1st Century; does that 'de-value' those born at other times in history? Probably not.
4. Jesus was Jewish; does that 'de-value' Chinese or Anglo-Saxons? Probably not.
5. Jesus was raised in Nazareth; does that 'de-value' Jerusalem? Probably not.

The list could go on--with each detail being examined for its 'incidental' character. I DO think there is some significance to the fact that He came as a human (as opposed to animal), and that He came in a sinless character (as opposed to a sinful character.) There MAY BE some significance that he was born of a female-only (instead of miraculously created WITHOUT a mother--the lineage problem would

have been solved by the 'legal' Joseph anyway), but I don't have enough confidence in this argument.

Where this nets out is that "Choosing" in regards to the Incarnation does NOT seem to be related to "Valuation" at all. To argue that it WAS positively correlated would require a supporting argument--which I have not seen so far.

- There was another point on the Incarnation that struck me odd. IF 'choice' WERE always linked to VALUATION, then God was not really very FREE in His choices! I find it difficult to believe that God could not have chosen WITHOUT being 'required' to communicate valuation in that process. What this position would mean is that WHATEVER form wherein God chose to appear REQUIRED God to 'de-value' EVERYTHING ELSE! Not only is this a questionable ethical principle, it is certainly 'odd' to place such a constraint on God's sovereign action, theologically speaking.

So, it seems to me that the Incarnation cannot be used to support "choice implies valuation/de-valuation".



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## Pushback....

.... *"Weren't women considered property in the OT, like cows or something? Didn't the Law say a father could even SELL his daughter?!!"*

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This is a very common question, and frankly, one I find amazing. It shows up in many, many Christian and non-Christian writings (even scholarly pieces!). Yet the evidence AGAINST this assertion is quite definitive.

The normal reason that people assume this, is that the OT makes a statement that 'slaves' are property (Lev 25.45f):

*You may also buy some of the temporary residents living among you and members of their clans born in your country, and they will become your property. 46 You can will them to your children as inherited property and can make them slaves for life, but you must not rule over your fellow Israelites ruthlessly.*

And then they use the "selling a daughter" passage in Lev 21:7:

*"If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do.*

So, I guess they conclude that women were considered property thereby. [Also, I have heard it mentioned that women were 'deeded' along with land, as in the case of Naomi and Ruth, but the fact that Naomi had to 'sell the land' indicates that this conclusion is not that easy to reach.]

### And the problem is...

**First**, the "property" passage ONLY APPLIES TO NON-ISRAELITES (see the end of the passage). Any buying and selling of Hebrew persons was more of an indentured servant relationship, that could only last for 6 years (cf. Ex 21.2: *"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything."*). These "servants" are NEVER called "property" in the OT.

**Secondly**, a man could ALSO sell his son (Neh 5.5: *Although we are of the same flesh*

*and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery.) and sell HIMSELF (Lev 25.39: "If one of your countrymen becomes poor among you and sells himself to you, do not make him work as a slave. 40 He is to be treated as a hired worker or a temporary resident among you; he is to work for you until the Year of Jubilee. 41 Then he and his children are to be released, and he will go back to his own clan and to the property of his forefathers. 42 Because the Israelites are my servants, whom I brought out of Egypt, they must not be sold as slaves. 43 Do not rule over them ruthlessly, but fear your God.).*

What this obviously means is that this 'selling' relationship HAD NOTHING TO DO with gender! [Other than the possible conclusion we might draw from the fact that the man is nowhere allowed to sell his WIFE! (grin)...]

**Thirdly**, it should be noted that the passage used in the objection (the 'selling a daughter' one) is actually a 'protection passage' for the woman--there are severe abuse-restrictions placed on THAT transaction, that do NOT occur in the descriptions of selling sons or self. God built some protection clauses in for His daughters.

**Fourthly**, who ever heard of "property OWNING property"?!

Yet women in the OT...

- Gave their personal belongings as offerings (Ex 35.22,29)
- Made vows (often involving possessions) (Num 30.9)
- They were required to make restitution for crimes (Num 5.6)
- Unmarried daughters could inherit property (Num 27.1-7; Elephantine papyri, Job 42.13)
- Female servants could buy their own freedom (Lev 27.1ff)
- Receive revenues from land (2 kgs 8)
- Possess nice homes (Mic 2.8)
- Sell property (Ruth 4.9)

Sounds more like they were 'own-ers' than 'own-ees' to me!

**Finally**, notice that a woman could sell HERSELF--indicating that she was NOT someone else's property.

*If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free.*

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The data above seems clear: (1) "selling" and "property" passages had no gender-specific elements; and (2) the data of the OT is quite clear that women were NOT property, as illustrated by their ability to wield property themselves.

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## Pushback....

*"Women were non-persons back then in the OT--they had NO legal rights in the system at all!"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This is sometimes argued based on the assumption that only men could initiate divorce in the OT (even though Jesus and Paul taught differently, and the Elephantine papyri of the Jewish colony of Egypt indicate otherwise--ANET:222-223), or the assumption that a woman was only a 'somebody' *legally* when she was "attached to" a male (WS:CP:TCP:9; [WS:AHTO:20](#)).

These arguments encounter difficulty when confronted with the vast amount of information and legal terminology applied to women (married, unmarried, widowed) in the OT:

1. The Levirate law for a brother to marry his brother's widow is called a 'duty to her' (Gen 38.8)
2. Zelophehad's daughters brought a legal case before Moses and the elders (Num 27)
3. They show up as required joint-agents with husbands in a number of settings (Gen 26.11; 26.34-35; I Sam 14.1ff)
4. They could buy their freedom (like males) (Ex 21.2-4)
5. They could be witnesses at the gate, even to capital crimes (Deut 21.18; 22.15f; 25.5)
6. Widows could initiate property transference transactions at the gate (Deut 25.5; Ruth 4.7-8)
7. Women appeared at the 'gates' with the elders (Judges 5.11ff; Prov 8.3-4), spoke for/dominated the group of elders (2 Sam 20.21-22), and were considered 'elders and leaders' (Is 3.11ff).
8. They had access to the king for grievances! (2 Sam 14 ; 2 kgs 8.5; 1 kgs 3.16)
9. Widows were said to have legal "cases" (Is 1.16-18,23) and are spoken in terms of "justice" (=>rights, Is 10.1)
10. [The Elephantine papyri (from a Jewish colony in Egypt) indicated that at least in the times of Ezra-Nehemiah, women could INITIATE divorce--ANET:222-223.]

This data is very diverse and indicative of a legal-system in which women were significant participants.



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## Pushback....

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So [WS:TCP:179](#): "This new order [the OT male priesthood] under the all-powerful God proclaimed to the Hebrews and to all those who took the Bible as their moral and religious guide that **women cannot speak to God.**"

This incredible quote, by a respected scholar, is amazing. Compare that with just SOME of the OT records of women 'violating' this principle (before AND after the priesthood was instituted):

### Before the Levitical priesthood...

1. God and Hagar have a dialog in the desert (Gen 21)
2. God listened to Leah's prayers, and Rachel's (Gen 29-30)
3. Rebekah inquired of the Lord, and He answered her (Gen 25)
4. God spoke directly to females (Gen 16.17ff; 21.17-19)

### Under the Levitical priesthood...

1. God heard Hannah's special prayer (I Sam 1.27)
2. The wife of Manoah had several interactions with YHWH/Angel of YHWH (Jud 13)
3. Deborah was a prophetess and SPOKE FOR YHWH (getting messages FROM Him) (Jud 4.4ff)
4. Miriam was also a prophetess (Ex 15)
5. God had direct interaction with a widow (I Kgs 17.9)
6. Huldah, as a prophetess, also received direct communications from God (2 Kgs 22.14f)

Now, the above cases were situations in which women interacted verbally with God--directly. There are so many more cases in which they were [major participants in the OT cult](#)--without it looking like they were any different than the other non-Levitical males.

There just doesn't seem to be any data to support 'restricted access' to God--and plenty

of cases in which it occurred (and was encouraged, e.g. vows).



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## Pushback....

*"The patriarchy system that God apparently condoned subjected women by restricting their access to social and cultural power."*

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There are two main problems I have with this.

**One**, it seems to be **factually incorrect** relative to the OT--women apparently developed increasing amounts of 'access' over time (contra Lerner, [WS:TCP:176-177](#)).

From the sage-like power of the Matriarchs, through the Wise Women of I Samuel, through the Wisdom-Woman in Proverbs, through the prophetesses, to the Queen-mothers, there was tremendous power exerted by women.

Women had the ear of kings, and, as the main 'newspaper' in Israel, had 'control' of the message of national history (cf. I Sam 18.7-8!).

Women of wealth and power are mentioned throughout the text (e.g. Miriam, patron of Elisha, Abigail, Queen of the South, Esther), although many powerful Jewish women abused this power and oppressed/exploited the poor (e.g. Amos 4.1; Is 3.11-17; Ezek 16.38).

We have already seen how they had access to [legal power](#), and the widespread practice of 6-year servants (contracted by SOMEONE more wealthy!), means that affluence among some women was not unheard of!

If one takes the biblical narratives and 'adjusts for' (1) the large number of featureless male names in genealogies/lists; and (2) the large number of male characters in military scenes, one becomes impressed with how many participants in the biblical narratives are female, AND, with how much more often their words are recorded in more detail. (Remember, the longest quotes, songs, prayers, etc.--apart from GOD and an occasional king--originate with women).

At least in the OT documents, women do NOT seem to face major difficulties in being used by God to further His kingdom!

The **second** problem I have with this pushback is **theological**.

Simply stated, "access to social and cultural power" is NOT a Judeo-Christian value! "Access to servanthood" is! Compare the words of Jesus Christ:

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mrk 10.42ff)*

And He specifically told us to be faithful with what we CURRENTLY HAVE, and that "access to power" is a increased responsibility that comes from the Lord:

*"His master replied, 'Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. (Mt 25.21)*

Now this is NOT to say that "access to social and cultural power" is a BAD thing; only that it can easily be distorted into a 'lust for power' that is decidedly un-Christian.

And this is NOT to say that we should refuse "access to social and cultural power"--the wealthy were told to USE their resources for God (I Tim 6.17f: *Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. 18 Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share.*), unless that wealth stopped them from coming to Jesus--in which case it needed to be "de-prioritized" radically--cf. The Rich Young Ruler in Luke 18.18ff.

It is obvious in the way God used women in the OT that He considered many, many of them faithful stewards, who earned more responsibility in the course of their lives. They did not necessarily seek it, but they were faithful in "the place where God called them" (I Cor 7.17,20,24).

Power is simply NOT a 'thing to be sought after'--Zech 4.6:*So he said to me, "This is the word of the LORD to Zerubbabel: 'Not by might nor by power, but by my Spirit,' says the LORD Almighty.*

So, the objection is factually wrong, but more importantly, it is misguided in the value-system it represents.

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## Good question...*did/does God order wives to 'obey' their husbands?*

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Draft: June 14, 2001

[\[Summary\]](#)

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Someone sent me an email with a number of items in which they maintained that God hated women. One of those items was that “God commands wives to **obey** their husbands”, so I wanted to point out—for the record—that the bible doesn't actually say that at all.

Let's look at the passages most often assumed to mean/teach that:

**Ephesians 5:** *Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord. 23 For the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church, his body, of which he is the Savior. 24 Now as the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything. 25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her 26 to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, 27 and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. 28 In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. 29 After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church— 30 for we are members of his body. 31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.” 32 This is a profound mystery—but I am talking about Christ and the church. 33 However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. [Eph 5.22ff]*

**Colossians 3:** *Wives, submit to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord. 19 Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them. 20 Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord. 21 Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. 22 Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, 24 since you know that you will receive*

*an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. 25 Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism. (4.1)Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven. [Col 3.18ff]*

**I Peter 3:** *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives, 2 when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. 3 Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. 4 Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. 5 For this is the way the holy women of the past who put their hope in God used to make themselves beautiful. They were submissive to their own husbands, 6 like Sarah, who obeyed Abraham and called him her master. You are her daughters if you do what is right and do not give way to fear. [1 Pet 3.1ff]*

**First of all**, let's notice that **none of these “commands” use the word “obey”**. The only occurrence of something with *that* word is the example given of Sarah in the Petrine passage (discussed below).

**Secondly**, let's observe that in the time of the Roman Empire, there were things called ‘household codes’. So, [[BBC](#): at Eph 5]:

“The section 5:21–6:9 addresses what we call “household codes.” In Paul's day, many Romans were troubled by the spread of “religions from the East” (e.g., Isis worship, Judaism and Christianity), which they thought would undermine traditional Roman family values. Members of these minority religions often tried to show their support for those values by using a **standard form of exhortations developed by philosophers from Aristotle on**. These exhortations about how the head of a household should deal with members of his family usually break down into discussions of husband-wife, father-child and master-slave relationships. Paul borrows this form of discussion straight from standard Greco-Roman moral writing. . **But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male head of the house.”**

**Thirdly**, let's look at the specifics of each passage:

## The Ephesians passage (and its ‘clone’, the **Colossians** one)

1. Commentators note that the verb ‘submit’ is not actually in the text, but has to be supplied from the preceding verse (v 21) enjoining **all Christians to ‘submit’** to one another—a radical break from the standard patriarchal marriages and household codes of the day. And this basically enjoins the ‘submitting’ of **ALL Christians to EACH OTHER** (husbands, wives, children, masters, servants, etc.). The further implication is that whatever “submission” a wife is called to, her husband (as a Christian) is called *to the same thing*:

“The final expression of being filled with the Spirit is “submitting to one another” because Christ is one's Lord. All the household codes Paul proposes are based on this idea. But although it was customary to call on wives, children and slaves to submit in various ways, **to call all members of a group (including the paterfamilias, the male head of the household) to submit to one another was unheard-of.** [[BBC](#): Eph]

“The participle of Ephesians 5:21 is the last of a series of four, as shown above, and clearly belongs to what precedes it. **This verse also supplies the verb “to submit” for this hard saying**, without which Ephesians 5:22 would be grammatically incomplete and without meaning. The verse in Greek reads literally: “Wives, to your husbands as to the Lord.” The verb “to submit” is absent and can only be read into the sentence because of the intimate connection between the two verses. Ephesians 5:21 is therefore transitional, both belonging to what precedes and setting the agenda for what follows. **Thus the kind of radical self-submission to one another which evidences the fullness of the Spirit is now explored in terms of its implications for husbands and wives.** That is, what does this **self-submission, modeled in Jesus**, look like in marriage? [[HSOBX](#): at Eph 5]

“First, Paul begins this three-part structure in a very unusual way. As the climax of his exhortations describing a Spirit-filled life (Eph 5:18–21), **Paul calls on all believers to submit to one another** (Eph 5:21). It is true that the following context

delineates different ways to submit according to differing societal roles; **but the very idea of “mutual submission” strained the common sense of the term “submission”**: **householders** were sometimes called to be sensitive to their wives, children and slaves, but they **were never told to submit to them**. That Paul envisions the same sort of mutual submission to cover the slave and master relationship is clear from his exhortation in Ephesians 6:9: after explaining how and why slaves should submit (Eph 6:5–8), he calls on masters to “do the same things to them,” an idea which, if pressed literally, goes beyond virtually all other extant writers from antiquity. [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. “Man and Woman”]

## 2. The **model for this** community-wide submission is **Christ**:

“Paul has clearly shown throughout the epistle that Christians are a new social order created to express the fullness of Christ in the midst of the old, fallen order. What he is saying in Ephesians 5:21 is that the Spirit empowers Christians to exist in relationship with each other in a radical, culturally transforming way, namely, through **mutual self-submission**. The ground for this radically new approach to human relationships is “out of reverence for Christ.” The reason for that reverence (or, perhaps better, awe) is the **radical nature of Christ's earthly life, the total, free submission of himself as God's suffering servant, climaxed in his self-giving on the cross** (Eph 5:2, 25). It is reverence and awe toward that **self-giving love that is to motivate our mutual self-submission to each other**. [[HSOBX](#): at Eph 5]

## 3. Even the injunction to submit for wives—as for all believers—is **based on freedom, not authority!**:

“The submission of the wife to the husband is to be “as to the Lord.” It is no longer to be the kind expected as a matter of course by cultural norms and forced upon women—who were seen as inferior to males in both Jewish and Gentile cultures. No, **her submission is to be freely chosen, being there for her partner “as to the Lord,” that is, as a disciple of the Lord, as one who followed in his servant footsteps, motivated by self-giving love**. This kind of submission is not a

reinforcement of the traditional norms; it is rather a fundamental challenge to them. [[HSOBX](#): Eph.]

“Second, the duties are listed as reciprocal duties. Whereas **most household codes simply addressed the head of the household, instructing him how to govern** other members of his household, **Paul first addresses wives, children and slaves. Far from instructing the paterfamilias how to govern his wife, children and slaves, he omits any injunction to govern** and merely calls on him to love his wife (undoubtedly a common practice, but rarely prescribed), be restrained in disciplining his children and to regard slaves as equals before God. **This is hardly the language of the common household code**, although some ancient philosophers also exhorted moderation and fair treatment of subordinates. **The wife, children and slaves are to regulate their own submission voluntarily.** [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. “Man and Woman”]; notice how different this is from the codes—the women are addressed in the codes, instead of just the men]

4. Not only does **Paul not use the word ‘obey’**, his indications of what he means by ‘submit’ is related to **humility and *not* to obedience**:

"Most ancient writers expected wives to obey their husbands, desiring in them a quiet and meek demeanor; some marriage contracts even stated a requirement for absolute obedience. This requirement made sense especially to Greek thinkers, who could not conceive of wives as equals. Age differences contributed to this disparity: husbands were normally older than their wives, often by over a decade in Greek culture (with men frequently marrying around age thirty and women in their teens, often early teens)...In this passage, however, **the closest Paul comes to defining submission is “respect”** (v. 33), and in the Greek text, wifely submission to a husband (v. 22) is **only one example of general mutual submission of Christians** (the verb of v. 22 is borrowed directly from v. 21 and thus cannot mean something different). [[BBC](#): Eph.]

“Writers sometimes closed a book or section with a concluding summary; Paul here summarizes the point of 5:21–32: **the wife should respect her husband**, and the husband should love his

wife. Although ancient moralists expected wives to respect their husbands (and Jewish teachers also expected the reverse), **moralists usually also emphasized the wife's "obedience"; Paul's exhortation to wives here would thus strike most ancient readers as quite weak.** [[BBC](#): Eph.]

“All ancient moralists insisted that wives should “submit” to their husbands, but **few would have stopped short of using the term “obey,” as Paul does here** [[BBC](#): Col.]

“A final argument [of Paul's] for the validity of a **radically new self-submission** of wife to husband is now given: “As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). What is the nature of the church's submission to Christ? It is **freely assumed in humble response to his self-giving**, sacrificial servanthood and his continuing empowering and nurturing presence. The **church's submission to Christ has nothing to do with external control or coercion**. For the life and ministry of Jesus demonstrates uncompromisingly **his rejection of “power over others”** as valid in the new creation which he is inaugurating (Lk 22:24–27). Christ stands in relation to the church, his bride, not as one who uses his power to control and demand, but rather to invite and serve. [[HSOBX](#): Eph.]

“Third, **Paul does not describe the duties that are attached to submission**. An ancient reader could therefore have been tempted to read a wife's submission as meaning all that it could mean in that culture—which, as we have noted above, involves considerably more subordination than any modern Christian interpreters would apply to women today. (Applying the text in this way would return women to rarely being able to attend college, to disallowing them voting privileges, etc.) However, **Paul does define the content of the wife's submission once, in quite a strategic place: at the concluding summary of his advice to married couples. The wife is to “respect”** (phobeomai, Eph 5:33) her husband. Although the term usually translated “submission” (hypotasso) could be used in the weaker sense of “respect,” **household codes demanded far more of wives than mere respect; Paul's view of women's subordination even in this social situation could not be much weaker than it is.**” [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. “Man and

Woman”]

"Here at Colossians 3:18, as Schweizer (164) claims, it denotes **the subjection of oneself, as Christ subjected himself to the Father** (1 Cor 15:28). The demand for mutual submission among Christians (Eph 5:21) shows that **“be subordinate” bears a close relation to Christian “humility”**) [[WBC](#): Col]

5. The **radical break this represents**, with conventional patriarchal *paterfamilias*, can be seen in the fact that this **‘code’ makes unusual demands on the husband/father/master**:

“The final expression of being filled with the Spirit is “submitting to one another” because Christ is one's Lord. All the household codes Paul proposes are based on this idea. But although it was customary to call on wives, children and slaves to submit in various ways, **to call all members of a group (including the paterfamilias, the male head of the household) to submit to one another was unheard-of.** [[BBC](#): Eph.]

“Although it was assumed that husbands should love their wives, **ancient household codes never list love as a husband's duty; such codes told husbands only to make their wives submit.** Although Paul upholds the ancient ideal of wifely submission for his culture, **he qualifies it by placing it in the context of mutual submission:** husbands are to love their wives as Christ loved the church, by willingly laying down their lives for them. At the same time that he relates Christianity to the standards of his culture, he subverts his culture's values by going far beyond them. **Both husbands and wives must submit and love** (5:2, 21). [[BBC](#): Eph]

“Although the ancient instructions to husbands normally stressed **how he should rule his wife, Paul stresses instead that he should love her** [[BBC](#): Col.]

“Having radically challenged the nature of the culturally expected and demanded submission of the wife to the husband, Paul now goes on (Eph 5:25–32) to show **what self-submission by the husband to the wife looks like in**

**practice.** The husband's self-submission (Eph 5:21) is to express itself in the kind of radical self-giving love that Christ demonstrated when “he gave himself up for” the life of the church (Eph 5:25). Husbands were of course expected to have erotic regard for their wives. But within a culture in which women were often not more than doormats on which male supremacy could wipe its feet, and in a religious setting where Jewish males thanked God daily that he had not made them a Gentile, a slave or a woman—in such a context erotic regard for the wife more often than not became a means of self-gratification and control over the wife. **That position of superiority is daringly challenged by Paul's call upon husbands to love (agape) their wives, that is, to be there for them and with them in self-giving, nurturing, serving love.** For that is the way Christ loved the church, and husbands, like their wives, are to be **imitators of Christ** (Eph 5:2). [[HSOBX: Ephesians](#)]

What becomes clear from all this is that the submission of wives to husbands in these Pauline passages is **not about** “obedience” *per se*, but about “respect” and “humility”; and, that this respect/humility character is **a self-chosen moral goal** to be sought after **by all who seek to emulate the self-giving and self-servanthood of Jesus.**

.....  
***Pushback:** “Wait a minute...you skipped over the ‘headship’ thing there, bud, right there in the Ephesians passage!...it explicitly says that the man is the ‘head’ of the woman...that makes it pretty clear that authority—with the implication of ‘required obedience’--is involved in Paul's mind”*

Actually, Not at all.

Although there is a huge debate over what the word *kephale* (‘head’) means in NT Greek, the impact of that would be minimal on these 2 passages.

**First**, we have already seen that **Paul defined ‘submission’** within the passage as something **other than** obedience.

**Second**, we have noted that **Paul has deliberately avoided the word**

‘**obey**’ in a context where it was universally expected (and Paul can never be accused of ‘softening his language’ for ‘politically correct’ reasons, as his track record more than amply shows!)

**Third**, the examples of submission given in the text (i.e., Jesus, the Church) are examples of freely-chosen humility and servanthood.

“A final argument [of Paul's] for the validity of **a radically new self-submission** of wife to husband is now given: “As the church submits to Christ, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything” (Eph 5:24). What is the nature of the church's submission to Christ? It is **freely assumed in humble response to his self-giving**, sacrificial servanthood and his continuing empowering and nurturing presence. The **church's submission to Christ has nothing to do with external control or coercion**. For the life and ministry of Jesus demonstrates uncompromisingly **his rejection of “power over others”** as valid in the new creation which he is inaugurating (Lk 22:24–27). Christ stands in relation to the church, his bride, not as one who uses his power to control and demand, but rather to invite and serve. [[HSOBX](#): Eph.]

**Fourth**, the *kephale* debate is about "source/provider *versus* boss/authority" as the **most plausible 'default'** meaning/emphasis of the word, but in this passage it's **clearly much closer to "source/provider"**. The description of Christ as Head over the church centers on His self-giving and His nurture of it--NOT His authority over it. Even the 'head/body' image is used explicitly in the context of 'nurture' and not authority. So at least in this passage, the meaning of 'head' seems much closer to 'source/provider' and the point seems to be about 'unity' and 'nurture' instead of 'authority' and 'control'.

"Although Greek and Roman moralists sometimes alluded to the unity of husband and wife, the image was especially prominent in Judaism, which shared Paul's and Jesus' dependence on Genesis 2:24, mentioned explicitly in Ephesians 5:31. **The head-body analogy of 5:23 here becomes an image of unity rather than one of authority.** [[BBC](#): Eph.]

**Fifth**, the *kephale* debate--in both here and in I Cor 11--suggests caution in trying to 'see' authority in this word, especially in Paul:

"Although Paul is arguing from a play on words [note: in 1 Cor 11], modern interpreters have often fastened on the single word *head* and debated what Paul meant when he called the husband the wife's "head." Some scholars have argued that the term means "authority" or "boss"; the Hebrew for "head" (*rosh*) could mean this, and occasionally *kephale* means this in the Septuagint (Grudem; Fitzmyer). Other scholars have disputed this meaning, noting that **the translators usually bent over backward to avoid translating the Hebrew *rosh* with the Greek term *kephale*; *kephale* does not normally mean "authority" or "boss" in Greek.** These latter scholars often argue for the meaning "source," which it does mean in some texts (Mickelsen in Mickelsen, 97–117; Scroggs, 284). Scholars favoring the "authority" meaning, however, respond that "source" is an even rarer meaning of *kephale* in the Septuagint than "authority." Both groups of scholars are undoubtedly right in what they affirm but may fall short in what they deny; **the term sometimes means "source" and sometimes means "authority,"** at least in "Jewish Greek" influenced by the rhythms of the Septuagint...The question is, what sense should be attributed to the term in 1 Corinthians 11:3? Given the allusion to Adam as Eve's source in 1 Corinthians 11:8, **it is very likely that Paul speaks of the man (Adam) as his wife's "source,"** just as Christ had created Adam and later proceeded from the Father in his incarnation (in which case 1 Cor 11:3 is in chronological sequence; see Bilezikian, 138). [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. "Man and Woman"]

"Like the English word "head" and the Greek word *kephale*, the Hebrew word *rosh* has first of all the literal meaning "head of man or beast." But like English and Greek, it also has numerous figurative meanings. In an exhaustive study of how the Septuagint translators rendered the Hebrew word *rosh*, the following data emerged. In the more than 200 times when it refers to a physical head, the translators almost always used *kephale*. About 180 times, *rosh* clearly has the figurative meaning of "leader" or "chief" or "authority figure" of a group. There is thus a close similarity between the English "head" and

the Hebrew *rosh*; figuratively, both frequently designate an authority figure....**When the translators, however, sought the appropriate Greek word to render this figurative meaning, they used not *kephale* but *archon* (and its derivatives) in the great majority of cases (138 times).** *Archon* means “ruler,” “commander,” “leader.” Its derivatives include meanings such as “authority,” “chief,” “captain,” “prince,” “chief of tribe,” “head of family.” Most of the remaining occurrences of *rosh* (when it designates an authority figure) are translated by several other specific Greek words (such as *hegeomai*, “to have dominion over”). **In only eight out of 180 cases** was *kephale* used to translate *rosh* when it designated the leader or ruler of a group. It is very possible that one of the figurative meanings of *kephale* (namely, “top” or “crown”) allowed the translator to use it in describing a prominent individual. It may also be that in these few cases one of the Septuagint translators simply used the literal equivalent for *rosh*, namely *kephale* (since both mean “head”). This is in fact what happens all too frequently in any translation when it is too literal. The exact equivalent may, in fact, distort the meaning conveyed by the original in its own context....It is clear from this data that **the Greek translators were keenly aware that *kephale* did not normally have a metaphorical meaning equivalent to that of *rosh*.** This linguistic evidence, which suggests that the idea of “**authority over**” was not native to the Greek *kephale*, has led numerous scholars to see behind Paul's use of “head” either the meaning “source, origin” or “top, crown, completion.”...Another factor to take into consideration is that **nowhere else in the New Testament is *kephale* used to designate a figure of authority. If that had been a prominent meaning, it could have served well in numerous places in the Gospels where the head or master of a household appears; yet it is never used to convey this meaning** (see, for example, Mt 10:25; 13:52; Lk 13:25; 14:21)....If the readers of Paul's Greek did not hear our “headship” concept in the word *kephale*, but rather the idea of “source, origin,” what did it convey to them, and how did that meaning in 11:3 lay the foundation for Paul's admonitions about appropriate hair length and decorum in public worship? Cyril of Alexandria, an important Greek-speaking leader of the church in the fourth century, commenting on this text wrote: “Thus we say that the *kephale*

of every man is Christ, because he was excellently **made** through him. And the *kephale* of woman is man, **because she was taken from his flesh**. Likewise, the *kephale* of Christ is God, because he is **from him according to nature**....It would therefore seem best to translate 1 Corinthians 11:3 as "I want you to understand that **Christ is the source of man's being; the man is the source of woman's being; and God is the source of Christ's being**" [[HSOBX](#): 1 Cor 11.3 'headship']

**Sixth**, many of the other uses in Paul of this seem **to support a general 'non-authority' content** for this word:

*He has lost connection with the Head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.* [Col 2.19; note the explicit organic and 'source' imagery].

*And he is the head of the **body**, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the **supremacy**.* [Col 1.18; this seems closer to the 'crown' or 'capstone'(?), but the head/body image (i.e. of union, growth-source) is definitely different from a head/group image (i.e., authority).]

*For in him the whole fullness of deity dwells bodily, 10 and you have come to fullness in him, who is the **head of every ruler and authority**.* [Col 2.9,10 NRSV...note that the NIV/NASB makes the literal 'head **of**' into 'head **over**' without any textual warrant. Christ, as the one who holds all together, is also now the 'source' of all power/authority in the cosmos too...This text is commonly used as a proof-text for *kephale*=authority, but I suspect that this might be another case of 'source', since elsewhere Christ is said to '*fill all things*', cf. Eph 4.30. So, although *kephale* can mean 'authority', in Paul it very often does not. Translators in Eph 1.10 likewise change the '*in Christ*' to '*under Christ*'. Eph 1.23 **does** have an '*over*' so it might be closer to some kind of authority there--although one should note the 'filling' terminology in the passage as well.].

**Seventh**, this is in keeping with even the classical usage of the word:

"Plato and Aristotle, among others, maintained that sperm was formed in the brain. The Pythagoreans in particular considered the head to be the source of human generation. They refrained from eating any part of an animal or fish head lest the creature be a reincarnated ancestor and the head the very organ from which they themselves had derived. By the time of Plato, adherents of Orphic religion were using *kephale* with *arche* ("source" or "beginning"; Kern Orph. Fr. 2.nos. 21 a.2., 168; Plato Leg. IV.715E and sch; Proclus In Tim. II 95.48. (V.322); Pseudo-Aristides World 7; Eusebius Praep. Ev. 3.9; Deveni Papyrus col. 13, line 12; Stobaeus Ecl. 1.23; Plutarch Def. Orac. 436D; Achilles Tatius, fr. 81.29), as did the translators of the LXX version of Isaiah 9:14–15.

"W. Grudem views *arche* as conveying the sense of "rule or dominion" when used synonymously with *kephale*, but this concept did not find wide acceptance among the ancients.

**Irenaeus equates head with "source"** when he writes of the "head and source of his own being" (*kephaleun men kai archeun teus idias ousias*; PG 7.496. See also Tertullian Marc. 5.8). Hippolytus emphasized the productivity of this bodily member when he designated **the head as the characteristic substance from which all people were made** (PG 16.iii.3138). Philo declared, "**As though the head of a living creature, Esau is the progenitor of all these members**" (Philo Congr. 61). *Kephale* was considered by Photius to be a synonym for procreator or progenitor (Photius Comm. 1 Cor 11:3. ed. Staab 567.1). **The concept of head (*kephale*) as "source," "beginning" or "point of departure" is readily apparent in the Pauline corpus.** *Kephale* is used in apposition to *arche* in Colossians 1:18. (As an aside, one should recall that the head is the part of the body which is usually born first, a feature that may shed light on Christ as the firstborn of the dead, and the firstborn of all creation [Col 1:15, 18].)

"While there was debate as to whether the head, breast or stomach was the dwelling place of mind and soul, philosophers viewed the head as the organ from which there issued forth that which was important or distinctive of humans—most notably speech. The head resembled a spring, from which power flowed forth to other bodily organs (Philo Fug. 182; Aristotle Prob. 10 867a). It was placed nearest to the heavens, drawing

from thence its power and **distributing the life force** to every member of the body (Philo Det. Pot. Ins. 85; Praem. Poen. 125). This concept of the **head as source of supply to the whole body** is **well attested among medical writers and is twice echoed by Paul** (Eph 4:15–16; Col 2:19). In Colossians 2:10 Christ is presented as the head (“source”) of the originative power and ability needed for the believer’s fulfillment as he himself embodies the fullness of the Godhead [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. "Head"]

[Let me quickly point out that these two meanings are not "mutually exclusive and exhaustive" at all. They could *both* be present in a passage easily, and the two meanings can be seen to blend together logically in some places. But in each textual case, we have to justify which core sense we 'find' and then what 'additional connotations' or nuances we might *also* see in the passage. This is simply honest exegesis, and as such, requires **SOME** textual evidence to be provided for seeing 'additional nuances' in the use of the word.]

So, given the (a) definition and examples of 'submission' given in the passage; (b) the lack of explicit references to 'obedience' or 'rulership'; (c) the probable 'source'-oriented meaning of *kephale* in this passage; and (d) the lack of any clear 'majority meaning' for *kephale* in Paul of 'authority', I don't see any reason to try and re-interpret the passage into some support for patriarchal marriage.

In fact, to argue that it **DOES** support the conventional *paterfamilias*/patriarchal marriage concept of the first century Roman empire, gets us in much 'worse' exegetical and theological problems:

"Finally, the wife's subordination to her husband is directly parallel to the slave's subordination to his or her master. In both cases one submits as “to Christ”—who is compared with a slave's master no less than with a wife's husband. Most interpreters recognize today that Ephesians 6:5–9 does not address the institution of slavery; it simply gives advice to slaves in their situation. Like some Stoic philosophers, Paul could recommend securing one's freedom where that was possible (1 Cor 7:21–22); like the rare philosophers whom Aristotle chastised for suggesting that slavery was against nature and therefore wrong, **Paul clearly regarded the subordination of humans as unnatural** (Eph 6:9). Whereas the OT enjoined children's obedience to morally sound parental instruction (Deut 21:18–21), **the OT nowhere explicitly enjoins the submission of wives and slaves** (although they regularly appear in subordinate cultural roles,

which God sometimes contravened). Paul does call on wives and slaves in his culture to submit in some sense; **but he does not thereby approve of the institutions of patriarchal marriage or slavery, both of which are part of the authority of the paterfamilias and the household codes he here addresses.** [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. "Man and Woman"]

"That Paul's instructions to wives and slaves are limited to wives and slaves culturally subordinated to the male householder has often been noted (e.g., Martin, 206–31; Giles, 43). The objection that Paul could have rejected the institution of slavery but clearly would support the institution of marriage (Knight, 21–25) simply begs the real question. **It is not the institution of marriage per se, but the institution of patriarchal marriage, that Paul addresses here;** that was what appeared in the household codes. Paul elsewhere calls on believers in normal circumstances to submit to all who are in authority (Rom 13:1–7; see Civil Authorities), as Peter does (1 Pet 2:13–17); but this does not mean that he regards the particular authority structures (e.g., kingship) as necessary for all cultures. Because Paul's instructions specifically address institutions as they existed in Paul's day, **interpreters of Paul who do not insist on reinstating slavery or the monarchy should not insist on patriarchal marriages which subordinate wives, either.** Indeed, given Paul's weak definition of the wife's submission as "respect" (Eph 5:33; see above), it appears that **Paul advocated her submission in only a limited manner even for his own social situation.**" [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. "Man and Woman"]

"Third, Paul does not describe the duties that are attached to submission. An ancient reader could therefore have been tempted to read a wife's submission as meaning all that it could mean in that culture—which, as we have noted above, involves considerably more subordination than any modern Christian interpreters would apply to women today. **(Applying the text in this way would return women to rarely being able to attend college, to disallowing them voting privileges, etc.)** However, **Paul does define the content of the wife's submission once, in quite a strategic place: at the concluding summary of his advice to married couples. The wife is to "respect" (phobeomai, Eph 5:33) her husband.** Although the term usually translated "submission" (*hypotasso*) could be used in the weaker sense of "respect," household codes demanded far more of wives than mere respect; **Paul's view of women's subordination even in this social situation could not be much weaker than it is.**" [[NT:DictPL](#): s.v. "Man and Woman"]

.....

So, the **Pauline passages** do not order a wife to 'obey' her husband...

Now, the **Petrine Passage**, 1 Peter 3.1ff

1. **Unlike the Pauline passages** discussed above--in which both partners were Christians--this passage is a '**special case**' passage, in that it deals with the specific situation of a Christian wife and a **non-Christian husband** (apparently wealthy/powerful/elite). In the Roman Empire, this was often a major **practical** problem:

**"Roman men particularly resented and retaliated against non-Roman cults that drew their wives away from the family religion and so shamed the husband's authority** (e.g., Rabello, 697); when those religions incited women or slaves to disobey the male head of the household in other matters, this increased the level of hostility (e.g., Plutarch Con. Praec. 19, Mor. 140D). Many felt that foreign cults targeted well-to-do Roman women (cf. Liefeld, 239–42). **Writing with the conviction that the level of persecution existing or imminent in Rome would soon spread to other provinces, Peter exhorts** his audience to uphold appropriate family standards of Roman society. Like members of other persecuted sects and like Paul before him (Keener 1992, 139–224), Peter adapts popularly used household codes of the day to make Christian behavior less needlessly objectionable to outsiders. [[NT:DictLNT](#): s.v., "Woman and Man"]

"Although Peter upholds societal norms **for the purpose of** the church's witness in society, his sympathy here is clearly with the woman, as it was with the slaves in 2:18–25. He continues to advocate submission to authority **for the sake of witness and silencing charges that Christianity is subversive**; husbands were always in the position of authority in that culture....Like Judaism and other non-Roman religions, Christianity spread faster among wives than husbands; **husbands had more to lose socially from conversion to an unpopular minority religion**. But wives were expected to obey their husbands in Greco-Roman antiquity, and **this obedience included allegiance to their husbands' religions**. Cults that forbade their participation in Roman religious rites, including prohibiting worship of a family's household gods,

were viewed with disdain, and Jewish or Christian **women who refused to worship these gods could be charged with atheism**. Thus by his advice **Peter seeks to reduce marital tensions and causes of hostility toward Christianity and Christians**. Silence was considered a great virtue for women in antiquity." [[BBC](#): in loc]

"But what is the context in 1 Peter? The **passage is addressed to upper-class Christian women with unbelieving husbands** (a far more common situation in that culture than that of Christian husbands with unbelieving wives). These women are advised to be subject to their husbands, for it is their virtuous behavior that will convert them, not their arguments for Christianity or their fancy dress (the fact that fancy dress was possible points to their being upper-class women; peasant women typically had one decent set of clothing and virtually no expensive jewelry). Such submission was also the mark of "the holy women," that is, the Old Testament women, of whom Sarah is the chief. This submission will mark these Christian women out as being themselves holy (Sarah's children)." [[HSOBX](#): in loc]

2. *Whatever* this submission is, it is **NOT absolute**--the wife will still have to 'chose' what issues to give ground on:

"**Notice what is not said**. First, it is **not** being implied that this submission **extends to giving up the practice of the Christian faith or compromising the standards of holy living** laid down by Jesus. These women are to continue to "hope in God" and "do what is right." Their husbands, being unconverted, may in fact threaten them with punishment or divorce, demanding that they not go to the church gatherings or that they practice something Christ has forbidden, **but these women are not to "give way to fear."** Suffering for the name of Christ is honored in 1 Peter. Yet like all of those to whom 1 Peter is written, they should suffer because they are committed to Christ, not because they have broken cultural standards of which Christ would approve...In other words, what we see here is that **the submission of these women is not to be absolute**. They have submitted to Christ first of all. That is the one absolute submission. Now they follow him and submit to their

husbands. Their culture demanded absolute submission to their husbands, including in matters of religion. This **epistle is calling for them to take an independent stand on religion and morality, but to be model wives in every other way, which means that Christ would not be blamed for what was not truly the result of obedience to him.** [[HSOBX](#): in loc]

3. Again, note that his **actual directive is for 'submission'**--the word 'obedience' **only** comes up in the example of Sarah.

"Third, **Peter every where else uses the verb *hypotasso* ("defer to") rather than *akouein* ("obey")** in his adaptation of the household duty code (i.e., 2:13, 18; 3:1, 5; cf. 5:5). **Other NT household codes use *akouein* of the obedience of children to parents (Col 3:20; Eph 6:1) and slaves to masters (Col 3:22; Eph 6:5), but *not* of wives in relation to husbands.** [[WBC](#): in loc]

4. In fact, the example of Sarah is **only the "wife-half"** of a **mutual**-submission marriage. We know, for example, that God commanded Abraham to "obey" Sarah at least twice:

"Although **Peter explicitly advocates only "submission"** (v. 1), he cites Sarah as an example even of "obedience," which was what Roman male society demanded of their wives. That **Abraham also "obeyed" Sarah** is clear in Genesis (the term usually translated "listen to" in 16:2 and 21:12 also means "obey," and **in both passages Abraham submits to Sarah**), but **this point is not relevant to Peter's example for wives with husbands disobedient** to the word [[BBC](#): in loc]

"His **attention is therefore focused on Sarah** and her behavior, **not on who Abraham was or how he treated her.** His argument is from the greater to the lesser: if Sarah "obeyed" Abraham and called him "Lord," the Christian wives in Asia should at least treat their husbands with deference and respect...Peter passes up the opportunity to capitalize on the great influence Sarah is said to have had on Abraham in certain Hellenistic Jewish traditions. To Philo, Sarah represents "paramount virtue"; in advising Abraham to beget children

from Hagar the slave woman, she was pointing allegorically to the “preliminary studies” (grammar, geometry, and music) as the path to philosophy and true wisdom (Philo, Leg. All. 3.244–45; cf. Philo, Cong. 71–82). **Abraham, in fact, “obeys” the voice of Sarah** according to Gen 16:3, LXX, as Philo is careful to emphasize in Philo, Cong. 68 (cf. Chef 9). [[WBC:](#), in loc]]

5. The example Peter gives of Sarah calling Abraham 'lord' deals with **respect** and *not with obedience/authority* per se:

**"One should not read too much into Sarah's calling her husband “lord” here.** The direct address “lord” may have been used in Hebrew **to address husbands respectfully as “sir,”** e.g., Hos 2:16, **but it is mainly in later Jewish traditions** such as the Testament of Abraham **that Sarah addresses Abraham in this manner.** Even in the Testament of Abraham, **Isaac also addresses his mother with a similarly respectful title** and **Abraham so addresses a visitor,** unaware that he is an angel. In another Jewish tale, **Asenath calls her father “lord” yet answers him boastfully and angrily,** although Peter certainly does not suggest such behavior here. In the patriarchal period, **it was a polite way to address someone of higher authority or one to whose status one wished to defer, e.g., Jacob to Esau** in Gen 33:13–14.) "[\[BBC:](#) in loc]

"Is Peter teaching that women should refer to their husbands as if the women were the slaves and the men were their owners? Isn't the expression “master” offensive and demeaning to the woman? And what does not giving way to fear have to do with such a situation? Is Peter setting women up for second-class status and abuse?..The passage in 1 Peter is referring to Genesis 18:12, in which **Sarah laughs and says to herself, “After I am worn out and my master is old,** will I now have this pleasure [of having a child]?” The point is that Sarah (perhaps even in her thoughts) refers to her husband as “my lord” (not “my master”), showing **a proper respect toward him.** The irony is that in the context, while appearing to respect Abraham, she is laughing at the words of Yahweh himself; Peter, however, like most New Testament authors, is

not concerned with the context, only with the single use of the term." [[HSOBX](#): in loc]

6. In fact, the context of Sarah's remark is **NOT one of 'deference'** but of independent, "formal" respect--and perhaps Peter is allowing his readers to implement some kind of 'formal-only' respect(?):

"Fourth, **the context of Sarah's remark** in Gen 18:12 is **not quiet deference** to her "lord," **but amused skepticism** at the extravagant promise she has just heard...Where **Rabbinic commentators** (e.g., Sipre Num 6:26, 42[12b], Lev. Rab. [111b] on 9:9; see Balch, Domestic Code, 104) **tend to struggle with Sarah's apparent insult to Abraham** (true though her statement was) in Gen 18:12, **Peter ignores the context and fastens instead on one word.** " [[WBC](#): in loc]

"Like others who respectfully addressed those of higher social status (Gen 33:13–14), **ancient Israelite women may have regularly called their husbands "sir"** (some cite Hos 2:16); in Genesis 18:12 and especially later Jewish tradition (T. Abr. 5-6A; 4, 6B) Sarah grants Abraham this title. Yet Isaac also grants a form of this title to Sarah (T. Abr. 3A, using the feminine form), and Abraham also grants it to guests (Gen 18:3–5; T. Abr. 2A; cf. T. Abr. 15, 18A; 8, 10, 12B). **Use of the title did not necessarily accompany submissive behavior** (Jos. and As. 4:5/7, 12/16), although Peter clearly does invite such behavior. At issue is **not a transcultural example of patriarchal dominance** but an appropriate **example of respect.**" [[NT:DictLNT](#): s.v., "Woman and Man"]

7. Peter's intent here is *practical*, **not** theological. He is **not** developing/defending some 'male dominance' model at all--that would be reading into the passage:

"The **solution to these varied difficulties lies in not reading too much profound theology into Peter's simple language.** Where Rabbinic commentators (e.g., Sipre Num 6:26, 42[12b], Lev. Rab. [111b] on 9:9; see Balch, Domestic Code, 104) **tend to struggle with Sarah's apparent insult to Abraham** (true though her statement was) in Gen 18:12, **Peter ignores the**

**context and fastens instead on one word** [[WBC](#): in loc]

"In 1 Peter 3:1 **Peter is doing three things**. First, he is **presenting an evangelistic strategy**. People are won to Christ not by words alone and certainly not by rebellion, but by living to the fullest pagan virtue (when it is consistent with Christian virtue), so that the non-Christian will see that the effect of Christ in one's life is to make one able to live the ideals that pagans could write about but rarely live...**Second, he is noting that the normal Christian position is the way of submission**. No New Testament writer has a problem with submission, for **it is what Jesus practiced**, as Peter points out in 1 Peter 2:23. Liberation in the New Testament comes from the powerful giving up power, the wealthy sharing their wealth, not by the oppressed demanding their rights or the poor their share of the pie. The effect of the Spirit is seen in the act of giving up, not that of demanding. Thus Sarah's action shows an attitude consistent with New Testament virtue. This was especially important, given the role possibilities for women in that day...**Third, he is following the pattern Paul** described in 1 Corinthians 5:12–13 (and illustrates in 1 Cor 7:12–16), **that Christians should not try to impose their standards on non-Christians**. After all, such people do not have the power of the Spirit to follow Christian standards. Thus this passage does not address the behavior of the unbelieving husband, only that of the wife. She alone can show Christian virtue. She can hope that her husband will in fact come to faith and, filled with the Spirit, in turn begin to treat her as an equal, as instructed in 1 Peter 3:7." [[HSOBX](#): in loc.]

"Though he is not addressing the institutions of slavery or patriarchal marriage structures themselves, **Peter recognizes the unjust use of such structures** (1 Pet 2:19) and **encourages believers in unjust situations to act strategically within them** for the long-range interests of the gospel (cf. Balch 1984)." [[NT:DictLNT](#): s.v., "Woman and Man"]

"**Peter's advice is practical**, not harsh as it might sound in our culture. Although philosophers' household codes often stressed that the wife should "fear" her husband as well as submit to him, **Peter disagrees** (v. 6; cf. 3:13–14). **Husbands could legally "throw out" babies, resort to prostitutes and make**

**life miserable for their wives**, although sleeping with other women of the aristocratic class or beating their wives was prohibited. (In a mid-second-century account, a Christian divorced her husband for his repeated infidelity, so he betrayed her to the authorities as a Christian.) Christian wives were limited in their options, but Peter wants them to pursue peace without being intimidated." [[BBC](#): in loc]

8. And, as with many NT ethical imperatives, **it has limits...**

"Like the instructions of other writers who are speaking in general principles (cf. 1 Cor 7:21; see Keener 1991, 22–25), **Peter's words apply under general circumstances but not necessarily under circumstances he does not address.** Thus he recognizes that slaves must endure beatings, often without any wrongdoing on their part (1 Pet 2:20); slaves, however, normally had little choice but to endure such beatings. By contrast Roman wives could divorce their husbands, and Christians could often flee local persecution; **Peter's instructions to submit to authorities (1 Pet 2:13–17) and to husbands (1 Pet 3:1–6) involved normal and not abusive situations.** The instructions to wives address what appears to be **the least abusive situation** in the context." [[NT:DictLNT](#): s.v., "Woman and Man"]

9. And finally it should be noted that this is **NOT Peter's advice for Christian marriages**, which will end up being described by him as a **mutual**-submission and **mutual**-respect model like Paul's:

"Second, this pattern is **not presented as the ideal for Christian marriage.** Only in 1 Peter 3:7, as we shall see in the next chapter, does the author get around to discussing Christian marriage. Given that he has so little to say about it, it is likely that either such marriages were not a problem or that they were relatively rare in the communities he is addressing. In a Christian marriage the wife is an heir with her husband "of the gracious gift of life." In other words, **she is an equal partner in the gospel.** The husband is to give her honor and treat her

with consideration, “so that nothing will hinder your prayers.”  
[\[HSOBX: in loc\]](#)

**"Then Peter addresses Christian husbands (1 Pet 3:7). Instead of exhorting them how to make their wives obey them,** however, as would have been customary in household codes (Keener 1992, 166–70), he exhorts them to be sensitive to their wives. Other ancient writers who regarded women as the weaker gender normally meant that they were morally or mentally inferior (Apuleius Met. 7.8; 'Abot R. Nat. 9, §24B; Gardner, 21, 67; Pomeroy, 150, 230; Lefkowitz, 112–32; Wegner, 159–62; less pejoratively, 4 Macc 15:4–5; 16:5, 14); this could entitle them to special consideration (Ep. Arist. 250; b. B. Mes\ 59a; Plutarch Rom. 108, Mor. 289E; Muson. Ruf. frag. 12; Chariton Chaer. 2.2.2; cf. 1 Cor 12:23). **The rest of Peter's instructions to the husband rules out the sense of moral or mental weakness,** however; Peter either thinks of the wife as weaker with regard to her societal status or because Greek men around age thirty often married women in their mid-teens, producing a disparity of social and intellectual maturation. In any case, like some of his contemporaries, Peter felt that this weakness entitled wives to special consideration and sensitivity (“according to understanding” or “knowledge”; cf. Sir 7:25)...**Peter emphasizes that husbands should treat their wives with “respect” or “honor” (1 Pet 3:7), as he had exhorted wives to treat their husbands (1 Pet 3:2, using a different term). They should likewise view them as fellow heirs of the grace of life. Whereas women's inheritance rights were normally subordinate to those of men (Num 27:8 improved their status in Israel), all God's people shared the same inheritance in the world to come. By emphasizing the wives' spiritual equality, Peter prevents the husbands from taking his instructions to the wives as grounds for the husbands to subordinate them.**" [\[NT:DictLNT: s.v., "Woman and Man"\]](#)

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## Summary:

1. None of the passages explicitly command wives to obey their

**husbands.**

2. Paul's departures from the patriarchal household codes of the day are **radical, and unsupportive of a male-dominance model.**
3. Paul specifically undermines the absolute authority of the male head of the *paterfamilias*.
4. In the Ephesians passage, Paul requires husband and wife BOTH to submit to one another.
5. This mutual submission is self-chosen, and **modeled after the voluntary submission and servanthood of Jesus.**
6. Submission is seen, in the Pauline passages, to be **defined/described as 'respect' instead of 'obedience'.**
7. Paul overturns the male's authority over the household by 'ordering' him to serve, in agape love, the wife (and to 'submit' to his slaves/servants, as well).
8. The Pauline passages thus teach a mutual self-giving and self-servanthood for one another.
9. The word *kephale* in the Pauline passages do not alter this understanding of the more explicit elements of Paul's argument (as observed above).
10. Paul's injunctions to wives and slaves in these passages **do not support a view that he was in favor of slavery or patriarchal marriage structures.**
11. The case in First Peter is **different from** that in Paul, in that it deals with a *mixed* marriage as opposed to a *Christian* marriage.
12. For practical reasons, the wife is urged to 'go with the flow' everywhere *possible*, but **without compromising** her Christian convictions and morals.
13. The submission of the wife was to be **freely chosen by her**, for the Lord's sake, and **not because of** some 'authority structure' sanctioned by Peter.
14. The word for 'obey' only comes up in the Sarah example--it is **not used by Peter in the imperatives.**
15. The example of Sarah was a half-example; it showed **only the wife-side of mutual submission** (since the non-believer could not be expected to be living the 'other side' yet).
16. Sarah's calling Abraham 'lord' was **a term of deference and respect** (the subject of Peter's injunction here), **not of 'recognition of male authority'.**
17. Using **this half-a-verse example** in Peter to build a theory that the bible supports Roman-like male-dominance patriarchal marriages (over against the *many* verses otherwise--including the Pauline ones discussed at the beginning) is exceptionally flawed !
18. Peter's instructions are for this special case **only** (i.e. mixed marriages

with a strong/elite Roman male head) and *not for Christian* marriages; and his few comments on Christian marriages indicates that he held a mutual-submission model of marriage like Paul did.

19. The resulting view of Christian marriage is one of liberating beauty and equality, and genuine self-giving like-Jesus love for one another--an *immense improvement* over the Graeco-Roman model, for BOTH partners...

So, the data indicates that (a) God didn't order wives to obey their husbands in the bible; and that (b) the marriage relationship as re-designed by Him in Christ was antithetical to all such power structures.

I hope this helps some...now to go start working on my own submission to others...(weak smile)...

Glenn Miller



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[Abbreviations](#))

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## Pushback....

***"Doesn't the bible teach that God cursed women by making them subject/subordinate to men?"***

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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The main point here is that God's statements to Eve in Gen 3 are understood in a particular way:

*To the woman he said,  
"I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing;  
with pain you will give birth to children.  
Your desire will be for your husband,  
and he will rule over you." (Gen 3.16)*

So, some have argued that part of Eve's punishment is that the man will "rule" over her--forever (or at least till the curse is lifted).

I personally don't think this is in view here, for the following reasons:

1. This is actually not introduced with a 'curse' formula--only the ground and the serpent are stated as being 'cursed' (3.14,17).
2. God's actions are limited to the first half of the verse--the discomfort in childbearing (e.g. physical, mental, emotional, or some combo of these)
3. The 2nd half of the verse looks more like a prediction or observation as to how the future will unfold.
4. The word for "your desire" and "rule" , and the exact set of prepositions and word order occur in Gen 4.7b: *But if you do not do what is right, sin is crouching at your door; it desires to have you, but you must master it.*". Cain will face a struggle for self-mastery with sin. The obvious import of the 4.7 passage is that sin desires to 'dominate' Cain, but that Cain must 'fight back'.

The fact that the verbs for "rule" are the same tense and mood, make me wonder why commentators translate 3.16 as "will rule" and 4.7 as "must rule". I cannot find any comments in the literature about this, although 4.7 is the more accepted

rendering ("must rule"=>"must attempt to rule") of the two.

So, if these forms/structures are indeed identical, and if 4.7 is generally accepted as a "must try to rule" and "desire (to rule)", THEN Gen 3.16b becomes something like this:

You will desire to rule over your husband;  
And (at the same time) he will struggle diligently to rule over you

-- a perpetual power struggle...

There is no indication that there is a 'winner' in this struggle, but history has shown us that all have been losers.

5. The other piece of data that might suggest that God was making a prediction of 'male dominance' (historically) comes from anthropological research. Grenz/Kjesbo refer to the work of Peggy Reeves Sanday ([WS:WIC:167](#)):

The anthropological research of Peggy Reeves Sanday indicates that in addition to biological sexual distinctions, the nature of the environment in which a society develops influences male and female roles. A hostile environment, she argues, readily leads to male domination, whereas relative equality between the sexes is most frequently found when the environment is beneficent. Indeed, in the biblical narrative, human sin results in both a hostile environment (a cursed ground) and male dominance.

What this would mean for my understanding of this verse is that the struggle of 3.16b would result (early in history) in more male dominance--due to the harsher environment. [However, other studies indicate that in 'pioneering' environments, such as post-exilic Palestine, women's status IMPROVES--see [WS:WBC:118](#)]

What this would make Gen 3.16 say is that, as a result of the Fall, men-women relationships are problematic--each is tempted to dominate/manipulate the other, and, like a cursed ground, relationships will require more 'work' to see the original desired fruitfulness. In any event, the text is CERTAINLY not clear enough to build a case for "prescriptive, pervasive, and punitive subjection" as part of the Fall(!)...

So, I conclude that Gen 3.16b is NOT a 'curse on Eve', but rather a simple prediction of (1) definite power struggles between husbands and wives (not necessarily men and women--not in view here) and of (2) a POSSIBLE tendency in early history toward male dominance.



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## Pushback....

*"Wasn't there a HUGE double standard in biblical sexual ethics?--weren't women supposed to be 'good', but men didn't have to?"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This shows up in a surprisingly large number of sources ([WS:AHTO:20ff](#); [WS:AST:15ff](#); [WS:WWR:184](#); [WS:TCP:170ff](#)).

Typically, they point to the [Sotah trial](#) (Trial of Jealously, Trial of Bitter Waters), noting that there was no counterpart test for a man's fidelity, or draw attention to the law stipulations about proving a bride's virginity.

The Sotah trial turns out to be a PROTECTION for women(!), not a double standard:

Num 5.12--the trial of bitter waters (*Sotah*) is a an amazing provision by God for a woman to publicly clear her name (and indict a dysfunctional husband in the process). This is the procedure invoked by a jealous and/or paranoid husband who suspected his wife of infidelity. God gave this law to protect the woman from physical and economic abuse from a capricious and petty husband. In many of the cultures of that day, men had absolute dictatorial rights over their wives. If they suspected adultery, they were allowed to kill the woman without any appeal on her part. There was not a process of justice, or process where they BOTH had to appear before a higher authority. In fact, in the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1720 BC.), CH 132, women who were suspected of this type of infidelity were required to throw themselves into the Euphrates river--if they drown, they were guilty; if not, they were innocent! (Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 171). God would instead provide a public vindication process, before His leaders, his people, and the couple. If the woman was vindicated, the man would bear the stigma of unfounded and paranoid jealousy, and slanderous accusation before his friends/family (with possible legal consequences). Her rights were protected by this very ceremony. This was a very, very advanced pro-women procedure for those times.

By comparison, in the other law codes of that time, ANYONE could accuse her and force her to undergo the River Ordeal(!). So, the Laws of Ur-Nammu, 14 [ca. 2100bc, Ur in Sumer]: "If a man accuses the wife of a

young man of promiscuity but the River Ordeal clears her..."  
([LCMAM:18](#)).

And the proof of virginity is the same thing--a protection (see the syllabus for discussion on this one).

The examples given as evidence for a double-standard are simply too weak to support such a conclusion. On the other hand, we have TONS of passages that support (1) a much greater emphasis on male fidelity and (2) preferential treatment for women in disputes of this nature.

1. The 10 commandments SINGLE OUT the male (Ex 20.17b)...
2. in cases of rape, the woman is given the benefit of the doubt (Lev 19.20ff; Deut 22.25-27)...
3. and is protected from disastrous marriages from those (Ex 22.16)...
4. in cases of adultery, BOTH parties were killed--a fact noted by authors as being a 'step forward' at that time (Lev 20.10-12)...
5. the male is CONSISTENTLY singled out for admonition in this area (Lev 18; Deut 27; Jer 5.7; Ezek 18.6; 22.10ff)...
6. even the case of female war captives was regulated for the male! (Deut 21.11)...
7. in some cases women were "excused from guilt" because of the guilt of the men! (Hos 4.14ff)...

And remember, this "inequality" AGAINST the male would had to have involved a female--but they do not get 'equal time' in the warnings/admonitions! They are often simply assumed to be more righteous in this area (cf. The "benefit of the doubt" passages above).

Again, the data is simply otherwise--IF there is a double-standard, THEN it is "against" the men!



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## Pushback....

*"All the books of the bible were written by men--see, God de-values women again"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This issue is a bit complex, because it is not AT ALL clear that AUTHORSHIP of something is of higher "status" than being the SUBJECT or CHARACTER in the something.

For example, consider the Book of Esther. Esther is obviously a main character and the main hero in the book. On the other hand, the author of the book is unknown. So, is it more "prestigious" to be the unknown author or the role-model hero? I submit that it is the latter.

I don't see this objection often, but let's look at some issues embedded in it anyway...

1. It is somewhat difficult to assign "authorship" to much of the OT literature.

Take for example the book of Ruth. Here is a story from the period of the Judges that probably was passed down orally for decades before being recorded under King David's reign. Someone probably fashioned the story (it is incredible literature) very, very early---oral transmission rarely changed any of the story; the transmission process was so good. But eventually, someone wrote it down and appended the genealogy of David onto it.

So, who was the author? The original storyteller-singer (probably a woman)? The court historian who added a genealogy? A scribe who redacted it into its final form?

2. Most of the OT literature is anonymous--we simply don't know who wrote it. Many of the historical books, of course, were probably written by scribes in the time of Ezra/Nehemiah, but since some of those who returned to the Land were of a family of female scribes ("Hassophereth" in Ezra 2.55 means "female scribe"--there was apparently a group that was descended from a female scribe), it is at least theoretically possible that females were involved in the "final assembly" of the OT literature.

And, since scribes also recorded at least ONE prophet's messages (Baruch and

Jeremiah), it is likewise possible that scribes (even female ones) recorded some of the other prophet's messages.

3. Most of the OT literature quotes women extensively anyway--who is the 'author' of those quotes? The prayers of Hannah and Mary, the Songs of Miriam and Deborah, the Proverbs of the Queen-Mother of King Lemuel, the prophesies of Huldah and Anna--who are the "authors" of those?
4. We have strong indications that women wrote pseudepigraphically in the Intertestamental period and NT time frames (cf. [WS:WLT:222ff](#)). When coupled with the 'female scribe' designation in Ezra/Neh, the probability that women had SOME part in the final assembly of OT works goes up.
5. We even have one piece of mid-4th century data that argues that Mary wrote the Gospel of Luke (See syllabus for discussion).
6. God tends to value the characters in the literature--the prophets, the players, the patrons, the people--NOT THE AUTHOR of the final edition of the history! The PORTRAYAL and ROLES of women in the documents is much more critical to valuation than who WROTE those texts. (I think the objection is simply misplaced.)

It would seem that the patterns of female "honoring" that show up throughout scripture would indicate EITHER (1) a high valuation of women--regardless of authorship profiles; OR (2) a role of women in shaping some of the final products...Both of these possibilities are real, with #1 being almost certain from the literary data.



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## Pushback....

*"The VAST MAJORITY of Israelite/Church leadership is by MEN--see, God de-values women again"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This is a standard type of argument form:

"The VAST MAJORITY of (highly-valued X) is *correlated* (e.g. owned, performed) with (specific group Y--and by implication, NOT with specific group Z)...THEREFORE, (specific group Z) is not as (highly-valued) as (specific group Y) by whatever agent does the correlating..."

The way it is used here "unpacks" to this:

1. "leadership" is (more highly valued)--by God--than ANYTHING performed by (group Z)
2. God's choice of (group Y) for "leadership" is due to his placing a higher valuation on (group Y)
3. God's alleged higher valuation of (group Y) is due to their being MALES(!).

**ALL of these are biblically false!**

1. God values FAITHFULNESS to whatever is assigned--'leadership' (and similar 'status' things) are not even an issue to Him--they are STRICTLY responsibilities and stewardships!

Consider the words of Jesus about the 'solitary voice in the wilderness':

*After John's messengers left, Jesus began to speak to the crowd about John: "What did you go out into the desert to see? A reed swayed by the wind? 25 If not, what did you go out to see? A man dressed in fine clothes? No, those who wear expensive clothes and indulge in luxury are in palaces. 26 But what did you go out to see? A prophet? Yes, I tell you, and more than a prophet. 27 This is the one about whom it is written: "I will send my messenger ahead of you, who will prepare your way before you." 28 I tell you, among those born of women there*

*is no one greater than John; (Luke 7.24ff)*

John would not have been considered 'authority' or 'leader' in the sense in the objection--but God valued him highly.

Or again...

*Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." (Mrk 10.42ff)*

Or again, as Jesus turns the value-hierarchy on its head once more...

*Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything -- all she had to live on." (Mark 12.41)*

2. We have absolutely NO reason to believe that God values men more highly than women!

Indeed, we have seen countless passages in which women are held to be equal in value in His sight (and in some passages, they seem to get preferential treatment!). Women are held to equal responsibilities, equal consequences, equal access with men to lay cultic functions, equal sacrifice values, equal access to legal structures, etc.

God's close relationships with women throughout the OT, and throughout the ministry of Jesus amply demonstrates His high valuation of them. He consistently uses them as examples of true discipleship (esp. in Matthew), as expected members/contributors/leaders of the NT church (e.g. Luke-Acts), and as suitable models with which to describe His attitudes/actions in salvation history (e.g. Is 49.15; Luke 15.8f).

3. But the really funny one is that He would value them for being 'male'...what a

joke!

Not only is there NOT THE SLIGHTEST HINT that this is the case, and not only are men CONSISTENTLY rebuked throughout scripture for every imaginable crime against God, humanity, and nature(!), but we can actually illustrate this by a little spoof of the "VAST MAJORITY" argument structure...

"Since God selected only MALE Israelites for the VAST MAJORITY of war casualties in ancient Israel, therefore He values women more highly..." (i.e. men are so much more expendable than women...!)

(And, before you ask it--"But doesn't the bible teach that ONLY the man is the image of God, whereas the women is ONLY the image of the man, as in I Cor 11.7?"--let me point out that the woman is the image of BOTH!--remember Gen 1.26-27?)

Besides, IF it were a valuation based on 'maleness', then there would be NO EXCEPTIONS at all! The outstanding women leaders in the OT COULD not show up like they do. If valuation is radically dependent on gender, then NO OTHER COMBINATIONS of 'other factors' would be able to generate an exception.

Yet we have the hero-women of the bible, from EVERY STRATA of society--slave girls (Miriam), prostitutes (Rahab), outcast foreigners (Ruth), queens (Esther), official prophets (Huldah), wealthy patrons (Joanna/Susanna-patrons of Jesus; patron of Elisha), Sages, queen mothers (Bathsheba), urban craftsmen (Lydia)...these simply would not exist if 'maleness' was a *sine qua non* to be used by God!

Accordingly, the objection is simply mis-guided. The distribution of roles and responsibilities in God's salvation work is NOT a function of gender, class, age, etc.--it is a function of a yielded and faithful heart, and a situation in which that can be leveraged to the fullest.



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## Pushback....

*"Wasn't Miriam punished for questioning male authority, while Aaron was not?"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This was another one of those "I cannot believe it actually says that..." passage:

Miriam's courage and frankness lead to a great humiliation by Yahweh when she challenges Moses' spiritual authority. It is important to note that Miriam receives the heavy punishment of leprosy while Aaron, who also challenged Moses, does not. There is a message in this for all women who want to question male authority. ([WS:AST:10](#)).

The passage the author is discussing is Numbers 12:

*Miriam and Aaron began to talk against Moses because of his Cushite wife, for he had married a Cushite. 2 "Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?" they asked. "Hasn't he also spoken through us?" And the LORD heard this. 3 (Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.) 4 At once the LORD said to Moses, Aaron and Miriam, "Come out to the Tent of Meeting, all three of you." So the three of them came out. 5 Then the LORD came down in a pillar of cloud; he stood at the entrance to the Tent and summoned Aaron and Miriam. When both of them stepped forward, 6 he said, "Listen to my words:*

*"When a prophet of the LORD is among you, I reveal myself to him in visions, I speak to him in dreams.*

*7 But this is not true of my servant Moses; he is faithful in all my house.*

*8 With him I speak face to face, clearly and not in riddles; he sees the form of the LORD.*

*Why then were you not afraid to speak against my servant Moses?"*

*9 The anger of the LORD burned against them, and he left them. 10 When the cloud lifted from above the Tent, there stood Miriam -- leprous, like snow. Aaron turned toward her and saw that she had leprosy; 11 and he*

*said to Moses, "Please, my lord, do not hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed. 12 Do not let her be like a stillborn infant coming from its mother's womb with its flesh half eaten away."*

*13 So Moses cried out to the LORD, "O God, please heal her!" 14 The LORD replied to Moses, "If her father had spit in her face, would she not have been in disgrace for seven days? Confine her outside the camp for seven days; after that she can be brought back." 15 So Miriam was confined outside the camp for seven days, and the people did not move on till she was brought back.*

There are several points about this passage that are important to note:

1. Miriam is the PRINCIPAL instigator of the attack on Moses. The Hebrew is quite clear, although English renderings do not reflect this, typically. For example, in verse 1, the actual verb form is "SHE spoke against..."--a 3fsg form. And, her name is placed BEFORE Aaron's in the attack about the Cushite wife; but Aaron's is put first in the attack on Moses' uniqueness (4-5). [They BOTH were not included in the "sharing of the spirit" event in Num 11.16f, and commentators suggest that this was what triggered their status-greedy attack.]
2. Others have suggested a rather infantile episode of sibling rivalry--they WERE brothers and sisters--based around the Moses-only event in Num 11.15-17.
3. The passage is filled with irony, and this forms the nature of the punishments on Miriam and Aaron. Miriam is the initial attacker about Moses' 'black wife' (i.e. the Cushite)--so God turns her 'white' with a skin disease! Aaron is the initial attacker about Moses having a unique relationship with YHWH--so God makes Aaron have to ask Moses to intercede to YHWH for them! (see Ashley in NICOT, s.v.).
4. The punishment on Miriam is instantly lifted at the request of Moses; the very-short exclusion outside the camp is simply a public statement before the people (in front of whom these attacks undoubtedly occurred).
5. Aaron, as the high priest, was not allowed to become ritually unclean for ANY reason, so it is entirely reasonable that his "humbling" come from a different direction--the need to ask Moses to talk to YHWH for him!
6. Also, note that God maintains Miriam's good reputation throughout biblical history--both the immortalizing of her words in Exodus 15-16, and His word through Micah shows this:

*I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. (Micah 6.4)*

As can be seen from the above, a close exegesis of the passage reveals a structure that in no way has gender-related determinants. Miriam and Aaron are dealt with NOT as gender-based agents; but rather, are dealt with according to their actions.

[It might also be pointed out that Miriam's punishment here is the lightest--by far--of the punishments inflicted on the leaders of the time! Moses and Aaron were forbidden from entering the Promised Land for THEIR joint-failure (Num 20), and the rebellion of Korah resulted in the destruction/death of all of the participants and their families (Num 16)! A skin disease for a few minutes, and a week outside the camp--relative to these punishments--seems like a 'token' action at its worst.]



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## Pushback....

*"Why do men get all the glory in the bible? Why are women only minor characters?!"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This is a fascinating question, for examination of it reveals two major patterns in scripture, relative to our subject.

But let me make a comment before we get to those--in the bible, ONLY God ends up with the glory--everyone else has 'problems'...

The two major patterns:

- **Women 'appear' to be more righteous than men.**

This can be seen by their LITERARY portrayal throughout the Book. They are consistently used as foils over against the men. For example, in Matthew they are used to demonstrate the characteristics of true disciples (over against the Twelve). In Luke, they are used to demonstrate the universal character of the church--they are seen as aggressive disciples and heralds of the Lord.

In Patriarchial times, women 'save the day' any number of times by independent action on behalf of YHWH--the "trickery of Rebekah" or the subterfuge of the Midwives.

If one were to compute some kind of "total appearances divided by good appearances", women would have a much better record than males in the book. There are only a couple of "major" male characters of which no fault is mentioned in the text (e.g. Daniel, possibly Job?), but there are numerous women (e.g. Ruth, Abigail, Esther, Deborah).

(In the syllabus, we looked at a number of these 'women versus men' literary uses.)

- **Minor characters are deliberately given MAJOR contributions to the historical flow**

There are many minor characters in the narratives--many of whom are women. But the minor women characters play a disproportionate role in the progress of

God's kingdom. It is as if He were trying to teach us that everyone is more important than they realize...

Consider just a few of the major events involving "minor" female characters:

1. Zipporah saves Moses' life.
2. Micah saves David's life.
3. Sarah saves Abraham's life twice (by half-lying about her identity)
4. Rebekah deceives Isaac so that GOD'S PLAN gets done in spite of Isaac.
5. Unnamed women are patrons of Elijah and Elisha.
6. Rahab is a major player in the conquest of the gateway-city to Palestine.
7. Jael saves Israel from major oppression.
8. a Wise-woman prevents civil war in Israel
9. An unnamed Samaritan woman is the first evangelist in Samaria
10. Lydia is the first convert in Asia Minor, and heads up a house-church there.

The point is this: God used 'minor' characters to make MAJOR influences on the historical flow.

But we should not be surprised by this--God delights in turning our perspectives and values 'upside down'--remember that the God of Power and Glory, came to earth as a Galilean peasant, was born in a stable, and executed as an international criminal--to save us...revealing the heart of the Divine Servant: " For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve"

Indeed, God delights in using the "normal", the "common", the "ignoble" to make His point (I Cor 1.26f: *Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things -- and the things that are not -- to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God -- that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*)

Women are not romanticized in the text--there are evil females who oppress and commit bloodshed--but overall they are portrayed very favorably, and are singled out as making significant contributions. (God seems to delight in bragging on His daughters!).



[Abbreviations](#)

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## Pushback....

*"Sure, women could be prophets, but they couldn't participate in government."*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This objection is normally levied because the monarchs in the OT were always male. ..

But women played obvious roles in ALL levels of government:

1. Deborah was actually a national 'judge' (like Samuel)
2. One woman built three cities (and named one after herself)
3. The Sage-women were local city elder-types.
4. Each king had a dominant queen--for good or ill! (cf. Jezebel)
5. Queen mothers functioned as vice-Kings, to the point that one could rule the land for 7 years without a king on the throne--and no one had a problem with it...
6. Even some of the prophetesses were attached to the court--Huldah was probably a court-prophet (and was married to a court official).
7. There were female scribes (originally a court position) that returned under Ezra.
8. They had access to the king and to legal courts.
9. There were female singers (and male singers) that had court assignments.
10. They assisted in rebuilding the Walls of Jerusalem.

I would say that that is a pretty robust line-up of known female participation in government.



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## Pushback....

*"But, women were excluded from being priests..."*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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Two comments:

**One:** So was David, Solomon, all of the kings, all the men of the other 11 tribes, most of the prophets, all of the Twelve, anyone over fifty or under 25, anyone with a handicap, any foreigner (such as Job)...I am not sure exclusion from the priesthood meant much in terms of value...

**Two:** There WAS a "lay" position that normal men and women could aspire to--the Nazarite role. This was a vow-based position of holiness in Israel. It was open to women and men, and had the same level of ritual purification requirements as that of the HIGH PRIEST! It actually involved some of the rituals of the Levitical priesthood (e.g. sacrifices), but did not require lifelong tenure. It was open to men and women, and could be done any number of times in life.

Theologically speaking, every Israelite WAS supposed to be a 'priest'--to the rest of the world. In Exodus 19.5, we read: *Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine, 6 you will be for me a **kingdom of priests** and a holy nation.'*

From an overall standpoint, this 'exclusion' was not that big of a deal...any value that MIGHT be associated (inappropriately) with it in the culture (in terms of "special relationship to YHWH") was available to ANYONE who would consecrate themselves to the Nazarite commitment.



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## Pushback....

*"Women are always pictured as being servile or passive or evil or stupid..."*

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On the contrary...

- Women are NOT pictured as SERVILE--they consistently manifest the 'uppity' tone, even in the Patriarchal narratives. (They occasionally adopt a 'servile' tone in the presence of royalty, but so do the men.)
- Women are NOT pictured as PASSIVE--they show a surprising amount of independent action, often deceiving a male to 'save the day' (e.g. the trickery of Rebekah, the deceit of the midwives and of Rahab, the 'disloyalty' of Jael, the insubordination of Abigail). They are lauded for initiative in Proverbs 31, and are bold in their confrontations with men (e.g. Deborah and Huldah).
- Women are NOT pictured as EVIL--they are consistently portrayed as 'more righteous than men' (in the Law codes, in various situations--the rape of Tamar, Abigail vs. Nabal vs. David, Rebekah vs. Isaac). They are not idolized or romanticized, however, for oppressive and arrogant women also appear in the narratives.
- Women are NOT pictured as STUPID--they consistently out-argue and out-think the males in the stories (e.g. Manoh's wife, Tamar vs. Judah, Abigail vs. David, the Sage-women), and even Wisdom in Proverbs is portrayed as female! Huldah was sought out for her biblical scholarship, and female scribes were also found.

Women are portrayed realistically, but favorably, throughout the biblical documents, and are often used in literary settings as examples of true followers of YHWH (e.g. women in Matthew, Ruth).



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## Pushback....

*"God is ALWAYS portrayed as a male--women had no way of identifying with Him"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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Actually, this is not true. God does use some female images of Himself...

- God is said to have a womb and give birth in Job.
- God portrays Himself as a mother in Isaiah.
- God portrays Himself as the mother of Israel (giving birth to them ), in parallel with the father image(!), in Deut 32.18
- God portrays Himself as a young wife in Malachi 2.13-16 (according to some commentators, see [OT:FAI:124](#)]
- Jesus portrays the Father, in His redemptive 'search and rescue mission' as a women in search of a lost coin (Luke 15.8ff).
- Jesus portrays himself as a "mother hen" in Matt 23.37.

These images show us that God's character is robust enough to incorporate the wide range of characteristics of our race. If God NEVER used images/titles of Himself (e.g. mother, father, king, servant) and only spoke of Himself in terms of 'person', we would STILL be able to perceive the range of characteristics embodied in those images/titles from His dealings with us recorded through history.

But, strictly speaking, *identification* with God is not the objective--*relationship* with God IS. Our 'identification' needs are met through the Personality/Consciousness of God--He is face-to-face 'like us'. He loves, chooses, regrets, responds in anger, feels compassion, makes commitments--the things persons do in relationships.

What we REALLY need is an image that explains/illustrates the *relationship* we are supposed to have with God. That would be more helpful than a simple 'identification' image, in which we would STILL have to come up with "how we are different from...".

We as humans are not called to 'be' God; we are called to 'be related to' God. He is the Father; the human race is called to be the responsive and trusting child. He is the Mother; the human race is called to be the dependent and suckling infant. He is the Husband; the human race is called to be the celebrating and committed wife. Does this de-value His child, His infant, His wife? If it does, I would hate to be the one to inform Him of that....(grin)...He seems to have paid a great Price for us...

In my opinion, at a practical level, it may sometimes be more difficult for the male to relate to the numerous biblical images in which God is the Husband and men are to be part of 'the wife', than it is for women to relate to the same images (assuming normal semi-functional image development during the 'formative' years, of course).



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## Pushback....

*"Weren't women always kept separate from the men in worship? They weren't even allowed in the Temples or synagogues. The OT religion just didn't seem to include women."*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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There are *two questions* in there: one about women's access to cultic locations; and one about women's roles in the cult.

### Women's access to cultic locations in the bible

1. Rebekah was allowed inside some shrine to "inquire" of the Lord.
2. Miriam appeared with Moses and Aaron at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
3. Women served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
4. Hannah went into the sanctuary.
5. Josiah's mother hid him in the temple.
6. Anna, the NT prophetess was in the temple area night and day.
7. Women appear in synagogues in Jerusalem often (cf. The "daughter of Abraham")
8. Women singers probably participated in 1st Temple functions and certainly in 2nd Temple functions.
9. Women completing Nazarite vows offered sacrifices in the Tent/Temple(?) entrance-area.

What this list means is that there was no identifiable sacred area (of general use, not like the Holy of Holies which was ONLY for the high priest) that was not visited by a woman at least once (most were done on a routine basis).

### Women's role in the cult

Consider this partial list...

1. they participated in all public assemblies
2. they were taught the law in public by priests

3. they brought the same sacrifices as males
4. they could take Nazarite vows
5. they participated in singing events
6. they were prophets
7. they composed Victory Songs and Laments
8. they made vows to the Lord
9. they made themselves temporary servants to Levites (like males)
10. they traveled to the festivals with the men and families
11. they were addressed in the Law
12. they were responsible for religious education (along with the dad)
13. they were equally guilty before the Law
14. they offered gifts for the building of the Tabernacle compound and Temple
15. they performed some unknown service at the entrance to the worship sites
16. they did scribal work (perhaps even on the sacred texts under Ezra)
17. they marched in religious processions and parades.

Together, these pieces of data indicate that women were significant participants in the OT cult...

And, in the NT, their roles even expand--every title for Christian workers is ascribed to a female in the NT or in archeological/literary remains before the 4th century AD...

God has ALWAYS sought a vibrant relationship with His daughters, and has always sought to have them bless His other children with their ministry as well...



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## Pushback....

*"None of the disciples or apostles were women--a bit unfair, aint it?!"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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This, of course, is a New Testament question, and one that is surprisingly easy to answer.

As we saw in the syllabus, there is not ONE title of early Christian leadership (i.e. apostle, elder, bishop, presbyter, deacon, "fellow-worker", "hard worker", patron) that is NOT ascribed to a female before the 4th century A.D.

- the NT calls a woman an 'apostle' and this reference is confirmed in the Church Fathers.
- we have several archeological finds, identifying women as bishops/elders
- the NT calls a woman a 'deaconess' as do church councils and pagan documents
- Paul calls several women 'patrons' and 'fellow-workers' and 'hard workers' in his epistles.

This is in addition to the data (both NT and archeological) that women 'ran' house-churches in the major cities of Christian expansion.

Now, it IS true that none of the Twelve were women (although there were some very important and highly-praised women disciples that traveled with the group). But this is commonly understood to be a deliberate re-enactment of the Twelve Sons of Israel (a typology kinda thing), and not a general prescription for leadership. (Indeed, one of the Twelve was the traitor!)

We saw in the detail that women did travel with Jesus--even into the hostile wilderness, did sit rabbinic-style 'at the feet of Jesus' for instruction, did perform patronage services, did bear witness, did evangelism, and were used by Matthew as examples of what TRUE discipleship was meant to look like!

Given their ample and aggressive service in the early church, the fact that they were not part of an OT fulfillment motif around the twelve sons of Israel probably is NOT that significant...

[But, what IS significant, is that they WERE singled out in the Joel prophecy cited by Peter in Acts 2--they were to be co-prophets and co-teachers with men in the New Covenant Kingdom!]



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## Pushback....

***"Paul OBVIOUSLY had a "sit down and shut up" attitude toward women--and we are supposed to trust HIM?!"***

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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Paul is often maligned HEAVILY as being this quintessentially-Talmudic misogynist throwback, who set women's gains under Jesus back 2-3 centuries...but this is SO FAR from the truth...

Just to show how off this mis-conception is nowadays, let me quote from Rosemary Reuther (a very outspoken feminist theologian) who is drawing upon Elizabeth Fiorenza (a very outspoken feminist theologian). Neither of these could REMOTELY be called 'apologetically inclined' toward Paul(!):

"It is generally assumed that Paul is the author of a Christianity of female subordination. But more recent studies have shown that the historical Paul in fact continued most of the assumptions and practices of early charismatic, inclusive Christianity. Indeed, most of the New Testament evidence that women functioned as local leaders, as well as traveling evangelists, is to be found in the Pauline letters. Paul addresses almost an equal number of women along with men (sixteen women and eighteen men) in his greetings to Church leaders in Romans 16. He mentions two women, Euodia and Syntche, as having preached the gospel "with Barnabas and me" in Philippians 4:2-3. He addresses a woman name Junia by the title of "apostle," and constantly refers to the husband and wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, as "Church leaders," usually naming Priscilla first. He also speaks of the prominent woman Phoebe by the title of both "deacon" and "*prostasis*" or leader, of her community.

Paul received from the early Church both a practice of thus including women in the ministries of catechesis, prophecy, local Church leadership, and traveling evangelism (the role Paul calls that of "apostle"), and also a baptismal theology of male-female equivalence in Christ as reflected in the Galatians 3:28 reference. This formula was not original with Paul; he cites it from early Christian tradition. The Galatians baptismal text expresses the early Christian vision of the new humanity in Christ. It was consciously moulded to contrast with the traditions of rabbinic piety, adapted from

Hellenistic philosophy, in which the Jewish male thanks God for having been born male and not female, free and not slave, and Jew rather than Gentile. By declaring that in Christ these divisions had been overcome and all these groups made "one," the early Christian stated the essence of his or her new identity as one where the equivalence of all humans in the image of God had been restored." ([WS:WWR:212-213](#))

[Note--the 'recent studies' Reuther refers to are works by Fiorenza...]

The [data](#) we discover about Paul shows that in every way he was as "liberated" in his actual treatment and teaching re:women as was Jesus. But Paul actually goes beyond this--he (as a human) can label women as 'fellow-workers' with him--a 'peer' statement from the great Apostle to the Gentiles.

As Reuther/Fiorenza note above, Paul was VERY 'inclusive' in his views--women were leaders, were co-workers, were patrons, were deacons, were apostles, were emissaries, were official delegates, were prophets, were prayer warriors, were leaders of house churches. He "allowed"(!) women to pray and prophesy in church (e.g. I Cor 11.5) and called on them to disciple leading men (Priscilla and Apollos). He addresses NT epistles to them (e.g. Philp) and entrusts NT epistles to their care (e.g. Romans).

As the apostle Peter noted in 2 Pet 3.15-16, Paul writes some things that are 'hard to understand'! He has passages which will probably always remain obscure (i.e. the head-covering passage?), and many passages that are exegetically baffling. The 'female silence' passages ('I do not allow a woman to teach' and 'women should keep silent in the churches') fall in these categories. The fact that Paul obviously allows women to speak in the churches ("pray and prophecy") and that prophecy was considered every bit as authoritative and as a teaching-practice as "official" instruction, should tip us off that something else is going on in those two texts. Exegetes from all persuasions have identified a number of options that remove the 'clash' with his less ambiguous (1) apostolic praxis and (2) other passages in his teaching corpus. It still remains which option will surface as a consensus option among students of Paul.

In any event, Paul comes off as quite 'liberated' --esp. for his Pharisaic upbringing! The stereotype of a female-hating, women-subjugating, Christian "Rabbi Judah" just cannot be objectively maintained anymore.

No, Paul understood their potential contributions to the cause of His precious Lord--their passion, their commitment, their love for the Desire of All Nations--and did not hesitate to worship with them and "put them to work alongside him" in His apostolic mission...



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## Pushback....

*"The early church was 'by, for, about MEN--women were barely even there, much less significant players (and ESPECIALLY not leaders)."*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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The data is **quite otherwise**--the early church was PROBABLY dominantly female!

There several indications of this, in the data (NT, archeology, extrabiblical lit, sociology):

1. Numerically, they were a minority in the Greco-Roman world, but a majority in the pre-Constantine church.
2. One of the earliest pieces of 'high literature' the church produced--the gospel of Luke--was CLEARLY written with women readership in mind.
3. Outside Palestine, Christianity was a "cult" (Galen called it a "philosophical school"! ). Cults have ALWAYS spread first through the intelligentsia, and intelligentsia are always closely aligned with patrons. And patrons were mostly women in that day and age...
4. The records of the earliest sites and house-churches feature prominent women leaders.
5. The earliest pagan reference to Christian leadership (e.g. Pliny) is to *women deacons*, who were tortured for their faith.
6. Early paintings and mosaics show females as a large part of Christian gatherings.
7. Women Christians outlived their non-Christian counterparts by DECADES--due to the Christian ethics around abortion, later marriage, non-forced remarriage, medical care-giving...
8. Early and Late Church Fathers refer to the large number of women in the church, AND TO their effectiveness at bringing their husbands 'into the fold'.

9. We have already noted in many places the widespread female representation in early church leadership positions.
10. Even widow-care was an early Christian priority! (Acts 6).
11. The church was known to attract a high number of high-status women to its ranks.

The early church was VERY MUCH "inclusive" of females--indeed, females CONSTITUTED a very large (maybe even majority) of the early church. They were a part of the Body of Christ and part of the leadership of that community.



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## Pushback....

*"Weren't OT women WORSE off than even their Babylonian counterparts?"*

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[Note: This is a simple summary of the detailed data in the [syllabus](#). Refer there for sources/discussion. Updated: 01/02/97]

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The feminist scholar Gerda Lerner, in her book *The Creation of Patriarchy* makes the following statement ([WS:TCP:171](#)):

"In general, the married Jewish woman occupied an inferior position to that of her counterpart in Mesopotamian societies. Babylonian women could own property, sign contracts, take legal action, and they were entitled to a share in the husband's inheritance."

Now, we have already documented that women in the OT "could own property" and "take legal action." We don't have much information about "contract signing"--even for males, but the fact that marriage was called a 'covenant' and that women had to 'consent' to this covenant in the OT, would provide at least SOME data of contracting-powers for women. (Also, the real-estate lady of Proverbs 31 would have to have had at least SOME power of attorney/agency.)

As to the "share in the husband's inheritance", I cannot see why the case of the widow (such as Naomi in the book of Ruth) would not be exactly this. But, even if that is not a counter-example, all it means is that there is no biblical data ONE WAY OR ANOTHER--and so the original statement is simply unfounded.

**So, the OT documents (pre-exilic) provide evidence AGAINST Lerner's statement.**

Now, let's look at some post-exilic data (from archeology)...

Lerner admits that she 'stepped out of her field' in writing this book, and was dependent on outside counsel in Assyriology, and so perhaps her omission of the important data from the Elephantine papyri is understandable. But consideration of the data available in it should have radically 'arrested' her argumentation.

Instead of a general 'constriction' of women's 'rights' over time, the Elephantine data indicates a much freer situation that Lerner might suppose.

The Elephantine texts can be found in [ANET:222-223](#) and the below citation is from

WS:WBC:118:

Persian-period contracts and letters in which women figure quite prominently give evidence concerning the diversity of Jewish women's roles and powers. The Elephantine documents unambiguously show that Jewish women in the postexilic era had more power and privileges than biblical texts and later traditions suggest. These documents come from the Jewish colony in Elephantine, Egypt, and can be precisely dated (sixth to fourth centuries B.C.E.) They contain original contracts and letters, many belonging to Jewish women. From this store-house of information about actual postexilic practices among one group of Jews, one can reconstruct social and economic realities of women's lives.

Various contracts from Elephantine show that these Jewish women were able to initiate divorce, buy and sell property, and inherit property even when there were male siblings. The Elephantine documents also illustrate how women were able to climb the social and economic ladder. An interesting example is the case of an Egyptian slave named Tamut (or Tapmu) and her daughter. Tamut married a Jewish temple official and eventually gained some kind of position in the temple (the precise nature of her title is unclear). Her daughter (born during slavery as a child of either the master or the mother's future husband) became wealthy and important in the community. Tamut's daughter, not only her son, was a designated heir to the parents' property, belying the notion that women could inherit only when there were no male descendants (cf. Numbers 27).

Marriage contracts from Elephantine are particularly fascinating. They list what each woman brought into the marriage and state that she retained control over such possessions. In cases of divorce, her belongings remained hers. The marriage contracts also indicate that either partner could initiate divorce. Some even specify procedures and financial responsibilities in cases of abuse.

This data is from the Persian period--matching the data from Ezra/Nehemiah in our study. That such a 'advanced' situation for women obtained in a Jewish military outpost (!), could NOT have been an isolated situation. It simply could not have DEVELOPED from some alleged "harshly-restricted" situation in mainstream Palestine of the day...

[The data we have from scripture (describing this specific period) do not go into this much detail, but certainly doesn't contradict such a 'high view' of women's status in the period.]

So, the **data from post-exilic Jewish life provide evidence AGAINST Lerner's statement.**

And finally, although this is outside the time-frame of Lerner's work, we may note that women had ALL THESE PRIVILEGES in post-70ad Jewry.

The data from this comes again from archeology--the Babata archive. This is composed of 35 papyri in Greek, Aramaic, and Nabatean, dating from AD 93-132. They document the life and "trials" of a Jewish woman and her family in the Judean Desert near the Dead Sea. (These documents have only been published within the last ten years.)

Chestnutt ([WS:EWEC:127-130](#)) discusses the import of these, and the quotes below indicate some of the relevance to our study:

"Babata's archive reveals a sad and complicated family history. Widowed twice, she spent most of her life in litigation. However, Babata's misfortune is the modern historian's fortune, for Babata did not discard the documents recording her marriages, lawsuits, and property transactions, but meticulously arranged them in four bundles and packed them in a leather pouch, which she wrapped in sackcloth and tied with ropes. The result is "the largest single collection of ancient documents ever found in the Holy Land" and a priceless source of legal, historical, geographical, and linguistic information on Palestinian Jews in the Greco-Roman period. Especially fortunate for purposes of the present study is the fact Babata and other women figure prominently in the social and legal maneuverings reflected dramatically in these documents.

" Women's ownership and management of property is well-documented in the Babata archive. In a deed dated AD 120, Shimeon (Babata's father) endows Miriam (his wife and Babata's mother) with his property in Mahoza, a village at the southern end of the Dead Sea in the Nabatean region, although Shimeon retains the use of the property during his lifetime. Later Babata inherits this property from her mother. A document from AD 127 has Babata, accompanied by her second husband, going to the capital of Moab to register her extensive holdings of property before the Roman district commander. By AD 130, Babata's wealthy second husband, who owned property in both En-Gedi and Mahoza, has died and Babata has become the owner of several palm groves which had belonged to him. A record of her selling crops of dates from these orchards is preserved, as are records of litigation over the rightful ownership of the grove in Mahoza.

"Babata's incessant involvement in litigation spans the entire period

covered by the Greek and Aramaic documents from her archive. In court, she defends her interests against claims from various members of her late husband's family, including the other wife of her second husband and the guardians of her son by her first husband. The legal capabilities and initiative of Babata and other women in these documents are striking.

So, the **Post-OT data provide evidence AGAINST Lerner's argument.**

What this nets out to is that we have three data points in time: the Pre-exilic OT data, the Post-exilic Elephantine data, and the Post-70ad Babata archive--ALL that provide evidence against Lerner's statement.

These three data points span some 1500-2000 years and there is no indication of a 'break' in the trendline, nor of a 'constriction' of rights of Hebrew women. If Babylonian women WERE 'better off', it would NOT be because they alone had these legal powers!



[The Christian ThinkTank...](http://www.christian-thinktank.com)[http://www.christian-thinktank.com] ([Reference Abbreviations](#))

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## **Good Question...Does female "pain-prone" reproductive physiology indicate that God apparently hates women?**

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Draft: April 26, 2001; [added a pushback](#) on April 27, 2001 (dealing with the "Curse" in Genesis 3)...May 11: added a quick ['quality control' response](#)

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Dear Glenn,

**I have been struggling just to make it through each day now for a while not (since just before I was married). I understand that you are very busy and this email might seem long-winded to you so I thought perhaps your daughter may be interested in helping me, if you can't.**

I know (as I shared with you in personal correspondence) about how difficult this struggle can be, and I hope some of the below material can help you find some relief and comfort...

**I am struck with the injustice in this world, not so much the injustice that is caused by humans but the inequality that God has created between men and women. It's seems that God has created women's' bodies to hurt them (menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause) while men seem to get off scot free. A man becomes a father by having an orgasm, a woman becomes a mother by going through years of discomfort and often days of agony. Why is it always women who draw the short straw? I can't read the bible because it wounds me to the point that I fantasize about ending my life. Men are physically stronger than women, they can force themselves on women yet women have no say on whether they conceive or not. My body is not my own, it is my husbands' as his is mine, yet it is my body that is at risk. The idea of giving birth makes me want to step out of my body yet in the bible it seems that's how God "rewards" women.**

There are several issues you mention here, friend, and let me see if I can represent them fairly:

- God created women's bodies *deliberately* in such a way as to be a *major source* of pain to them, and this pain is experienced in menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause by all or almost all women.
- This looks especially malicious (of God) since men have no corresponding types/cycles of pain, relative to reproduction.
- This disparity is consistent throughout human life ("always women who draw the short straw").
- Men are physically stronger than women, and this disparity in strength makes women at the mercy of physically-stronger men (e.g., rape, dominance).
- By implication: this deliberate injustice reveals that God is not good (at least, not to women)

Okay, let's go through each one of these and try to surface all the pro & con data, and try to see all of it as

a whole (if possible). I'll try to confine myself mostly to *objective* data--from medical, historical, academic sources--but will also draw in *semi-subjective* perspectives from women of different (but non-religious) persuasions (e.g., feminists). Hopefully, this will keep the discussion less susceptible to bias or over-statement.

God created women's bodies *deliberately* in such a way as to be a *major source* of pain to them, and this pain is experienced in menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, and menopause by all or almost all women.

First of all, let's assess how much pain we are talking about here, and how extensive these are among women. To do this I need to divide history/cultures into what we might call "pre-analgesic" and "analgesic" cultures/histories, depending on the widespread availability of effective pain-alleviation medicines. [Although all ancient cultures had various substances and methods used for this, I might add, but with varying levels of success. Of course, much ancient pain 'effectiveness' might have been due to placebo effects.]

Since the vast majority of pain can be eliminated in analgesic-cultures, I will try to focus on the rest of human history, where the pain is more likely to be more unrelieved. [note: we are not trying to *minimize* the extensiveness/intensiveness of this very real pain, but only to "*size it*"--i.e., how close does it come to inflicting 'all women' and thereby perhaps grounding an accusation of unfairness?]

I also need to focus on **non-pathological** pain. If we are talking about "design" here, we need to restrict our research to how the systems *are designed to function*, and NOT try to analyze all the pathologies that are extrinsic (or at least, not 'normal') to that design. Accordingly, the many things that can go wrong with female (and male, for that matter) functioning are excluded from this study.

**Menstrual pain.** Menstruation begins around 12-14 and ends around menopause, and does not occur during pregnancy and regular nursing. In the ancient world, most women would have been married by 13-14 years of age, and commenced child-bearing at that time. Since children were normally nursed for 2-3 years in antiquity [OT:DLAM:120] and a little shorter in the Middle Ages, most women *would not even have had very many menstrual cycles* in their life, unless they became unmarried due to widowhood (common) or divorce (very rare).

For example, in the 9th-12th centuries AD:

"Demographers assume that women's potential for childbearing remained the same throughout the centuries, roughly twenty years. Women, regardless of social position, began to menstruate between twelve and fourteen. ...Demographers estimate that a woman might have five to seven successful pregnancies at two and a half year intervals if she lived a normal life span. From the woman's perspective, she could assume that **she would be pregnant or nursing a child for most of her adult life.**" [WS:AHTO:105]

The actual type of pain associated with menstruation is called Primary Dysmenorrhea (basically, non-pathological cramps). Many women experience NO discomfort at all during menstruation, and for those that do, the discomfort declines over time:

"There are two types of dysmenorrhea: primary and secondary. The primary form usually occurs

in females who have just begun to menstruate. **This form may disappear or become less severe after a woman reaches her mid-20s or gives birth**

[<http://external.aomc.org/selfcare/common/menstrua.htm>]

The largest variables in presence/amount of discomfort are health and diet:

"Menstrual cramps are like cramps elsewhere in your body. A muscle contracts too hard or too fast, constricting the blood flow and producing pain. In this case, the muscles are in the uterus...**Mild cramps are often caused by factors other than menstruation itself.** Good menstrual health, **free from pain or cramps, is closely related to good health and a positive mental attitude.** The simple health habits of good posture, exercise, adequate diet, regular elimination-all are important in **preventing** painful menstruation (dysmenorrhea).

[<http://bodymatters.com/questions/questions2.html#cramps>]

The discomfort's primary cause is chemical imbalance, which is correctible by nutrition:

"Many women have dysmenorrhea (menstrual cramps) just before or at the beginning of menstruation, and continuing for one to two days. The pains can be sharp or dull. Some women have such severe pain that they must stay in bed a few days each month. **Most often, cramps are a symptom of a simple chemical imbalance....**Menstrual pain is commonly **caused by your body making or taking in too much of one chemical, and not enough of another.**

[<http://www.aomc.org/HOD2/general/general-PAINFUL.html>]

Treatment approaches emphasize rest, activity, and nutrition:

"Therapies for primary dysmenorrhea include **rest**; heating pad to the lower abdomen or back; **nutritional, aerobic exercise**; and medication. **Nutritional therapy includes a well-balanced diet** with an adequate intake of **calcium** (1200 mg. per day). An adequate fluid intake of **2 quarts of water** each day is very important. **Vitamin B6** , 50 to 100 mg. each day, may occasionally be helpful. [<http://www.mckinley.uiuc.edu/health-info/womenhlt/mencramp.html>]

With a vegetarian diet being highly effective:

"**Reducing fat and eating a vegetarian diet can significantly decrease menstrual pain** and premenstrual symptoms...Each study participant followed a low-fat, vegetarian diet for two months and her pain and menstrual symptoms were compared to how she felt before the study... Study results show about **two-thirds of the women reported improvement** in menstrual pain and premenstrual symptoms. Other research has shown that **a low-fat diet can reduce the amount of the female hormone estrogen in the blood by as much as 30 percent.**

[<http://onhealth.webmd.com/fitness/briefs/item%2C33890.asp>]

What is interesting from this data, is that the prescribed **preventative** and remedial actions are **essentially the life styles of the ancient women**:

1. The diet of most people in antiquity (except the elite) was vegetarian, mostly grains and a few vegetables. Beverages were water and milk, and diet was sometimes supplemented with fish or fowl (where feasible)
2. Aerobic exercise was still done by the women (e.g. walking), although it could only be done in certain areas of work (due to the blood taboos).

3. Due to the blood taboo, there were periods of forced rest and inactivity.

This means that the discomfort experienced by the vast majority of pre-analgesic women of antiquity would have been either (a) precluded--due to childbirth/nursing; or (b) non-existent/minimal--due to lifestyle.

In "analgesic" cultures (often also more 'healthy' cultures), the amount of discomfort is largely a function of individual choice and lifestyle. [My two daughters provide anecdotal confirmation of this to me: the one who has been constantly physically active and nutritionally-aware, experiences absolutely no discomfort whatsoever; the other, with a more "casual" lifestyle, experienced difficult periods at time.]

So, the fact that this is easily preventable (or certainly, considerably reducible) and not as pervasive as might appear, I would hesitate to consider this a "design for pain" at a significant level.

In addition to the fact that the pain is often reduced by "the mid-20's or by the first birth" (above), one other fact to consider is that the actual painful aspect only affects **less than half** of all women. The *Merck Manual of Medical Information* (Home Edition, 1997, page 1086) describes the extent of the regular form of menstrual pain (primary dysmenorrhea) in these terms:

"Primary dysmenorrhea is common, possibly affecting more than 50 per cent of women; it's severe in about 5 to 15 percent."

"Possibly more than 50%" is another way of saying "we only have evidence that it affects LESS THAN 50%". The number is thus most likely between the 5-15% range and the 50%, but even if assume the number is at 50% of women, it is certainly not even close to being 100% ("all women").

**Pain in Pregnancy.** I am not actually sure why this one was mentioned, since pain in pregnancy is not even close to universal, nor is it typically severe. The major areas of non-pathological discomfort/pain would be in (a) morning sickness; and (b) low-back pain.

*Morning sickness* can be uncomfortable and irritating, but is certainly not in the league with actual child-birthing, nor even the pain of menstrual cramps.

*Low-back pain*, is a little more serious, but occurs in **only half** of all pregnant women, and for them, **only about half the time**:

"For **about half** of all pregnant women, low-back pain is inevitable."

"Formal study of the incidence of low-back pain in pregnancy has been very limited. The overall prevalence of back pain **during the 9-month period** is thought to be **approximately 50%** "

And the best preventative is, again, an active lifestyle:

"Before a woman becomes pregnant, encouraging her to become fit and resolving existing back problems is the key to back pain prevention."

[Source: "Back Pain and Pregnancy: Active Management Strategies", by Julie Colliton, MD, *THE PHYSICIAN AND SPORTSMEDICINE* - VOL 24 - NO. 7 - JULY 96]

**Menopause.** Menopause is the common term for the cessation of menstruation in women. Strictly speaking, the period of transition from menstrual to non-menstrual status is called *perimenopause*:

"According to CAMS, the term perimenopause includes "the period immediately prior to menopause (when the endocrinologic, biologic, and clinical features of approaching menopause commence) and the first year after menopause."

"The median age for the onset of perimenopause is 47.5 years. For most women, perimenopause lasts approximately 4 years. Only about 10% of women cease menstruating abruptly with no period of prolonged irregularity.

"Perimenopause is the correct term for what some call "being in" or "going through" menopause.

[<http://www.menopause.org/aboutm/facts.html>]

In pre-analgesic cultures (of the ancient world), most women (and men) would not have even experienced this:

"In previous centuries, **few women lived beyond menopause**; today, women spend one-third to one-half of their lives after menopause." [<http://www.menopause.org/aboutm/facts.html>]

Although there are many myths/stories/stereotypes of the "menopausal women", the **actual experience can range widely, from liberating/positive to difficult/negative**:

"Menopause happens to all women, **but affects each woman uniquely**. For some, the end of fertility (and the end of concerns about contraception and menstrual periods) brings a sense of freedom. Menopause is a bridge to a part of life when **many women report feeling more confident, empowered, involved, and energized than in their younger years**. For some women, however, menopause -- coupled with midlife emotional and social crises -- can contribute to serious health problems. " [<http://www.menopause.org/aboutm/facts.html>]

"A popular myth pictures the menopausal woman shifting from raging, angry moods into depressive, doleful slumps with no apparent reason or warning. However, a study by psychologists at the University of Pittsburgh suggests that **menopause does not cause unpredictable mood swings, depression, or even stress in most women...In fact, it may even improve mental health for some**. This gives further support to the idea that **menopause is not necessarily a negative experience**. The Pittsburgh study looked at three different groups of women: menstruating, menopausal with no treatment, and menopausal on hormone therapy. **The study showed that the menopausal women suffered no more anxiety, depression, anger, nervousness or feelings of stress than the group of menstruating women in the same age range**. In addition, although more hot flashes were reported by the menopausal women not taking hormones, **surprisingly they had better overall mental health than the other two groups**. The women taking hormones worried more about their bodies and were somewhat more depressed...However, this could be caused by the hormones themselves. It's also possible that

women who voluntarily take hormones tend to be more conscious of their bodies in the first place. The researchers caution that their study includes only healthy women, so results may apply only to them. Other studies show that women already taking hormones who are experiencing mood or behavioral problems sometimes respond well to a change in dosage or type of estrogen...Studies indicate that women of childbearing age, particularly those with young children at home, tend to report more emotional problems than women of other ages. ..**The Pittsburgh findings are supported by a New England Research Institute study which found that menopausal women were no more depressed than the general population:** about 10 percent are occasionally depressed and 5 percent are persistently depressed. The exception is women who undergo surgical menopause. Their depression rate is reportedly double that of women who have a natural menopause. ..**Studies also have indicated that many cases of depression relate more to life stresses or "mid-life crises" than to menopause.** Such stresses include: an alteration in family roles, as when your children are grown and move out of the house, no longer "needing" mom; a changing social support network, which may happen after a divorce if you no longer socialize with friends you met through your husband; interpersonal losses, as when a parent, spouse or other close relative dies; and your own aging and the beginning of physical illness. People have very different responses to stress and crisis. Your best friend's response may be negative, leaving her open to emotional distress and depression, while yours is positive, resulting in achievement of your goals. **For many women, this stage of life can actually be a period of enormous freedom. "**

[<http://www.nih.gov/health/chip/nia/menop/men3.htm#wte>]

Most of the discussion on menopause (as can be seen from the above) relates to emotional health, and not to "pain" *per se*. Non-pathological perimenopause is mostly an emotional issue, and not a pain one. Even the famous 'hot flashes', although potentially disruptive, are mild in terms of pain:

**"Hot flashes, or flushes, are the most common symptom of menopause,** affecting more than **60 percent** of menopausal women in the U.S. A hot flash is a sudden sensation of intense heat in the upper part or all of the body. The face and neck may become flushed, with red blotches appearing on the chest, back, and arms. This is often followed by profuse sweating and then cold shivering as body temperature readjusts. A hot flash can last **a few moments or 30 minutes or longer.**

"Hot flashes **occur sporadically** and often start several years before other signs of menopause. They **gradually decline in frequency and intensity as you age.** Eighty percent of all women with hot flashes have them **for 2 years or less,** while **a small percentage** have them for more than 5 years. Hot flashes can happen at any time. They can be **as mild as a light blush, or severe enough to wake you from a deep sleep.** Some women even develop insomnia. Others have experienced that caffeine, alcohol, hot drinks, spicy foods, and stressful or frightening events can sometimes trigger a hot flash. However, avoiding these triggers will not necessarily prevent all episodes.

"Hot flashes appear to be a direct result of decreasing estrogen levels. In response to falling estrogen levels, your glands release higher amounts of other hormones that affect the brain's thermostat, causing body temperatures to fluctuate. **Hormone therapy relieves** the discomfort of hot flashes in most cases." [<http://www.nih.gov/health/chip/nia/menop/men3.htm#wte>]

A more serious issue/hazard/risk, however, is *osteoporosis*--which is greatly increased in menopausal women. This is the thinning of the bones, associated with the reduced estrogen production in this period.

In analgesic cultures, there are several treatment and prevention alternatives. In pre-analgesic cultures (typically not having this problem, obviously), the prevention regime proscribed today would have been standard fare for normal women:

**"Prevention is more successful than treatment;** it involves maintaining or increasing bone density by consuming adequate calcium, engaging in **weight-bearing exercise**, and for some people, taking drugs...**Weight-bearing exercise, such as walking and stair-climbing**, increases bone density." [The *Merck Manual of Medical Information* (Home Edition, 1997, page 220)]

One interesting fact about this problem is that the risk is **reduced for women who have had prior pregnancies**. [The *Merck Manual of Medical Information* (Home Edition, 1997, page 219)].

[Notice that both hot flashes and osteoporosis are treatable in analgesic cultures, and would not have occurred in ancient times--due to lifespan limitations and women's lifestyles.]

**Childbirth.** With the previous three issues (menstrual cramps, pregnancy, perimenopause), the pain was probably either too low-level (in intensity, frequency, or duration) or not widely enough distributed among women to support a misogynist charge against God, but with childbirth pain we get into a potentially much more serious arena.

One survey indicated that pain in childbirth/delivery ranked very high in the range of human experience:

"At the end of chapter 3, we looked at the McGill pain questionnaire. The sensory words most commonly used by mothers to describe the pain during labor are *sharp, cramping, aching, throbbing, stabbing, hot, shooting, tight, and heavy*. For the emotional affective feelings, the most common words were *tiring and exhausting*. A rating scale for pain intensity was used, with a number assigned by each mother. The average rating for women having a **first baby** was 35, and for those **who had previous children** the number was 30. These numbers are on a scale in which people with broken bones rate their pain at 20 and cancer patients at 27. Scores above 35 were reported only in cases of nerve injury or amputation. **Evidently, the average reported pain of child-birth ranks high in the range of human experience. Of course, there is an extremely wide variation in the reported intensity** and I have discussed variation elsewhere. But it is crucial to remember that, of **first** births in Canada, 9.2 percent of mothers described their pains as "**mild**," 29.5 percent as "**moderate**," 37.9 percent as "**severe**," and 23.4 percent as "**excruciating**." A study of Scandinavian women (despite their reputation for toughness and stoicism) yielded similar results." [[CS:PSS:84-85](#)]

What is interesting to note about this use of McGill's pain questionnaire are the words that are **NOT used by women to describe childbirth: terrifying, gruelling, cruel, vicious, blinding, unbearable**. [Questionnaire choices are shown at [CS:PSS:28](#).]

Childbirth/delivery is divided into a couple of major stages. The two periods that have strong pain-aspects are the "**active**" stage and the "**transition**".

The **active stage** has an average length of 2-3.5 hours [[http://homearts.com/depts/health/fetal/childbirth.html#stage\\_1](http://homearts.com/depts/health/fetal/childbirth.html#stage_1)], with times being reduced for subsequent deliveries [*Merck Manual* gives 5 hours for a first birth, and 2 hours for subsequent ones]. Contractions (where the discomfort is) are generally 3-4 minutes apart and last 40 to 60 seconds. [At 3 minutes apart and one minute long, that would be 75 minutes of pain in a first

labor, and 30 minutes of pain in a subsequent one, in this stage.]

The **transition stage** is the most difficult, but only lasts 60 minutes in a first pregnancy and only 15-30 minutes in subsequent ones. Contractions are very strong, 60 to 90 seconds long, and 2-3 minutes apart. [At 90 seconds long, and 2 minutes apart, that would be 25 minutes of pain in a first pregnancy, and either 6 minutes or 11 minutes of pain in a subsequent one, in this stage.]

Thus, the really serious (questionnaire level) pain ranges from some 100 minutes for a first pregnancy, to 36-41 minutes in a subsequent one. **In the ancient world, this 40-100 minutes of labor pain would have occurred only once every 3-4 years or so** (assuming normal fertility, pregnancy, delivery, and nursing cycles). [In analgesic cultures, almost all of this can be eliminated or reduced to significantly milder levels.]

So there obviously is significant/intense pain in this process, but the range of experiences of this is **exceptionally wide**:

"Data on expectations and experiences of pain in labor are presented from a prospective study of over 700 women who gave birth in six maternity units in southeast England. Most women preferred to keep drug use to a minimum, even though they expected labor to be quite or very painful. The ideal of avoiding drugs was unrelated to education or social class. Women who preferred to avoid drugs were more likely to do so, and were more satisfied with the birth overall than women who used drugs. **In general, women tended to get what they expected.** Breathing and relaxation exercises were widely used, and were most successful for those who had expected them to be so. **Anxiety about the pain of labor was a strong predictor of negative experiences** during labor, lack of satisfaction with the birth, and poor emotional well-being postnatally. [*Birth* 1993 Jun;20(2):65-72 at <http://www.childbirth.org/articles/laborpain.html>]

"A woman's need for pain relief during labor **varies considerably, depending to some extent on her level of anxiety.** Preparation for labor and delivery as well as emotional support from those attending the labor tends to lessen anxiety and **often markedly reduces her need for drugs to relieve pain. Many women take no drugs.**" [*Merck Manual*, p.1175]

"While **a few women will state that labor was not painful at all**, and a few more will state that it is the most excruciating pain that they have ever felt, **most women will fall into the middle ground. Labor pain that is tolerable and desirable...**Pain comes from a couple of sources in labor. Generally these fall into three categories: emotional, functional, and physiological. Knowing what is causing the pain will help you deal with it. **It is also important to realize that a certain amount of pain is normal and functional in labor, telling your body what is going on, allowing you to help yourself.**  
[<http://pregnancy.about.com/health/pregnancy/library/weekly/aa100697.htm>]

Indeed, as with much/most pain, it is an important contributor to the success of the process:

"We also talk about the physiological role that pain plays in normal birth. Nature's blueprint for birth includes pain, and **this pain is purposeful.** The sensations women experience in labor are part of **an ingenious feedback mechanism which is essential to normal labor and birth.** The painful sensation of the cervix stretching open sends messages to the brain to release more

oxytocin, the hormone that causes strong contractions of the uterus -- which causes further opening of the cervix...Labor pain also guides the mother. The positions and activities she feels more comfortable with are the same ones that promote good progress in labor and help shift the baby into the right position for birth. **Removing labor pain wipes out that feedback mechanism.** [*The Truth About Labor Pain* by Pam England, CNM, MA & Rob Horowitz, PhD, at <http://pregnancy.about.com>]

Now, let me throw a completely different light on this issue (of childbirth pain) from the writings of an aggressive feminist and naturalist, Andrea Robertson. Consider some of her 'aggressive' statements about childbearing pain [<http://www.acegraphics.com.au/resource/papers/painlabour.html>]:

"Pain in labour is universal: it hurts to give birth. Since this is such a common experience it could be seen as comforting, a bond among women, a fundamental truth that confirms our special biological role and affirms the importance of our contribution to society. More often, however, it is seen as a blight, an unnecessary imposition, an affliction we must bear as the price for bearing children. **This view, bolstered by the perception that pain is a symptom of disease and illness, has enabled medical men to convince us that pain is dispensable during birth, and is of no value, an evil to be cured with modern treatments and technology.**

**"This view of labour pain as an affliction seems most prevalent among western women. In many cultures, pain in labour is accepted as a necessary, if uncomfortable part of birth, and is not seen as an insurmountable problem.** Perhaps the fact that these women are usually cared for by other women, **who understand birth and its mysterious benefits for the female psyche,** is the central reason **why pain is not feared but accepted.** The enforced movement of birth from the home setting to a hospital has established birth as a medical event and the ready availability of drugs and technology in hospitals has encouraged its use (Wagner 1994). Women, often unaccompanied by knowledgeable support people, and made vulnerable by their emotional and hormonal state, are ripe for **seductive messages conveyed by "experts" that labour pain has no benefit.** Most of these "experts" are men who have a different biological view from women as a result of masculine reproductive information. Since men will never give birth, they have no need of innate birthing instincts, and therefore can have no deep sense of intuition and understanding of the birth process. Perhaps this explains why men are often so uncomfortable around women in labour --- they are unable to connect with the process at an instinctive level. Suspicion and fear can be created in such a climate.

...

"Since no drugs have been proven safe for the unborn in either pregnancy or labour (Haire 1994), then preventing possible harm to our children will necessitate women once again accepting that **pain may be a necessary component of birth.** Moreover, **pain during birth may offer some positive advantages for the baby, since its presence is an integral part of the process and therefore unlikely to be an addition without some biological benefit.** If there is a biological purpose for the pain, then understanding this role may alter attitudes to its action, whilst allowing insights into labour management that enhance rather than block this physiological entity.

...

These are important points for women to consider. Pregnancy proceeds without outside "assistance" and **birth is similarly straightforward, cleverly designed to be as efficient as possible.** **Virtually all women have the potential to give birth easily and safely,** and no special knowledge or learning is required. The intricate system of hormones, in an exquisite balance, ensures success almost all the time.

...

"The **biological necessity for pain in labour is mediated by the body's ability to produce endorphins** in times of acute physical stress. This phenomenon is well known amongst athletes and those who take regular aerobic exercise. **The beneficial effects and protective nature of endorphins** are helpful for enhancing performance and as they are similar to opiates in their chemical structure and action, they have the ability to cause addiction in those who regularly experience endorphin release.

"Endorphins offer a number of benefits for pregnant and labouring women:

- They are **natural pain killers, produced in response to** the heavy work of pregnancy and the stress of uterine contractions.
- Withdrawal behaviours are encouraged, useful for self awareness and protection.
- They create **a sense of well-being and promote positive feelings**.
- They may be an important link in mother-baby attachment --- creating a positive emotional climate for the first meeting with the baby.
- **The feelings of achievement and satisfaction with birth increase self-esteem and confidence.**
- The amnesic effect of endorphins enables women to forget the worst aspects of labour providing an incentive to reproduce again.
- They offer **a natural reward** for the effort involved in giving birth.

"From the baby's perspective, endorphins may also be important, **ensuring that the mother is feeling positive and nurturing when they first meet**. The hormones produced in the baby's body in response to labour (nor-adrenalins) are important for all babies' immediate survival, ensuring that they are able to maintain body heat and breathe successfully, due to adequate surfactant production. In addition, the baby's pupils dilate and they exhibit quiet alert behaviour --- both very important in attracting and holding the mother's undivided attention (Lagercrantz & Slotkin 1986).

"**Endorphins are nature's natural pain-killers, with numerous side benefits for mothers and babies. They are only released in response to the work and effort of labour, and specifically when pain is present. Therefore, women need first the labour and then the pain of contractions to ensure they have the endorphins they need.** Without these factors, endorphins will not be produced, and the woman will not only suffer during labour, but may be in a less than optimal state to greet her new baby. The process of bonding, often thought to be a nice "extra" in a good birth, is actually critical for reproductive success and is guaranteed by a number of hormonal interactions.

...

"Improvements and change will come when women take charge of their bodies and acknowledge the special role of their hormones during labour...We need to come to terms with the pain of labour. **It is not to be feared, but rather welcomed for its intrinsic benefits and rewards:** pain is a necessary part of normal labour and is **important for maternal physical and emotional well-being**. It is also good for babies!

...

"The harsh reality is that we women have allowed our bodies to be taken over by the medical men **peddling ideas that pain in labour is unnecessary and safely avoidable**. We have condoned this takeover because we have been kept ignorant about the nature and **purpose of our labour pain**, and we have been swayed by arguments that seem persuasive, but are not based on fact. The time has come to reclaim our pain --- we and our babies need it to survive!

Notice that this feminist/naturalist view/perspective is entirely supportive of a 'normal pain is good' perspective, and the above perspective can hardly be accused of being some kind of theistic spin-doctoring for women(!)...

Of course, for most women experiencing childbirth pain, the pain is **dwarfed by** the goodness and joy of the experience...Jesus one time compared the joy of the resurrection to that of a mother (John 16.19ff):

*"Jesus saw that they wanted to ask him about this, so he said to them, "Are you asking one another what I meant when I said, 'In a little while you will see me no more, and then after a little while you will see me'? 20 I tell you the truth, you will weep and mourn while the world rejoices. You will grieve, but your grief will turn to joy. 21 **A woman giving birth to a child has pain because her time has come; but when her baby is born she forgets the anguish because of her joy that a child is born into the world.** 22 **So with you: Now is your time of grief, but I will see you again and you will rejoice, and no one will take away your joy.***

On a personal note, friend, I have been a very active, involved, and up-close father to my three kids. We did 'natural childbirth' for each of our three, blending elements of LaMaze and Leboyer in the early days.

With our second child--Britt--I sang "Jesus loves me" to the stomach wall every night for the last 3+ months of the pregnancy. When she was born, we dimmed the lights, I put her in the bath of warm water, and I began singing that song to her, in the familiar voice she had come to know...once I started singing, she stopped crying, grabbed my hand, and opened her eyes to see me...my wife took a before-and-after picture of that moment for me. Few things else in human experience compares to that, in my opinion, but I can tell you without the slightest doubt in my heart that MY experience was only a pale shadow of that experienced by my wife, as she held her in her arms, at her breast, that first time in the Delivery room. As close as I was, I was still somewhat the "outsider" to something much deeper, richer, and real between mother and baby. And, I remember so distinctly the feelings of "I'll never know what that's like" as I watched my wife nurse the little ones, laughing and giggling and gurgling and touching and rubbing them and baby-talking...the way her eyes shone and face glowed during those times.

The labor pain just didn't seem to matter to her somehow...

Another mother--who had experienced the intense anguish of miscarriage and childdeath--put it this way [<http://pregnancy.about.com/health/pregnancy/library/blpaininbirth.htm>]:

"In my history as a mother, about 10 years, I have deliberately chosen to endure pain countless numbers of times. Just as you point out, most of us, including me, also take deliberate steps to avoid pain, like popping the Excedrin or having that THIRD glass of wine after a particularly exhausting day...:)

"Birth, however, is not like having a toothache, backache or headache. Birth is a cataclysmic moment, a spiritual touchstone, and just as transformative for families and for the woman as it is for the baby. **Nothing compares to my birth experiences in terms of changing my perception of the UNIVERSE and of myself and others**, much UNLIKE my latest headache. :) [but maybe you have REALLY tremendous headaches. LOL] Birth is ALSO extremely commonplace, basic to human nature, rustic and earthly, much like a headache

"I have reverence for the pain of childbirth. For me, to numb it is like caging a mysterious but beautiful, powerful animal because we are afraid of it. It doesn't impede my joy, it helps to

define it much more completely. It shapes who I am, as a mother, a woman and a human. It perhaps brings me closer to the powerful, mystical place my baby has come from, with me as the vessel.

"I guess I'd like to make the case for pain. I would like to, one more time on this list, remind people of the complicated soul and spirit of our topic. We all talk about angels and spirituality each day in reference to the souls of our children. In the same breath, however, we believe we have the right to strictly biologically control an incredibly complex process of reproduction, we wonder aloud why it is WE who must endure repeated loss, as if it isn't really normal to even have ONE miscarriage, or it is unjust (justice being a PURELY human invention) that, even if we do "everything right" we continue to suffer loss. We feel jinxed, tortured and obsessed. **I know this, because I spent years of my life feeling this way. I spent three solid years dealing with the death of my babies, the near loss of my life, the burial of another baby lost late in pregnancy, the shattering threat to my marriage and my whole personality. Now THAT'S pain.** And I would not trade it for the world. I have become a more humble creature, more rich in my understanding of humanness, more at peace with what seems like the unlikely marriage of pain and faith. Would you trade it? "

"But let us not be so narrow in vision to wonder aloud WHY anyone would CHOOSE to feel the pain. **A headache interferes with our daily life. Childbirth shapes it.**

An anonymous childbirth instructor, in an article dealing with various pain-prevention methods summarized this well, with this quote:

*"View pain in labor for what it is - normal, healthy, productive, intermittent - and **ending with the ecstasy of your baby's birth.**"*

[Note: Some of the *subjective* aspects of this discussion apply only to wanted pregnancies and births, and NOT to unwanted ones, but this would be the normal case in pre-analgesic and pre-modern societies anyway. I suspect--but haven't looked at the data--that the ratio of wanted-to-unwanted pregnancies/birth in even the modern world would reveal it to be the 'norm' here as well (with some major exceptions in population-control areas, obviously).]

Now, if I back up a little here and reflect on this, I notice several things about the data:

1. None of the discomforts, although certainly non-trivial in many cases, listed above are chronic, unrelieved, continuous, severe for ALL women, or destructive.
2. Most of them would not have been issues for ancient and pre-analgesic cultures.
3. None of them are significant issues in analgesic cultures
4. None of them are universally (by all women) experienced as excruciating or unbearable. There is a *tremendous variation* in women's experiences of these, with some not considering them 'pain' at all.
5. Some of them are not experienced by even a majority of women.
6. The most intense pain (i.e., childbirth) is purposeful, important, controllable, transitory, and dwarfed by the overall joy/depth of the experience.

If God really wanted to hurt women, their pain would likely/conceivably be much more horrific, continuous/continual, throughout all their lives, uncontrollable, and without **any** benefits--especially joy

and celebration...

There are, of course, women who decide that the childbirth experience was catastrophic for them, and there are others who find it incredibly joyous/fulfilling. But the **variation in response alone** should tell us that it is highly questionable to conclude that the pain-reward mix of childbirth demonstrates a misogynist character of God...

Accordingly, I cannot see that these experiences/patterns can successfully ground an argument that God hates women...The overall childbirth experience *alone* might suggest the complete opposite--that of preferential treatment...

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**Pushback:** "Wow--this is incredible, Glenn...you can write 15 pages on this topic and NEVER MENTION the fact that this was a curse God put on women in Genesis 3?! How could you ignore such a clear teaching of the bible, and still call yourself an evangelical, etc. etc. etc."

And related to this is: "The bible talks about Eve giving Adam the Apple from the tree.....so God says she will have pain with child birth. I also know that God will forgive us for our sins and I have a hard time believing that Eve wasn't forgiven for her sin? "

Well, the reason I didn't mention Genesis 3 in this topic is that I personally no longer believe it is directly related to the subject of female physiology--apart from the fact that only the Serpent and the ground were actually "cursed" in the passage. Let me try to answer the second (less abusive, smile) question first, and in the process, maybe I can set forth how I now understand Genesis 3--as a conservative evangelical...

The Genesis 3 passage, of course, reads like this (from *traditional* translations):

*To the woman He said, "I will greatly multiply Your pain in childbirth, In pain you shall bring forth children; Yet your desire shall be for your husband, And he shall rule over you."*

*17 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it'; Cursed is the ground because of you; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. 18 "Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you; And you shall eat the plants of the field; 19 By the sweat of your face You shall eat bread, Till you return to the ground, Because from it you were taken; For you are dust, And to dust you shall return." [NASB]*

*To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pains in childbearing; with pain you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you."*

*17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." [NIV]*

*To the woman he said, "I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."*

*17 And to the man he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten*

of the tree about which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; **in toil** you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." [NRSV]

To the woman he said: "**I will intensify the pangs of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children.** Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master." 17 To the man he said: "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat, "Cursed be the ground because of you! **In toil** shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. 18 Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dirt, and to dirt you shall return." [NAB]

Western interpreters have traditionally understood these references to the pains of childbirth (even to the point of resisting the introduction of anesthesia into labor/delivery in the 19th century!), but I have lost my confidence that this is the correct exegesis of the passage, for the following reasons and considerations:

1. The effects of the first 'sin' (i.e, disruption and dissonance in the universe) were massive, and not at all restricted to Adam's workload and Eve's childbearing. The cosmic disruption (like ripples you can't ever call back) had BOTH a moral aspect to it (i.e., 'sin' or 'moral failure' or 'crime) which WAS forgiven both Adam and Eve; AND a physical aspect to it (i.e., consequences) which can only be softened or worked around. [For example, I can give someone a black eye, and get them to forgive me *instantly*, but the swelling won't *instantly* go away/down...some consequences ripple-through...and if I had chopped off their right thumb in anger, it would NEVER grow back or be restored, even though they could completely forgive me.
2. In this first case, the disruption affected the physical processes of life, throwing them out of synch with one another...various cycles of agriculture, for example, would now be out-of-phase, creating 'pain' for the man-gardener [the Hebrew word for 'painful toil' in verse 17 (cf. also Genesis 5.29: "the toil of our hands"), '*asab*, for the man is the SAME Hebrew root used for the 'painful toil' of the woman in childbearing--the difficulty for each is to be equal for each, essentially], just as the muscle systems can work against one another in childbirth, sometimes...
3. This Great Disruption affected processes everywhere--for example, human life span began to decrease over time right after the Garden--but the only aspects mentioned in Genesis 3 are the one's 'closest' to the initial 'jobs' given Adam and Eve. Adam was a 'farmer/gardener' and so his initial and perhaps most vivid encounter with this large-scale disruption would be in his day-to-day work; Eve was the 'mother of all living' and it would be in that role that she would encounter the effects of the disruption most vividly. The Disruption was not at all confined to these two aspects of cosmic experience (Paul used the phrase "all creation" in Romans).
4. Actually, I should also point out that the word translated 'pain' there, might actually mean 'sorrow' instead--it is NOT the normal word in the bible for childbirth pain (which is *hebel*)...and this sorrow could refer to bringing children into a post-Eden world, a world that contained deception, treachery, and failure in it.

- "There is no doubt that this term refers to physical pain. Its root lies in a verb that means 'to injure, cause pain or grief.' Whether the pain would lie in the agony of childbirth **or in the related grief that accompanies raising that child** cannot be finally determined; **the text would seem to allow both ideas.**" [[HSOBX](#)]
- The meaning of the two words given by TDOT are "**sorrow**, labor" (for woman) and "**sorrow**, toil" (for men)--there is a different word for childbirth pain (*hebel*: "very intense pain in childbirth" [*Louw-Nida Dict of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Old Testament* ])
- The HAL gives the following meanings for the word:
  1. **hurt**: a hurtful word : Pr 15.1;
  2. **strenuous work** Pr 10.22 , 14.23 ; pl. what is acquired with difficulty Pr 5.10, bread acquired with pain, or bread of anxious toil Ps 127.2,
  3. **pain** (of childbirth) Gn 3.16
- The Louw-Nida definitions focus largely on the difficulty, trouble, hard work of doing something (e.g., labor!)
- "Neither the word used here for 'pain,' nor the earlier one, is the usual one for the pangs of childbirth." [[WBC](#), in. loc.]
- "The next clause strengthens the one we have been discussing by adding 'in sorrow [or pain] you will bring forth children'. Once again note that bearing children in itself was a blessing described in the so-called orders of creation of Genesis 1:28. **The grief lies not so much in the conception or in the act of childbirth itself, but in the whole process of bringing children into the world and raising them up to be whole persons before God.**" [[HSOBX](#)]
- "Some believe that the Hebrew root underlying "pains," "pain" and "painful toil" should here be understood in the sense of **burdensome labor** (see Pr 5:10, "toil"; 14:23, "hard work")" [NIV Study Bible Notes]

5. [See <http://www.christian-thinktank.com/wgencurz.html> for a discussion on the "he shall master you"...]

6. The '*increase your pain in childbearing*' is literally '*increase your pain/toil/sorrow and your pregnancies*'...the Disruption Factor would have created much more "vulnerable" lives (which it did, through both harsher living conditions, shorter lifespans, and through increasing amounts of human treachery/violence), and for the human race to continue, expand, and thrive would have required a *faster* child-production rate (as it would also require a faster and higher-yield agricultural production rate, to compensate for the effects of the curse on the ground)...there is a certain amount of exertion-pain with normal childbirth (severe muscle exertion pain, as an extreme weight-lifter might feel in spurts), and this could have stayed constant with only the SUM TOTAL of the discomfort increased, through increased FREQUENCY of childbirth events (to offset natural death rates). As death invaded the world, infant mortality would also have arisen, and nothing bears so much sorrow/pain/grief for a mother than the loss of a child. This too, would have increased, with the required increase in childbirth rates.

7. Finally, let me also point out that there are a couple of very important textual problems in the passage, and that a strong case can be made for a *radically* different understanding of this passage. Let me give the summary from HSOBX on this:

"Katherine C. Bushnell, in *God's Word to Woman*, suggests that verse 16 be translated differently since the Hebrew text could support such a reading. She noted that some ancient versions attached the meaning of 'lying in wait', 'an ambush', or a 'snare' to the word generally read as 'multiply.' This idea of a snare or a lying in wait, however, may have been moved back to Genesis 3:15 from its more normal position in Genesis 3:16. Bushnell would render the opening words of verse 16 this way: "Unto the woman he said, 'A snare has increased your sorrow and sighing.'"

"This translation is not all that different in meaning from the more traditional "I will greatly multiply..." The difference between the two readings is found wholly in the interlinear Hebrew vowel signs which came as late as the eighth century of the Christian era. The difference is this (using capital letters to show the original Hebrew consonantal text and lowercase to show the late addition of the vowel letters): *HaRBah AaRBeh*, "I will greatly multiply," and *HiRBah Ao-ReB*, "has caused to multiply (or made great) a lying-in-wait." The participial form *ARB* appears some fourteen times in Joshua and is translated as "ambush" or "a lying in wait."

"If this reading is correct (and some ancient versions read such a word just a few words back in verse 15, probably by misplacement), then that "liar-in-wait" would undoubtedly be that subtle serpent, the devil. He it was who would increase the sorrow of raising children. This is the only way we can explain why the idea of "a snare" or "lying-in-wait" still clings to this context.

"But another matter demands our attention in verse 16, the word for conception. This translation is difficult because the Hebrew word *HRN* is not the correct way to spell conception. It is spelled correctly as *HRJWN* in Ruth 4:13 and Hosea 9:11. But this spelling in Genesis 3:16 is two letters short and its vowels are also unusual. The form is regarded by lexical authorities such as Brown, Driver and Briggs as a contraction or even an error. The early Greek translation (made in the third or second century before Christ) read instead [...] meaning "sighing." The resultant meaning for this clause would be "A snare has increased your sorrow and sighing..."

"Furthermore, it must be remembered that this statement, no matter how we shall finally interpret it, is from a curse passage. In no case should it be made normative. And if the Evil One and not God is the source of the sorrow and sighing, then it is all the more necessary for us to refuse to place any degree of normativity to such statements and describe either the ordeal of giving birth to a child, or the challenge of raising that child, as an evil originating in God. God is never the source of evil; he would rather bless women. Instead, it is Satan who has set this trap."

[Note: in addition to the LXX rendering of "conception" as "sighings/groanings", Augustine comments on this clause in a similar fashion: "For she clearly has her pains and sighs multiplied in the woes of this life." (*Manicheans* 2.19.29).]

What this would mean--if this understanding is correct--is that the passage may simply be a

*descriptive* one (instead of a *prescriptive* one), in which God is reminding the woman that the Evil one was **not** a dispenser of blessings and life, but of sorrow, grief, and toil...

Whether this last point is correct or not, it seems to me that the passage is focused on the subjective aspect of birthing and raising a child in a post-Eden world.

[There is not even a hint in the biblical text, by the way, that this applied to *anyone other than* or *anyone after Eve(!)*, so to argue for extensive physiological changes in female anatomy which occurred at that time, and which were passed on to her female progeny is going **way beyond** the textual data...I cannot imagine the subjective/emotional aspect *alone* of having actually lived in the Garden and then bringing each child into a fallen world of alienation and hardship...its hard enough to do that NOT having seen the Garden, if you know what I mean...]

So, that's why I didn't bring it up here...smile...

=====  
*Okay, on to the next piece...*

**This looks especially malicious (of God) since men have no corresponding types/cycles of pain, relative to reproduction.**

There are two points I want to make here.

1. The low 'involvement' or 'risk' of men in the pregnancy/childbirth process is matched by the much lower emotional/physiological 'reward' granted to them;
2. The low 'involvement' or 'risk' (and/or 'wear and tear') of men in the reproductive process is generally balanced by their high 'risk' associated with long-term provision for the child (in pre-analgesic cultures).

On the **first point**, I have already sorta mentioned it, that the father doesn't get the endorphins, doesn't enjoy the uniquely intimate connection with the baby, and can never do any better...(And, on a lighter note, in the ancient world of the bible/ANE, the fathers didn't get 'maternity leave' either: mothers didn't have/get to do much work for 2-4 months after the birth, due to aspects of the blood taboo).. The involvement and risk/reward trade-off is very, very real in this endeavor...

The **second point** is something that really needs to be considered--in most of ancient history. The reproductive process is only **one part** of the task of 'making new people'. In the pre-modern world, it was the father who generally had to (a) provide the bulk of the material support for the wife/kids (i.e., "making a living"); and (b) defending the family against hostile forces (e.g., wars, raiders, bandits, etc.)--a definite 'health risk'(!). The process of provision and protection was *a multiple-decade process* that involved long days of hard manual work, frequent violent encounters from enemies and the treacherous, and sudden changes of fortune (due to famine, pestilence, environment, government).

Although it would be impossible to adequately "compare" the total-pain-discomfort-effort of men and of women in ancient cultures, the fact that **both** partners worked long and hard and 'with health at risk'

argues that **we should not isolate** 'the pregnancy and childbirth' cycle *as the only* arena of risk and pain. This would be simply the **reverse** of the superficial position that "only men did the really hard work back then"--and therefore a position *equally* superficial.

To illustrate the other side of this, we might consider some of the practices of the desert monks in antiquity. Their stories are quite colorful, but their lives of sexual abstinence were a constant struggle. Some found a 'motivation to singlehood' in the *cost* associated with providing materially for a wife and family:

"Monks who burned with the desire to return to the valley and take a wife were given the example of a monk who was so tormented by desire that he said ten women would not be able to satisfy him. No one could stop him. Passing through the village one day, Paphnutius heard his name called by a thin and ragged man whom he did not at first recognize. "No doubt you have taken ten wives?" And groaning, he said, "Truly I have only taken one, and **I have a great deal of trouble satisfying her with food.**"...To cure himself of wanting to go and take a wife in the village, **one solitary had made himself a woman out of clay and he would work as if he had to feed her. Then he made a daughter, and worked even harder to feed her. His exhaustion cured him of wanting to leave the desert.**" [[HI:Porneia:162f](#)]

So, I suggest we look at the *combined* task of child-bearing, education, provision, protection, etc. to help keep this in a balanced perspective.

### **This disparity is consistent throughout human life ("always women who draw the short straw").**

I am not sure I understand this point correctly, but as it is stated here, there is ample evidence to suggest that this is inaccurate or surely at least one-sided. Consider just a couple of major areas--*dealing with death and pain*--in which men 'draw the short straw' (sometimes by their own doing/nature, of course!):

- **Lifespan:** Women are apparently "designed" to outlive men by 10% of the lifespan, and this seems to have been a common experience in the ancient world (e.g., women outliving men).
- **Violent Death:** Men have always been more likely to die as a result of violent deaths (e.g., even in the US in 1999, males were **3.2 times more likely** than females **to be murdered**. [source: DOJ/BJS])...and notice this doesn't include any deaths from combat activities, a common source of death for men in the ancient world.
- **Painful Death:** The incidence rate for cancer (in the US, 1987-1992, source: National Cancer Institute) is **55% higher for men** than for women, and the **mortality rate** from cancer is **72% higher for men** than for women.
- **Victims of Violent Crimes:** Although the gap has narrowed in the 1990's, up until around 1990, the violent crime rate against men was **twice that** of against women [DOJ/BJS]
- **Infant mortality:** one-third more (33%) boys than girls die in the first year of life, due to lower resistance to disease. [[WS:AHTO:10](#)]

[And if someone objects that an early death is not really 'bad'--since death "ushers us into the wonderful

presence of God"--I would have to remind such a spiritually high-minded person that *pain itself* is **also viewed positively** in the bible...we are supposed to 'glory' in suffering, because it develops our character and our ability to empathize/help others...smile]

So, I am not sure the data we looked at from the reproductive functions (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, childbirth, menopause) would be strong enough to conclusively 'outweigh' the five facts above...If anything, the pain/death numbers might suggest just the opposite (e.g., preferential treatment of women)... But in any event, this would at least indicate that the conclusion that "always women who draw the short straw" would need considerable evidence to substantiate it.

### **Men are physically stronger than women, and this disparity in strength makes women at the mercy of physically-stronger men (e.g., rape, dominance).**

First of all, let's see *how different* female humans are from male humans, and if this is predictive of general dominance (we will discuss physical coercion in a moment):

"Primatology does not currently explain why women should be subordinate and men dominant in many human societies...**Neither does biology**. Increasingly sophisticated studies of human anatomy and physiology reveal **no clear reason for either sex dominating the other**. Biological evidence does explain differentiation of function, but little more. **In contrast to many animal species in which there are dramatic anatomical differences between females and males--in coloration, size, and strength--human females and males differ relatively little from each other.**" [[WS:AHTO:9](#)]

"If conditions of diet, health, and exercise are equal, **women will be, on the average, 10 percent shorter, lighter, and weaker than men. Some women will be stronger than most men; some men will be weaker than most women.** But in addition, the hormone testosterone, produced exclusively by males from puberty on, has been associated with "a differential readiness to respond in aggressive ways." **Male strength and aggression may lead to male dominance of women but need not do so:** Male dominance is not universal in human society, and **male aggression is culturally controlled in a variety of ways.** [[WS:AHTO:11](#)]

"On the other hand, only women have the ability to give birth. In addition, if conditions are equal, **women will be longer-lived than men, by a factor of 10 percent. Like male strength and aggression, female childbearing and longevity could lead to dominance.** But such **dominance by females or males because of their physiology alone is neither inevitable nor universal. In biological terms, either sex could dominate the other,** but it is not determined that either will, nor even that one must do so. Given this, how can the fact that in most societies women are subordinated to men, or at best, equal to them, be explained? Why are men more likely to subordinate women than women to subordinate men? **While biology offers no conclusive answers,** psychology can shed some light on this question. [[WS:AHTO:11](#)]

"In addition, **adult men are genitally vulnerable in ways that women are not.** The male genitals are more exposed than the female's, and male fear of genital injury or castration is present in many cultures. Women seem to have no equivalent fears. While rape exists in many societies, it does not seem to carry the negative psychological weight for women that castration does for men. Women can feign or hide sexual arousal; a man's arousal is quickly evident and often beyond his conscious control. In sexual intercourse, a woman can experience multiple

orgasms; a man has a more limited orgasmic capacity. Moreover, a man may be impotent, which among other things will prevent him from inseminating. Even if a woman is not sexually aroused, she is still capable of intercourse, conception, and motherhood. **Motherhood gives a woman value and a function; fatherhood is far less significant in most cultures.** Women know that their children are their own; men must rely on more indirect proof of their paternity. Even when clear on his role in conception, a man cannot be positive of his paternity. As the psychologist Erik Erikson has written, "Behind man's insistence on male superiority there is an age old envy of women who are sure of their motherhood while man can be sure of his fatherhood only by restricting the female." [WS:AHTO:12]

The net of this is this: biological differences are not adequate to explain *general* male dominance, they are relatively minor, and could be used by either sex to attempt to dominate the other.

But more to the point is the issue of **physical or forceful coercion**--and specifically the case of **rape** and/or **sexual assault**.

Several points come to mind, for us to consider in thinking through the relationship between rape and biology:

1. A 10% raw strength/size difference (the "designed by God" part) is really insufficient to account for this. A 10% difference in height would be about 5-6", and a 10% difference in weight would be about 10-15 pounds. The muscle mass difference (36% for women, 42% for men--WS:AHTO:10) is relative to size, but is also subordinate to other factors such as dexterity, development, endurance, etc. The *observed* differences in actual people, of course, are greater, but these are due to what the culture 'encourages' for the different sexes. In other words, the *actual* differences are much greater than the '*designed*' differences.

2. We know rape is about power, aggression, and dominance. And all cultures place certain limits on the use of force/power by males (and females too, for that matter). Physical advantage does not have 'free reign' in ANY society in history--there are always some limits to its application, use, and abuse. It's more than simply a question of biological power.

3. Statistically speaking, 50% of males are *weaker than* the other 50% of males (obviously). Some of this difference would be genetic/biological (e.g., 'designed in'?). Would we be on solid ground to attribute (non-prison) *male* rape to God's 'hatred' of the 'bottom 50%' (because they were physically weaker)? Probably not...

4. "Almost as many boys as girls will be sexually assaulted by age eighteen" (<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/sacc/whatIsSA.html>). Most of these cases will involve **older** perpetrators. Would we be on solid ground to attribute these rapes to God's 'hatred' of the sub-18 crowd (because they were physically weaker)? Probably not...

5. The incidence-rate gap between female rapes and male rapes is not as wide as one might originally suspect, if based on biology:

- a. **"1 in 3 women and 1 in 5 men** will be sexually assaulted in their lifetime. (FBI, 1990)  
" [<http://www.cpsdv.org/SV/sexual.htm>]
- b. "Approximately one in six boys is sexually abused before age 16"  
[<http://www.jimhopper.com/male-ab/>]
- c. **"Almost as many boys as girls will be sexually assaulted** by age eighteen"

- [<http://www.cs.utk.edu/~bartley/sacc/whatIsSA.html>]
- d. "Students of sexual abuse, drawing upon a wide number of studies conducted in the 1980s which sought to overcome the reluctance of the abused to discuss their experiences, have now concluded that **boys and girls up to the early teen years have an equal chance of being sexually victimized**; a summary of these studies was published by Eugene Porter in 1986." [<http://www.igc.apc.org/spr/docs/malerape.html>]
  - e. "For the later teens and adult males, figures are harder to come by, but a consensus appears to be forming that 'in the community' (a phrase excluding incarceration facilities) **between one-seventh and one-fourth of all rapes involve male victims.** " [<http://www.igc.apc.org/spr/docs/malerape.html>]
  - f. "Some rape crisis centers see **nearly equal numbers of girls and boys up to age 12.**" [<http://www.youthresource.com/library/ygm5.htm>]
  - g. "A household survey conducted for the United States Bureau of Justice Statistics stated that the rapes of males reported to their interviewers were **25.9% of the number of completed rapes reported by females in the same survey**; when applied to the national population that would be about 12,300 rapes of males per year. These figures are **believed to be underestimates** due to a reluctance of male victims to identify themselves to the interviewers. " [<http://www.igc.apc.org/spr/docs/malerape.html>]
  - h. "Rape crisis counselors estimate that while only one in 50 raped women report the crime to the police, **the rates of under-reporting among men are even higher** (Brochman, 1991)." [<http://www.ncvc.org/infolink/info38.htm>] Compare: "One perpetrator kept records showing he had sexually assaulted **over three hundred boys** in one summer, mostly hitchhikers; he was arrested only when **one** of the boys complained to the police, **the rest** having remained silent. " [<http://www.igc.apc.org/spr/docs/malerape.html>]

6. How would we explain the female sexual assault of adult males? The case of children is obvious and well-known, but not so the reverse-scenario:

"According to a report published in the *British Medical Journal* 1999;318:846-850, 2,500 British men were surveyed. 3% reported they had been sexually assaulted **as an adult, and nearly half of them were assaulted by women.**" [Reuters Health, March 26, 1999; referenced at <http://www.xris.com/survivor/msa/information.html>]

7. Male rape is also an act of violent aggression and power, and is somewhat more violent than female rape (on average):

"Comparing rapes of females with rapes of males, it has been found that in cases involving male victims, gang-rape is more common, multiple types of sexual acts are more likely to be demanded, weapons are more likely to be displayed and used, and physical injury is more likely to occur, with the injuries which do occur being more serious than with injured females" [<http://www.igc.apc.org/spr/docs/malerape.html>]

What these facts and counter-examples lead me to believe is that arguing *from* physical differences (such as statistical 'weakness') *to* God's hatred of the 'weak' is very dubious. There are just too many more variables (e.g., culture, peer pressure, individual psychology) that seem to be *more* important in the discussion on sexual assault, and these factors are not a function of God's "design" of our physiology.

In short, physical "inferiority" can put someone at the 'mercy' of someone stronger, but this situation is not the sole liability of women; it applies to anyone--the young, disabled, impaired, confused, outnumbered, the needy, the unprepared...and we cannot infer from this that God 'hates' them for their inability to withstand greater force, guile, or threat.

(Those familiar with the bible will recognize quite the opposite theme throughout the Book--that God has a special place in His heart for the weak, the poor, the victim, the alienated, and the less-than-elite:

*"For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; 27 but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, 28 and the base things of the world and the despised, God has chosen, the things that are not, that He might nullify the things that are [1 Cor 1.26ff])*

### **By implication: this deliberate injustice reveals that God is not good (at least, not to women)**

I guess where I come out here is that *I cannot find injustice to women in this data*, from the standpoint of the biological issues we have looked at so far.

- A close look at the details and patterns of the various pain-possibilities suggested that they were either minimal, non-existent, or non-problematic in the pre-analgesic world (e.g., menopause, menstruation, pregnancy) or important, constructive, intermittent, transitory, infrequent, and *dwarfed by joy* in the case of childbirth. In the analgesic world, all of these are controllable and reducible, if desired/needed.
- I noticed that the man's role in family-growing was different--not necessarily more or less difficult or risky--than the role of the women in childbearing and child nurture. The requirements in the ancient world for material production/provision, protection of the family from violence and loss, and "risk-management" relative to radical events of misfortune, would consume most of a father's waking day, for all his life. The ancient world knew nothing of 'retirement' for the common soul. To look only at the *physical* aspect of childbearing would be to only consider a fraction of the real-world risk, responsibility, and reward.
- We saw enough hard statistical data to strongly suggest that "women DIDN'T always draw the short straw": lifespan differences, violent death rates, painful death rates, victimization in violent crimes, and infant mortality.
- The argument from biologically-based differences seemed to be methodologically flawed, since it would lead to bizarre conclusions when applied to analogous cases (e.g., God hates the young, God hates the outnumbered). We also noted that the differences were not great enough to warrant such a 'strong conclusion' from them.

So, at least on this issue--female physiology as an indicator that God hates women--I have to conclude that the data we looked at doesn't seem to offer much support for that position. I am NOT SAYING that these pains aren't real, at times intense, or difficult challenges for many individuals. I am only arguing that the pattern of these difficulties is not sufficient grounding for an objection against God...indeed, many precious souls will argue that "only God" got them through some of these moments...

I realize that this data/discussion will sound very 'clinical' and 'statistical' and even 'cold', but the point of the study was to surface **as much hard, objective data** about the physiological, statistical, and medical **realities**. Our subjective experiences and perspectives and worldviews are of course also at play in our assessment of such data, but we need to always be willing to revise our perspectives, if the overall data suggests that it is time to do so. There are no doubt other issues and contrary data that can be brought forward, both *for* and *against* this position, but I hope this discussion shows **at least** that the case against the good heart of God is **not** that obvious, conclusive, or easily defended--at least not on the basis of physiology.

So, its **not at all** something like you have been apparently told by others, friend: "Yes, its bad for women, but they deserve it" or "Yes, its bad for women, but somebody has to bear it..." I find it mind-blowing that someone could tell you that...

My (earlier) studies on [Women and the Heart of God](#) opened my eyes so much, as to how special women are to God...I personally had *no idea* of the depth and richness of His warmth toward such grace-bearers, before going through the Self-Disclosure of His heart...

You have many other questions in your emails to me, and I appreciate you sharing them with me--maybe as we work through them, the fears and anguish you feel will melt or soften, and those with similar anguish will find peace...

Warmly,  
Glenn miller

(p.s. God "rewards" women in many, many different ways...but that's another story, for another time...smile)

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[The Christian ThinkTank...](http://www.Christian-thinktank.com)[<http://www.Christian-thinktank.com>] ([Reference Abbreviations](#) [bookabs.html])

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# Women in the Heart of God (IIa)

## The Data From the Pre-Monarchy Literature

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(updated 10/08/96)

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the **historical** data in the narratives before the institution of the Kingship in I Samuel 8, the **legal** data from the Law of Moses, and the **literary data** of the biblical text itself. In this section, we will focus on the HISTORICAL data.

**One: The Historical Data** from the Pre-monarchy narratives.

### 1. Passages in which God is an agent

- Gen 1.26-28: *Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground."*

Observations: Woman was part of the original creation (and therefore "good"), was a bearer of the image of God, was co-ruler over the creation, was distinct/different from the 'male', was blessed by God, was given joint-responsibility by God (increase, fill, rule), was absolutely essential to the "fruitful and increase" command(!), was commanded to co-subdue the earth.

- Gen 2.18-24

The LORD God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him." 19 Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air. He brought them to the man to see what he would name them; and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name. 20 So the man gave names to all the livestock, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field.

But for Adam no suitable helper was found. 21 So the LORD God caused the man to fall into a deep sleep; and while he was sleeping, he took one of the man's ribs and closed up the place with flesh. 22 Then the LORD God made a woman from the rib he had taken out of the man, and he brought her to the man. 23 The man said, "This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called 'woman,' for she was taken out of man." 24 For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh.

Observations: Woman was needed to make the situation "good". She was designed specifically to be a co-worker for the man ('helper suitable'), and a complementary worker at that ("suitable"). The method of making Eve involved a complete sharing of the nature--she was made out of the same 'stuff' (numerically and essentially) as Adam, as he obviously recognized in his quote. The marriage relationship was also relegated to a higher importance than parent/child relationships.

- Gen 12.17: *But the LORD inflicted serious diseases on Pharaoh and his household because of Abram's wife Sarai. 18 So Pharaoh summoned Abram. "What have you done to me?" he said. "Why didn't you tell me she was your wife? 19 Why did you say, 'She is my sister,' so that I took her to be my wife? Now then, here is your wife. Take her and go!"*

Observations: God valued Sarai, and judged Pharaoh "because of" Sarai. (NOT because of Abraham or because of 'the Law!').

- Gen 16.7ff:

The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name

to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me."

Observations: The Angel of YHWH addresses a women directly, by name, gives her a direct command, and issues a promise of blessing of the same magnitude as that to Abraham(cf. 13.16)! The descendants are called 'her' descendants. The Angel specifically says that the LORD had heard of her misery--He paid attention to the plight of this woman. Hagar even gave a name to the Angel, and had the insight to recognize the Angel as being God. This is the FIRST of the appearances of the Angel of YHWH in scripture--and He is sent to help a foreign servant woman.

- Gen 17.15: *God also said to Abraham, "As for Sarai your wife, you are no longer to call her Sarai; her name will be Sarah. 16 I will bless her and will surely give you a son by her. I will bless her so that she will be the mother of nations; kings of peoples will come from her."*

Observations: God not only changed Abram's name--He also changed Sarai's! He promises to bless Sarah (twice), and uses the same blessing format ("mother of nations, kings of people") as He had used with Abe in verses 5-6! She indeed is co-covenanter with YHWH--not left out or lesser in any way.

- Gen 18.9:

"Where is your wife Sarah?" they asked him. "There, in the tent," he said. 10 Then the LORD said, "I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son." Now Sarah was listening at the entrance to the tent, which was behind him. 11 Abraham and Sarah were already old and well advanced in years, and Sarah was past the age of childbearing. 12 So Sarah laughed to herself as she thought, "After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?" 13 Then the LORD said to Abraham, "Why did Sarah laugh and say, 'Will I really have a child, now that I am old?' 14 Is anything too hard for the LORD? I will return to you at the appointed time next year and Sarah will have a son." 15 Sarah was afraid, so she lied and said, "I did not laugh." But he said, "Yes, you did laugh."

Observations: The three-fold theophany of the Lord specifically asked about Sarah, and made the promise in her hearing. They were obviously paying attention to Sarah, for they brought the matter up with Abe. When

she denied it, they addressed her DIRECTLY.

- *Gen 19.12: The two men said to Lot, "Do you have anyone else here -- sons-in-law, sons or daughters, or anyone else in the city who belongs to you? Get them out of here, 13 because we are going to destroy this place. The outcry to the LORD against its people is so great that he has sent us to destroy it."*

Observations: In spite of Lot's gross heartlessness (willing to have his daughters brutalized), the Angels were concerned about their well-being and rescue, as indicated by their focus on both sons and daughters.

- Gen 20.1-6:

Now Abraham moved on from there into the region of the Negev and lived between Kadesh and Shur. For a while he stayed in Gerar, 2 and there Abraham said of his wife Sarah, "She is my sister." Then Abimelech king of Gerar sent for Sarah and took her. 3 But God came to Abimelech in a dream one night and said to him, "You are as good as dead because of the woman you have taken; she is a married woman." 4 Now Abimelech had not gone near her, so he said, "Lord, will you destroy an innocent nation? 5 Did he not say to me, 'She is my sister,' and didn't she also say, 'He is my brother'? I have done this with a clear conscience and clean hands." 6 Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know you did this with a clear conscience, and so I have kept you from sinning against me. That is why I did not let you touch her. 7 Now return the man's wife, for he is a prophet, and he will pray for you and you will live. But if you do not return her, you may be sure that you and all yours will die."

Observations: God protects Sarah once again (in spite of Abe!), and sinning against Sarah was sinning AGAINST GOD (vs.6)!

- *Gen 21.1: Now the LORD was gracious to Sarah as he had said, and the LORD did for Sarah what he had promised. 2 Sarah became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, at the very time God had promised him. 3 Abraham gave the name Isaac to the son Sarah bore him.*

Observations: Notice how prominent Sarah is in this passage! She is mentioned BEFORE Abe, the grace was extended to HER, and the first promise mentioned in the passage is to HER.

- Gen 21.12: *But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you, because it is through Isaac that your offspring will be reckoned.*

Observations: God specifically tells the patriarch Abe to 'obey his wife'--WHATEVER she says(!).

- Gen 21.17-19: *God heard the boy crying, and the angel of God called to Hagar from heaven and said to her, "What is the matter, Hagar? Do not be afraid; God has heard the boy crying as he lies there. 18 Lift the boy up and take him by the hand, for I will make him into a great nation." 19 Then God opened her eyes and she saw a well of water. So she went and filled the skin with water and gave the boy a drink.*

Observations: God interacted with the woman Hagar again, speaking to her directly, calming her, and promising her prosperity for her son. He then 'opens her eyes' and meets their need.

- Gen 25.21ff:

Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant. 22 The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."

Observations: Rebekah had access to the Lord (via the standard 'inquiry method'--cf. I Sam 9.9; Ex 33.7; Josh 9.14; Jdgs 20.18 et. al.), was the FIRST in scripture to so 'inquire' (requiring righteousness--cf. Ezek 20.31!), the Lord answered her, and delivered a prophecy to her.

- Gen 29.31: *When the LORD saw that Leah was not loved, he opened her womb*

Observations: the Lord had mercy on Leah--because she was not loved by her husband!

- Gen 29.32ff:

Leah became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him

Reuben, for she said, "It is because the LORD has seen my misery. Surely my husband will love me now." 33 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Because the LORD heard that I am not loved, he gave me this one too." So she named him Simeon. 34 Again she conceived, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "Now at last my husband will become attached to me, because I have borne him three sons." So he was named Levi. 35 She conceived again, and when she gave birth to a son she said, "This time I will praise the LORD." So she named him Judah.

Observations: Leah attributes most of these births directly to the Lord, feeling that she is the recipient of God's mercy. She understands God's goodness to be addressed specifically to HER need--and this results in the praise of YHWH at the birth of Judah.

- Gen 30.17: *God listened to Leah, and she became pregnant and bore Jacob a fifth son.*

Observation: God listened to Leah.

- Gen 30.18:

Then Leah said, "God has rewarded me for giving my maidservant to my husband." So she named him Issachar. 19 Leah conceived again and bore Jacob a sixth son. 20 Then Leah said, "God has presented me with a precious gift. This time my husband will treat me with honor, because I have borne him six sons." So she named him Zebulun. ... 22 Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." 24 She named him Joseph, and said, "May the LORD add to me another son."

Observations: This passage has similar motifs as the earlier passage. Both Leah and Rachel attribute their conceptions to God--the gift-giving One and the disgrace-removing God. They understand God to be good to THEM individually (and not just as a member of a family).

- Gen 38.8: *Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother." 9 But Onan knew that the offspring would not be his; so whenever he lay with his brother's wife, he spilled his semen on the ground to keep*

*from producing offspring for his brother. 10 What he did was wicked in the LORD's sight; so he put him to death also.*

Observations: The responsibility of a brother to raise up children for a deceased brother (by marrying the widow) was call the Levirate marriage law. It was an important part of protection of widows' inheritance rights, and to violate it (as did Onan in this passage) was very displeasing to God. God cared for this woman and correspondingly put Onan to death for failing to meet her legal need.

- Exodus 4.22: *"And I will make the Egyptians favorably disposed toward this people, so that when you leave you will not go empty-handed. 22 Every woman is to ask her neighbor and any woman living in her house for articles of silver and gold and for clothing, which you will put on your sons and daughters. And so you will plunder the Egyptians."*

Observations: On the Passover night, it was not just a ceremony involving males(!), but the women had a wonderful, wonderful job to do as well! For slaves to dress their sons and daughters in the riches of Egypt must have been quite a delight for the moms of Israel--and a delight that God designed for them to enjoy.

- Exodus 1.20-21: *So God was kind to the midwives and the people increased and became even more numerous. 21 And because the midwives feared God, he gave them families of their own.*

Observations: Notice that God felt affection ("kindness") for these women, and blessed them directly with families.

- Num 27.1ff:

The daughters of Zelophehad son of Hopher, the son of Gilead, the son of Makir, the son of Manasseh, belonged to the clans of Manasseh son of Joseph. The names of the daughters were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. They approached 2 the entrance to the Tent of Meeting and stood before Moses, Eleazar the priest, the leaders and the whole assembly, and said, 3 "Our father died in the desert. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. 4 Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives." 5 So Moses brought their case before the LORD 6 and the LORD said to

him, 7 "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them.

Observations: This passage is important for a number of reasons, but I only want to point out that the Lord SPECIFICALLY said that what these daughters argued was "RIGHT". God sided with the daughters, so that, instead of becoming 'fatherless', they became 'head of households'. God supported these women in setting a precedent that would be mentioned THREE TIMES in scripture! (here; Num 36.1-12; Josh 17.3-6).

○ Judges 4.4:

Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was leading Israel at that time. 5 She held court under the Palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites came to her to have their disputes decided. 6 She sent for Barak son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali and said to him, "The LORD, the God of Israel, commands you: `Go, take with you ten thousand men of Naphtali and Zebulun and lead the way to Mount Tabor. 7 I will lure Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his troops to the Kishon River and give him into your hands.'" 8 Barak said to her, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go." 9 "Very well," Deborah said, "I will go with you. But because of the way you are going about this, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will hand Sisera over to a woman."

Observations: This passage will also come up a number of times, but the main point here is that God would grant the victory to a woman instead of to ANOTHER MALE. The Lord, in teaching Barak his lesson, could just as easily have given it to another male rival of his, but rather, He chose to give the honor to a woman--whose deed was immortalized in the Song of Deborah (chapter 5).

○ Judges 13.2ff:

2 A certain man of Zorah, named Manoah, from the clan of the Danites, had a wife who was sterile and remained childless. 3 The angel of the LORD appeared to her and said, "You are

sterile and childless, but you are going to conceive and have a son. 4 Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, 5 because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines." 6 Then the woman went to her husband and told him, "A man of God came to me. He looked like an angel of God, very awesome. I didn't ask him where he came from, and he didn't tell me his name. 7 But he said to me, 'You will conceive and give birth to a son. Now then, drink no wine or other fermented drink and do not eat anything unclean, because the boy will be a Nazirite of God from birth until the day of his death.'" 8 Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: "O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born." 9 God heard Manoah, and the angel of God came again to the woman while she was out in the field; but her husband Manoah was not with her.

Observations: The angel of the Lord appears ONLY to the unnamed wife (TWICE), dialogues with her, gives her explicit instructions to follow, has her follow part of the Nazirite vow herself, and she repeats the message accurately to her husband Manoah. ALL of the revelatory content comes directly to the woman.

- I Sam 1.27: *27 I prayed for this child, and the LORD has granted me what I asked of him.*

Observations: Hannah understood that her prayers were heard by God, and that God responded to her specifically.

## 2. Passages in which Women participate in the religious life/cult

- In Gen 25 (above), Rebekah 'inquired of the LORD'--a specifically cultic procedure, usually done at some worship site ("went" in verse 22).
- Joshua 8.34-35: *Afterward, Joshua read all the words of the law -- the blessings and the curses -- just as it is written in the Book of the Law. 35 There was not a word of all that Moses had commanded that Joshua did not read to the whole assembly of Israel, including the women and children,*

*and the aliens who lived among them.*

Observations: Joshua included the women in the public ceremony.

- Judges 17.3: *When he returned the eleven hundred shekels of silver to his mother, she said, "I solemnly consecrate my silver to the LORD for my son to make a carved image and a cast idol. I will give it back to you."*

Observations: Although this making of the idol was explicitly against the Law of God (and in keeping with the general moral decline of the time!), it does show that women were personally involved in forms of worship and offering.

- I Sam 1:9ff *Once when they had finished eating and drinking in Shiloh, Hannah stood up. Now Eli the priest was sitting on a chair by the doorpost of the LORD's temple. 10 In bitterness of soul Hannah wept much and prayed to the LORD. 11 And she made a vow, saying, "O LORD Almighty, if you will only look upon your servant's misery and remember me, and not forget your servant but give her a son, then I will give him to the LORD for all the days of his life, and no razor will ever be used on his head."*

Observation: Hannah (wife of Elkanah) apparently had access to the sanctuary around the Tent of Meeting. (The word 'temple' in this passage indicates that by this time the Tabernacle was somewhat stationary and was housed in a larger compound. This is not to be confused with the 'real' Solomonic temple later.) She is able to pray in the sanctuary and to make vows to YHWH--about a child WITHOUT her husband's consent!

- I Sam 2.22: *Now Eli, who was very old, heard about everything his sons were doing to all Israel and how they slept with the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.*

Observation: Even at this morbid time of Israel's history, there were still women serving the Lord at the entrance to the Tent--cf. Ex 38.8.

- There are two women who are specifically called 'prophetesses' in this time period: Miriam (Ex 15.20) and Deborah (Jdgs 4.4). In the period under discussion, these two female prophets are mentioned among only 5 male prophets: Abraham, Moses, Aaron, Samuel, and an unnamed prophet in Judges 6.8.
- (There will be many more cultic roles played by women, documented in the section on the Law.)

### 3. Passages in which Women participate in favorable or equal social/legal transactions

- "Naming" was sometimes understood as a legal right. We have several women who named their children themselves, without any mention of husbands.
  1. Eve names Seth (Gen 4.25)
  2. Leah and Rachel name their children (Gen 29,30)
  3. Rachel names Benjamin as she dies (Gen 35.19)
  4. Hannah names Samuel (I Sam 1)
  
- They show up in genealogical records and in descriptions of families.
  1. In Gen 5, the genealogy starts with 'male and female' and contains numerous references to "sons and daughters"
  2. Gen 46.5: *Then Jacob left Beersheba, and Israel's sons took their father Jacob and their children and their wives in the carts that Pharaoh had sent to transport him. 6 They also took with them their livestock and the possessions they had acquired in Canaan, and Jacob and all his offspring went to Egypt. 7 He took with him to Egypt his sons and grandsons and his daughters and granddaughters -- all his offspring.*
  3. Gen 46.15: *These were the sons Leah bore to Jacob in Paddan Aram, besides his daughter Dinah. These sons and daughters of his were thirty-three in all.*
  4. Gen 46.17: *The sons of Asher: Imnah, Ishvah, Ishvi and Beriah. Their sister was Serah.*
  5. Num 26.33: *(Zelophehad son of Hephher had no sons; he had only daughters, whose names were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah.) 34 These were the clans of Manasseh; those numbered were 52,700.*
  6. Num 26.46: *(Asher had a daughter named Serah.) 47 These were the clans of Asher; those numbered were 53,400.*
  7. (There are numerous references to sisters and daughters in the genealogies in I Chron.)
  
- They show up in equal/favored status in legal situations involving males.

1. Gen 20.14ff: *Then Abimelech brought sheep and cattle and male and female slaves and gave them to Abraham, and he returned Sarah his wife to him. 15 And Abimelech said, "My land is before you; live wherever you like." 16 To Sarah he said, "I am giving your brother a thousand shekels of silver. This is to cover the offense against you before all who are with you; you are completely vindicated."*

Observations: The offense was ALSO against Sarah--SHE had rights which were recognized by a royal male(!), who also made a legal pronouncement that she was completely "vindicated".

2. Gen 24.6ff: *"Make sure that you do not take my son back there," Abraham said. 7 "The LORD, the God of heaven, who brought me out of my father's household and my native land and who spoke to me and promised me on oath, saying, 'To your offspring I will give this land' -- he will send his angel before you so that you can get a wife for my son from there. 8 If the woman is unwilling to come back with you, then you will be released from this oath of mine.*

Observations: Abraham required the woman HERSELF (not her father, or her brother, or any other guardian) to be WILLING to move.

3. Gen 24.57: *But he said to them, "Do not detain me, now that the LORD has granted success to my journey. Send me on my way so I may go to my master." 57 Then they said, "Let's call the girl and ask her about it." 58 So they called Rebekah and asked her, "Will you go with this man?" "I will go," she said.*

Observations: Along the lines of Abe's thought above, the household 'ruler' (Laban) still ASKED Rebekah (not commanded her!) about her willingness to go.

4. Gen 26.11: *So Abimelech gave orders to all the people: "Anyone who molests this man or his wife shall surely be put to death."*

Observation: In the country of Abimelech, the man AND the wife (abe and sarah) had equal legal protective status.

5. Gen 26.34-35: *When Esau was forty years old, he married Judith daughter of Beeri the Hittite, and also Basemath daughter of Elon the Hittite. 35 They were a source of grief to Isaac and Rebekah. and I Sam 14: *Samson went down to Timnah and saw there a young**

*Philistine woman. 2 When he returned, he said to his father and mother, "I have seen a Philistine woman in Timnah; now get her for me as my wife." 3 His father and mother replied, "Isn't there an acceptable woman among your relatives or among all our people? Must you go to the uncircumcised Philistines to get a wife?" But Samson said to his father, "Get her for me. She's the right one for me." 4 (His parents did not know that this was from the LORD, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines; for at that time they were ruling over Israel.) 5 Samson went down to Timnah together with his father and mother.*

Observations: In both these cases, the mother and father appear to act jointly. In the case of Samson, there are 4 references to them as a couple!

6. In Gen 27 (The "treachery of Rebekah and Jacob"), the adult Jacob obeyed his mother in every step of her commands to him--IN SPITE OF what he KNEW his father would say/do/feel.
7. Gen 28.7: *and that Jacob had obeyed his father and mother and had gone to Paddan Aram.*

Observation: The adult Jacob still obeyed his mother in the SAME way he obeyed his father.

8. Gen 29.24, 29: *24 And Laban gave his servant girl Zilpah to his daughter as her maidservant. and Laban gave his servant girl Bilhah to his daughter Rachel as her maidservant.*

Observation: Laban apparently 'wills' or passes 'ownership' of the maidservants to the newly married sisters. To the extent maidservants could be 'owned', to that same extent females 'owned' them.

9. Gen 31.16: *Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."*

Observation: Rachel and Leah assert that Jacob's property "belonged to them" TOGETHER (sorta like a community-property state in the U.S.A.?)--NOT just to the male Jacob.

10. Gen 37.9-10: *Then he (i.e. Joseph) had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me." 10*

*When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"*

Observation: Notice that Jacob finds it incredible that he AND HIS WIFE would submit to the son. In other words, the wife/mother was as authoritative over Joseph as the husband/father.

11. Gen 38.8: *Then Judah said to Onan, "Lie with your brother's wife and fulfill your duty to her as a brother-in-law to produce offspring for your brother."*

Observation: Onan had a "duty to her", implying legal status, rights, and claims upon a male (from the female).

12. Gen 38.26: *Judah recognized them and said, "She is more righteous than I, since I wouldn't give her to my son Shelah."*

Observation: Judah had originally made a summary trial and execution of Tamar, but now he not only clears her name, but also points out that legally, she is MORE in the right than he, the judge!

13. Num 27.5: *So Moses brought their case before the LORD 6 and the LORD said to him, 7 "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them.*

Observation: These daughters won a legal appeal, and had both property and inheritance rights deeded them. (cf. also Josh 17.3)

14. Ruth 4.9: *Then Boaz announced to the elders and all the people, "Today you are witnesses that I have bought from Naomi all the property of Elimelech, Kilion and Mahlon.*

Observation: Childless widows could own and sell property.

- There are passages that describe the often favorable treatment/love/care women received in that society.

1. Gen 23.2: *She died at Kiriath Arba (that is, Hebron) in the land of Canaan, and Abraham went to mourn for Sarah and to weep over*

*her.*

2. Gen 24.59: *So they sent their sister Rebekah on her way, along with her nurse and Abraham's servant and his men. 60 And they blessed Rebekah and said to her, "Our sister, may you increase to thousands upon thousands; may your offspring possess the gates of their enemies."*
3. Gen 25.21: *Isaac prayed to the LORD on behalf of his wife, because she was barren. The LORD answered his prayer, and his wife Rebekah became pregnant.*
4. Gen 29.19: *So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her.*
5. Gen 31.4f:

So Jacob sent word to Rachel and Leah to come out to the fields where his flocks were. 5 He said to them, "I see that your father's attitude toward me is not what it was before, but the God of my father has been with me. 6 You know that I've worked for your father with all my strength, 7 yet your father has cheated me by changing my wages ten times. However, God has not allowed him to harm me. 8 If he said, 'The speckled ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks gave birth to speckled young; and if he said, 'The streaked ones will be your wages,' then all the flocks bore streaked young. 9 So God has taken away your father's livestock and has given them to me. 10 "In breeding season I once had a dream in which I looked up and saw that the male goats mating with the flock were streaked, speckled or spotted. 11 The angel of God said to me in the dream, 'Jacob.' I answered, 'Here I am.' 12 And he said, 'Look up and see that all the male goats mating with the flock are streaked, speckled or spotted, for I have seen all that Laban has been doing to you. 13 I am the God of Bethel, where you anointed a pillar and where you made a vow to me. Now leave this land at once and go back to your native land.'" 14 Then Rachel and Leah replied, "Do we still have any share in the inheritance of our father's estate? 15 Does he not regard us as foreigners? Not only has he sold us, but he

has used up what was paid for us. 16 Surely all the wealth that God took away from our father belongs to us and our children. So do whatever God has told you."

Observations: Notice that Jacob goes to great pains to explain his rationale for his actions to his wives! And that the wives voice judgment and rational approval.

6. Gen 31.48ff: *Laban said, "This heap is a witness between you and me today." That is why it was called Galeed. 49 It was also called Mizpah, because he said, "May the LORD keep watch between you and me when we are away from each other. 50 If you mistreat my daughters or if you take any wives besides my daughters, even though no one is with us, remember that God is a witness between you and me."*
7. Gen 31.55: *Early the next morning Laban kissed his grandchildren and his daughters and blessed them.*
8. Gen 34:7,31: *Now Jacob's sons had come in from the fields as soon as they heard what had happened. They were filled with grief and fury, because Shechem had done a disgraceful thing in Israel by lying with [i.e. the rape of their sister Tamar] Jacob's daughter -- a thing that should not be done. and 31 But they replied, "Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?"*
9. Gen 48.7: *As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).*
10. Ruth 3.10: *"The LORD bless you, my daughter," he replied. "This kindness is greater than that which you showed earlier: You have not run after the younger men, whether rich or poor. 11 And now, my daughter, don't be afraid. I will do for you all you ask. All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.*

#### 4. **Passages in which Women manifest social, familial, and cultural power.**

There are three specific types of texts that show this dimension of women's experience in the OT: the interactions of the wife with the husband, the exhibition of Sage-like behaviors in historically important events, and the appearance of hero-type figures in the narratives.

- First, the **interactions between husband and wife** in the pre-monarchy period could scarcely be called that of "master and slave" or "master and cowering subordinate"! Indeed, the tone of voice and style of comments/questions of the wives is actually characterized by that colorful word "uppity" in the academic literature! (cf. SAIANE:277).

1. Gen 16.1f: *Now Sarai, Abram's wife, had borne him no children. But she had an Egyptian maidservant named Hagar; 2 so she said to Abram, "The LORD has kept me from having children. Go, sleep with my maidservant; perhaps I can build a family through her."*

Observation: She simply orders Abe around!

2. Gen 16.5: *Then Sarai said to Abram, "You are responsible for the wrong I am suffering. I put my servant in your arms, and now that she knows she is pregnant, she despises me. May the LORD judge between you and me."*
3. Gen 27.46: *Then Rebekah said to Isaac, "I'm disgusted with living because of these Hittite women. If Jacob takes a wife from among the women of this land, from Hittite women like these, my life will not be worth living." 1 So Isaac called for Jacob and blessed him and commanded him: "Do not marry a Canaanite woman."*
4. Gen 30.1: *When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I'll die!" 2 Jacob became angry with her and said, "Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?" 3 Then she said, "Here is Bilhah, my maidservant. Sleep with her so that she can bear children for me and that through her I too can build a family."*
5. Gen 30.16: *So when Jacob came in from the fields that evening, Leah went out to meet him. "You must sleep with me," she said. "I have hired you with my son's mandrakes." So he slept with her that night.*

Observation: Notice that the Jacob seemed to have NO SAY in the matter--the wives somehow had connubial rights that were very strong.

6. Ex 4.24: *At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. 25 But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a*

*bridegroom of blood to me," she said.*

7. Frymer-Kensky makes some interesting observations about these passages (SAIANE:277):

There is a particular tone to these petitions by the matriarchs. They do not plead, and do not address their husbands in the language of obedience or submission. On the contrary, they are uppity women who use a characteristic form of biblical rhetoric, the guilt-producing opening attack...This guilt-producing rhetoric is not simply characteristic of the "Jewish mother"! In fact, it is an essential method of biblical argumentation, one used by women other than mothers, and by such great male authority figures as Moses and Samuel. But it is significant that there are not two separate ways of discourse for men and women, and that women do not have to adopt a subordinate posture in their speech."

- **Secondly, the women in the pre-monarchy period consistently manifest sage-like behavior.** The sage was one of the two un-official roles of power in Israel (the official roles being king and priest, and the other un-official one being prophet). The Sage was the wise man (e.g. I Chr 26.14; Prov 1.6; Jer 18.18) or wise woman (2 Sam 20.14ff; 14.2), who exerted what today would be called 'expert power.' It was not a paid-position (like priest or king), nor was it a full-time job (like prophet often was).

Frymer-Kensky describes this informal power and explains that it applies to both male and female sages:

Having no direct authority of their own, they--on their own initiative--have the power to effect results through their knowledge and their willingness to act upon their knowledge, either through petition and argument or, failing that, through independent actions. In the Pentateuch, such a role is usually filled by women, notably by Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel. [SAIANE:276]

...like women, male sages have an ancillary position to the holder of direct power. They do not have the power to determine events directly, but rather influence the direction of

events through their intelligence and persuasive power.  
[SAIANE:278]

The power of the sage could be used for either good or evil--as "power" it was ethically neutral. It manifested itself typically in dialogues with 'decision makers' or in independent actions of consequence to history. "Official" Sages were often called 'counselors' in the court (2 Sam 15:30ff).

1. We have already noted above the passages in which the matriarchs use the "open guilt" technique, used by sages elsewhere in the OT.
2. Gen 21.11: *But God said to him, "Do not be so distressed about the boy and your maidservant. Listen to whatever Sarah tells you,*

Observations: God specifically told Abe to pay attention to her as a counselor--the sage.

3. Gen 27--the "trickery of Rebekah". This familiar passage, in which Rebekah has Jacob disguise himself as Esau, to receive the blessing of the first born, is often seen as an evil act on the part of Rebekah--almost a manipulative and scheming power-play. But it seems to me that the situation is altogether different than that. Consider:

- In Gen 25.22, Rebekah had been told by YHWH directly that Jacob was to have authority over Esau--a formula that normally meant the firstborn blessing was his (cf. Gen 48.17). This message from YHWH was no doubt known to Isaac, due to its importance and probable recording in the family archives.
- In Gen 25.29, Esau sells his birthright as the firstborn to Jacob. This would have also been recorded in the family archives.
- What this means is that Isaac should NOT have intended to give the blessing to Esau at all! Isaac was in the wrong, and the prophetic word of YHWH was about to be compromised (as well as the legally binding oath of Esau earlier)--27.29 was INTENDED for Esau!.
- Rebekah, seeing that independent action was required, acted the sage--and did "whatever it took" to see that God's will was done. [That it was NOT an issue of her being concerned about her sustenance after her husband's death, is obvious from the

fact that BOTH Esau and Jacob were her sons and would have had responsibility for her--as indeed Esau fulfilled after Jacob went away.]

- This 'trickery' or 'deceit' was a VERY ACCEPTABLE way of dealing with authority figures that were attempting to thwart God. When the Pharaoh tried to kill all the male babies of the Israelites in Egypt, the midwives lied to Pharaoh and God blessed them (Ex 1). When the Israelites were about to attack Jericho, Rahab deceived the rulers of the city by hiding the spies and telling a lie, and was listed in the heroes of faith for this (Heb 11). When Judah failed to keep up the levirate law, Tamar disguised herself and was declared 'more righteous than' him. So, Rebekah's deception was in perfect line with acceptable practice in such a difficult situation.
- The narrative in no way censures Rebekah for this (nor does any other passage), and even has Isaac using the basic word choices of the birth-promises about Jacob in his secondary blessing to Esau ("you will serve your brother"--27:40 with 25.23.)

I have to conclude that Rebekah here is the hero of the story, playing the wise sage and resourceful agent, and 'saves the day'.

4. We see a similar 'deception' occur in the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38. Judah is supposed to provide a husband (and inheritance) for Tamar but fails to do so--deliberately (38.11). Tamar does this elaborate disguise-play and 'sagely' gets Judah to fulfill his duty (unintentionally). And Judah admits that she was 'more righteous' than he (38.26).
5. In Gen 31, Jacob explains in detail his reasoning to his wives, seemingly asking for their counsel, and receives a sage-like analytical response from them.
6. The Hebrew Midwives in Exodus 1 are another example of sage-like behavior. They acted wisely and were critical to the rapid growth and strength of Israel at the Exodus.
7. Moses' life was TWICE saved by wise women! First, his mother developed a clever scheme to preserve his life (Ex 2). Second, his wife Zipporah saved him from being killed by the Lord, when he

failed to circumcise his kids. [Ex 4.24: 24 *At a lodging place on the way, the LORD met Moses and was about to kill him. 25 But Zipporah took a flint knife, cut off her son's foreskin and touched Moses' feet with it. "Surely you are a bridegroom of blood to me," she said. 26 So the LORD let him alone. (At that time she said "bridegroom of blood," referring to circumcision.)* ]

8. Num 27.3: "*Our father died in the desert. He was not among Korah's followers, who banded together against the LORD, but he died for his own sin and left no sons. 4 Why should our father's name disappear from his clan because he had no son? Give us property among our father's relatives.*" 5 *So Moses brought their case before the LORD 6 and the LORD said to him, 7 "What Zelophehad's daughters are saying is right. You must certainly give them property as an inheritance among their father's relatives and turn their father's inheritance over to them.*

Observations: Notice that the argument of these women is well thought out--distancing from Korah, and appealing to the importance of family names; a sage-type argument (although probably somewhat condensed).

9. Judges 4.17ff:

Sisera, however, fled on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, because there were friendly relations between Jabin king of Hazor and the clan of Heber the Kenite. 18 Jael went out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Come, my lord, come right in. Don't be afraid." So he entered her tent, and she put a covering over him. 19 "I'm thirsty," he said. "Please give me some water." She opened a skin of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him up. 20 "Stand in the doorway of the tent," he told her. "If someone comes by and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say 'No.'" 21 But Jael, Heber's wife, picked up a tent peg and a hammer and went quietly to him while he lay fast asleep, exhausted. She drove the peg through his temple into the ground, and he died. 22 Barak came by in pursuit of Sisera, and Jael went out to meet him. "Come," she said, "I will show you the man you're looking for." So he went in with her, and there lay Sisera with the tent peg through his temple -- dead.

Observations: Here is another case of deception in a difficult authority context. Jael is often faulted for violating the trust of Sisera (in the context of the friendly political relations between the two peoples), but this alliance was itself a breach of faith. Most of the Kenites (kin to Moses) were living in the south and allied with Israel. Heber had made a breach of faith with them (and with Israel) and moved north to support Jabin AGAINST Israel. His wife was obviously still loyal to Israel and YHWH and saved Israel by her cunning and independent action. (She was immortalized in the Song of Deborah in chapter 5.)

10. Sages ("the wise") generally congregated around the "gates" of the community. There legal decisions were made, community issues discussed, and worldviews explored (e.g. Prov 24.7; 31.23). We have one passage in which a woman participated WITHIN that assembly--Deborah, the Judge. In recounting a victory in the Song of Deborah (5.11f), we read: *"Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates. 12 'Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song!'* The most natural reading of this places Deborah at the city gates, doing her judging tasks. This judging task was a mixture of legal and wisdom skills/authority, both of which found

locus at the assembly of the gates.

- **Third, the appearance of female hero-type** figures in the narratives demonstrate both the actuality of female leadership/influence/role models in that time.
  1. The matriarchs are obviously leaders in their communities. Sarah herself receives covenant promises and blessings and Rebekah's beautiful character is highlighted (Gen 24.17ff) as is her wisdom (Gen 27-28). Rachel was a shepherdess (Gen 29.9), a non-trivial job (cf. David's having to defend the flock from a lion and bear--I Sam 17.34ff)!
  2. One of the more powerful, yet almost invisible, figures is Sherah, daughter of Ephraim. In I Chr 7.24 we read: *His daughter was Sheerah, who built Lower and Upper Beth Horon as well as Uzzen Sheerah.* . This daughter was said to have built three towns(!), one of which was named after herself. A glance at the names of the only other city-builders mentioned in Scripture yields: Nimrod (Gen 10.11), Pharaoh (Ex 1.11), Joshua (Jos 19.50), one unnamed survivor of Luz (Judg 1.23), and the kings of Israel and Judah (e.g. David, Solomon, Asa). City-building is listed as an important royal feat in I Kings 15.23 (*As for all the other events of Asa's reign, all his achievements, all he did and the cities he built, are they not written in the book of the annals of the kings of Judah?* ). This would indicate a particularly powerful and effective woman leader in this period, and one whose exploits were recorded in the official genealogies and archives of Israel!
  3. The Hebrew midwives' bravery and sage-actions would have been widely known and admired in that day (Exod 1).
  4. Miriam was Moses' older sister, a sister of Aaron, a prophetess, a leader of congregational worship/singing, and one of the "BIG THREE" of exodus Israel. Her role in leading Israel cannot be underestimated.
  5. The daughters of Zelophehad were clearly (being mentioned thrice) an important example for women to speak up in legal settings.
  6. Rahab the harlot (Jos 2) is a model of faith and action in the NT (cf. Heb 11; Jas 2), and even is part of the genealogy of Jesus (Matt 1.5).

She lived among the Israelites and was a constant witness to their identity as the covenant people (cf. Joshua 6.25).

7. Deborah (Judges 4) was a prophetess, a 'judge' (highest political office prior to the monarchy--Deut 17.9), a wife/mother, and a composer (wrote the "Song of Deborah" in Judges 5). She did legal dispute-resolution (in the same vein as Moses--Ex 18:13--and Solomon.)
8. The entire book of Ruth is the story of a foreign women who shows loyalty, resourcefulness, and tenacity in her commitment to her mother-in-law. The book ends with her being acknowledged as "better than seven sons" (4.15). Ruth, the Moabitess, is the only descendant of Moab known to have entered the assembly of Israel--IN SPITE OF GOD's general injunction to the contrary in Dt 23.3! Ruth becomes a progenitor, thereby, of King David and the Lord Jesus.
9. Hannah, mother of Samuel, is featured in I Sam 1-2 as the model of spiritual grace and theology. (However, it is doubtful that her story would have been widely known until the monarchy.)

So, the narrative data indicates a rather wide range of role models, heroes, community agents, and influence-wielders among the women population of the time.

### **Summary:**

If we simply list some of the above observations, we get a surprisingly robust picture of Israelite women:

1. They were necessary to make the universe "good" (Gen 1.26-28)
2. They shared joint responsibility with man to rule/fill the earth. (Gen 1.26-28)
3. God judged people who sinned against females. (Gen 12.17; Gen 20.1-6)
4. God spoke directly with females. (Gen 16.17ff; Gen 21.17-19; Judg 13.2)
5. God listened to females and answered their prayers. (Gen 16.17ff; Gen 30.17; I Sam 1.27)
6. God makes promises to females. (Gen 16.17ff; Gen 21.17-19)
7. The first appearance of the Angel of YHWH was to a female. (Gen 16.17ff)
8. God blessed Sarah at the same level and in the same covenant-forms as Abraham. (Gen 18.9ff)
9. God includes females and their issues in His discussions with males. (Gen 18.9f; 19.12f)

10. God is gracious and faithful to females. (Gen 21.1f; Gen 29.31; Gen 30.17)
11. God tells males to pay attention to their wives! (Gen 21.12)
12. God imparts insight/wisdom to women.(Gen 21.17-19)
13. Women could inquire of God formally. (Gen 25.2f)
14. Women were the first to 'inquire' of God in scripture. (Gen 25.2ff)
15. God delivered prophecies directly to women. (Gen 25.2ff)
16. Women recognized God's goodness and so bore witness in their children's` names. (Gen 29.32f; 30.18ff)
17. God killed people for not protecting/providing for women's needs. (Gen 38.8)
18. God included women in the core functions of the first Passover. (Ex 4.22ff)
19. God honored 'civil' disobedience on the part of wise and committed women. (Ex 1.20-21)
20. God 'took the side' of women in some major legal disputations/decisions. (Num 27.1ff)
21. God gave military victory/honor to women. (Judg 4.4)
22. Women publicly declared that God answered their prayers. (Judg 5)
23. Women were involved in public exposition/reading of the Law. (Jos 8.34-35)
24. Women could dedicate gifts and offerings to YHWH. (Judg 17.3)
25. Women had access to the pre-Temple sanctuary. (I Sam 1,2)
26. Women could make vows without husband approval. (I Sam 1,2)
27. Women served the Lord at the Tent of Meeting. (I Sam 2.22)
28. Women served as prophetesses. (Miriam--Ex 15.20; Deborah--Judg 4.4; among Abe, Moses, Aaron, Samuel)
29. Women had legal rights to name children, without husband involvement. (Gen 4.25; 29,30; 35.19; I Sam 1)
30. Women had recognized legal rights, which also generate 'duties' for males (Gen 20.14ff; 38.8).
31. Women show up in all sorts of genealogies (except military enrollments). (Gen 5; 46:5; 46.15; 46.17; Num 26.33; 26:46; I Chron)
32. Marriage required the approval of the woman. (Gen 24.6ff; 24:57f)
33. Women show up as joint-agents with husbands in a wide range of authority-type activities.(Gen 26.11; 26:34-35)
34. Mothers had considerable influence and legal authority over adult male sons.(Gen 27; 37.9-10)
35. Wives/women could own property. (Gen 29.24,29)
36. Unmarried daughters could own property. (Num 27)
37. Wives co-owned property with their husband. (Gen 29.31.16)
38. Childless widows could own and sell property. (Ruth 4.9)
39. Women were consistently loved and blessed by their relatives. (Gen 23.2; 25.59; 25.21; Gen 31.48ff; 31.55; 48.7)
40. Women were sought for counsel by males. (Gen 31.4ff)
41. Women were called 'noble' and 'better' in public by males. (Gen 38.26; Gen

34.7.31; Ruth 3.10)

42. Women's interactions with their husbands indicate a strong 'uppity' character. (Gen 16.1ff; 16.5; 27.46; 30.1; 30.16; Ex 4.24)
43. Women typically manifest sage-like behavior, argumentation, functions, and results. (above 'uppity' passages; Gen 21.11; Gen 27--the 'trickery of Reb'; Gen 38--Tamar; Gen 31.4ff; Midwives, Zipporah, Judg 4.17ff)
44. Women are sometimes pictured as 'correcting' the mistakes of male authority figures (Rebekah, midwives, Jael, Rahab).
45. Women contributions to the history of the chosen people (apart from giving birth to all of the participants!) were substantial and critical to the success of biblical history:
  - Rebekah saved the birthright line by the deception of Isaac.
  - The midwives saved the majority of Israelite men (from infanticide in Egypt)
  - They save the life of Moses TWICE before he leads Israel out of Egypt!
  - Rahab is a key to success for the overthrow of the major border town Jericho--the gateway to the land of Israel. (Jos 2)
  - Deborah and Jael were deliverers of Israel for the extremely disruptive/destructive oppression of King Jabin (cf. Judg 5.7--"village life had ceased")
  - The spiritual life of Hannah produced the major positive figure in post-conquest Israel--Samuel.
46. Men leaders officially declare women as vindicated or ethically superior. (Gen 38.26; 20.14ff)
47. The only known exception to God's exclusion of Moabites from His assembly (Dt 23.3) is for a female--Ruth, who also becomes an ancestor of David and Jesus (cf. Ruth 4.21 and Matt 1.5).
48. Several women heroes show up in the narrative (the Matriarchs, Sherah, the midwives, Miriam, daughters of Zelophehad, Rahab, Deborah, Hannah(?), Ruth)
49. One woman actually 'sat' in the assembly of the elders in the 'gate' (Jud 5.11f).
50. These role models came from every strata of society--leadership, wealthy families, foreigners, ordinary folk, prostitutes.
51. One woman held the highest political office of the day.

**The historical data in the narratives of pre-monarchical Israel reveal a rather important level of influence of women on the historical unfolding of Israel, as well as indications of special care from the heart of God for His daughters.**

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# Women in the Heart of God (IIb)

## The Data From the Pre-Monarchy Literature

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the historical data in the narratives before the institution of the Kingship in I Samuel 8, the **legal** data from the Law of Moses, and the literary data of the biblical text itself. In this section, we will focus on the LEGAL data.

**One: The Legal Data** from the Pre-monarchy period.

The previous section on historical data had frequent illustrations of legal situations and transactions involving women, but the Law of Moses has a wealth of information that directly reveals God's heart for His daughters. In this section we will look at:

1. Passages which address women as to cultic responsibilities, offerings, and equal liability before God;
2. Passages which show equal value, treatment, punishment, and honor for women;
3. Passages which focus on women's legal rights, property codes, and relationship with the broader legal community; and
4. Passages which show either stricter requirements/penalties on men, and/or preferential treatment/special protection for women.

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- 1. Passages which address women as to cultic responsibilities, offerings, and equal liability before God with men.**

- Ex 20.10: *but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. On it you shall not do any work, neither you, nor your son or daughter, nor your manservant or maidservant, nor your animals, nor the alien within your gates.*

Observation: This command from the Decalogue mentions all the household members EXCEPT the wife, implying that she is listed in the "you" under address.

- Ex 35.22: *All who were willing, men and women alike, came and brought gold jewelry of all kinds: brooches, earrings, rings and ornaments. They all presented their gold as a wave offering to the LORD.*

Observations: Women were equally involved in offering expensive gifts to the LORD as a WAVE offering.

- Ex 35.29: *All the Israelite men and women who were willing brought to the LORD freewill offerings for all the work the LORD through Moses had commanded them to do.*

Observations: Women were equally involved in offering FREEWILL offerings.

- Ex 38.3: *They made the bronze basin and its bronze stand from the mirrors of the women who served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.*

Observation: Women had some kind of tabernacle service AT the tabernacle. This is where all the sacrifices were offered (Ex 29.10-11).

- Lev 10.14: *But you and your sons and your daughters may eat the breast that was waved and the thigh that was presented. Eat them in a ceremonially clean place; they have been given to you and your children as your share of the Israelites' fellowship offerings.*

Observations: The daughters of the high priest could eat the sacrificial food.

- Num 6.2:

The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `If a man or woman wants to make a special vow, a vow of separation to the LORD as a Nazirite, 3 he must abstain from wine and other fermented drink and must not drink vinegar made from wine or from other fermented drink. He must not drink grape juice or eat grapes or raisins. 4 As long as he is a Nazirite, he must not eat anything that comes from the grapevine, not even the seeds or skins. 5 "`During the entire period of his vow of separation no razor may be used on his head. He must be holy until the period of his separation to the LORD is over; he must let the hair of his head grow long. 6 Throughout the period of his separation to the LORD he must not go near a dead body. 7 Even if his own father or mother or brother or sister dies, he must not make himself ceremonially

unclean on account of them, because the symbol of his separation to God is on his head. 8 Throughout the period of his separation he is consecrated to the LORD. 9 "If someone dies suddenly in his presence, thus defiling the hair he has dedicated, he must shave his head on the day of his cleansing -- the seventh day. 10 Then on the eighth day he must bring two doves or two young pigeons to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 11 The priest is to offer one as a sin offering and the other as a burnt offering to make atonement for him because he sinned by being in the presence of the dead body. That same day he is to consecrate his head. 12 He must dedicate himself to the LORD for the period of his separation and must bring a year-old male lamb as a guilt offering. The previous days do not count, because he became defiled during his separation. 13 "Now this is the law for the Nazirite when the period of his separation is over. He is to be brought to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting. 14 There he is to present his offerings to the LORD: a year-old male lamb without defect for a burnt offering, a year-old ewe lamb without defect for a sin offering, a ram without defect for a fellowship offering, 15 together with their grain offerings and drink offerings, and a basket of bread made without yeast -- cakes made of fine flour mixed with oil, and wafers spread with oil. 16 "The priest is to present them before the LORD and make the sin offering and the burnt offering. 17 He is to present the basket of unleavened bread and is to sacrifice the ram as a fellowship offering to the LORD, together with its grain offering and drink offering. 18 "Then at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting, the Nazirite must shave off the hair that he dedicated. He is to take the hair and put it in the fire that is under the sacrifice of the fellowship offering.

Observations: This is the Nazarite vow--probably the highest form of dedication to the LORD in the OT. It was obviously for both men and women (v.2), with no apparent differences between their commitments--the offerings are the same, the regulations the same, the treatment the same. If the Nazarite were female, notice that she cannot defile herself **EVEN FOR HER FATHER or BROTHER** (c. 7). At the end of the process, she is required to make the hair-sacrifice **HERSELF**--not the priest (v.18). This procedure all takes place at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (v.18).

Evans (citing Vos) points out how high this level of consecration was:

Vos points out that if we compare the elements involved with a vow, such as cleansing regulations, then 'the Nazirite vow...brought one in some respects to the level of consecration of a high priest.' [[WS:WIB:29](#)]

- Num 30: The first part of this chapter deals with religious vows. It starts out with a strong admonition to men to fulfill whatever they commit to, but then goes on to discuss various aspects of female vows. Although we will deal with this passage under a later category, it should be noted that there were no restrictions on vows by 'head of household' women--widows and divorcees (v. 9), nor on vows by OLDER daughters in households (v. 3). And it should also be noted, that under the conditions of vs 3-5, even YOUNG GIRLS could make vows to the LORD! He was always open to building relationships with them.
- From the inclusive 'you' (and description of the other family members as 'sons and daughters'), it is clear that God commanded BOTH husband and wife to travel and celebrate the cultic feasts. Cf. Deut 12.12, 18; 16.11,14:

And there rejoice before the LORD your God, you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns, who have no allotment or inheritance of their own...Instead, you are to eat them in the presence of the LORD your God at the place the LORD your God will choose -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites from your towns -- and you are to rejoice before the LORD your God in everything you put your hand to...And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you. ..Be joyful at your Feast -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, and the Levites, the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns...

- Deut 29.9ff: *Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. 10 All of you are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God -- your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, 11 together with your children and your wives, and the aliens living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. 12 You are standing here in order to enter into a*

*covenant with the LORD your God, a covenant the LORD is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, 13 to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. 14 I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you 15 who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God but also with those who are not here today.*

Observations: Notice that the wives were specifically addressed as covenant parties.

- Deut 31.10ff: *Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people -- men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns -- so they can listen and learn to fear the LORD your God and follow carefully all the words of this law.*

Observations: the women were specially included in the public reading of the Law.

- To recap what was noted in the [historical data](#) section, women were known to have:
  1. Inquired of the Lord
  2. Heard the law read to them by Joshua
  3. dedicated silver
  4. made vows to the Lord
  5. been in the sanctuary
  6. served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.
  7. been prophetesses.
- Deut 32.19: *The LORD saw this and rejected them because he was angered by his sons and daughters.*

Observation: This verse in the Song of Moses pre-rehearses the fortunes of Israel. The mention of the word "daughters" illustrates that YHWH's relationship to His covenant people was not just with or through "the sons"!

## **2. Passages which show equal value, treatment, punishment, and honor for women**

- Ex 20.12: *"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you.*

Observations: Mother was to be honored at the same level as Father--no distinction in honor. (also Lev 19.3)

- Ex 21:15, 17: *"Anyone who attacks his father or his mother must be put to death. .... "Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.*

Observation: "Ancient Israel raised the role and authority of the mother to a new level when compared to her ancient Near Eastern neighbors, as exemplified in law codes where offenses against the mother were judged as seriously as those against the father." (Fontaine, in SAIANE:161) [see also Lev 20.9; Deut 27.16]

- Ex 21.26ff: *"If a man hits a manservant or maidservant in the eye and destroys it, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the eye. 27 And if he knocks out the tooth of a manservant or maidservant, he must let the servant go free to compensate for the tooth. 28 "If a bull gores a man or a woman to death, the bull must be stoned to death, and its meat must not be eaten. But the owner of the bull will not be held responsible. 29 If, however, the bull has had the habit of goring and the owner has been warned but has not kept it penned up and it kills a man or woman, the bull must be stoned and the owner also must be put to death. 30 However, if payment is demanded of him, he may redeem his life by paying whatever is demanded. 31 This law also applies if the bull gores a son or daughter. 32 If the bull gores a male or female slave, the owner must pay thirty shekels of silver to the master of the slave, and the bull must be stoned.*

Observations: In each of these cases, the male and female are valued EQUALLY.

- Lev 12.6: *"When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. 7 He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood.*

Observation: The offering was IDENTICAL for male or female babies.

- Lev 13: This chapter deals with various types of skin disorders, and it applied to men and women alike (cf. vs.29, 38).

- Lev 15: 18--sexual contact rendered BOTH parties unclean for the same length of time--no distinction.
- Lev 20.10-12: "*If a man commits adultery with another man's wife -- with the wife of his neighbor -- both the adulterer and the adulteress must be put to death. 11 "If a man sleeps with his father's wife, he has dishonored his father. Both the man and the woman must be put to death; their blood will be on their own heads. 12 "If a man sleeps with his daughter-in-law, both of them must be put to death. What they have done is a perversion; their blood will be on their own heads.*

Observations: Both parties in adultery were EQUALLY guilty and EQUALLY punished. (The man was not somehow 'less responsible' or under a 'looser standard'!) [see also Deut 22.22,23]

Curiously, this equal punishment is a step forward for women of the time! So Carmody in [WS:WWR:191](#): "...the provision in Deuteronomy 22.22 that imposes the death penalty on an adulterous couple. This is a landmark insofar as it treats the woman as equal to the men. By contrast, the law of adultery in many other cultures evolved in a way that never granted the woman fully human status. For example, ancient Greece placed the erring wife in the hands of her master, who was usually her husband or father. "

- Lev 20.27: "*A man or woman who is a medium or spiritist among you must be put to death. You are to stone them; their blood will be on their own heads.*"

Observations: Male and Female bore equal punishment.

- Lev 21.1: *The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: `A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, 2 except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, 3 or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband -- for her he may make himself unclean.*

Observations: Females were important enough for a priest to become unclean for!

- Num 5.1-3: *The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Command the Israelites to send away from the camp anyone who has an infectious skin disease or a discharge of any kind, or who is ceremonially unclean because of a dead body. 3 Send away male and female alike; send them outside the camp so*

*they will not defile their camp, where I dwell among them."*

Observation: Equal treatment for female and male.

- Num 5.6: *"Say to the Israelites: `When a man or woman wrongs another in any way and so is unfaithful to the LORD, that person is guilty 7 and must confess the sin he has committed. He must make full restitution for his wrong, add one fifth to it and give it all to the person he has wronged.*

Observation: Either party is equally guilty, and equally expected to get the resources necessary for restitution.

- Num 18.11,19: *"This also is yours: whatever is set aside from the gifts of all the wave offerings of the Israelites. I give this to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share. Everyone in your household who is ceremonially clean may eat it.....Whatever is set aside from the holy offerings the Israelites present to the LORD I give to you and your sons and daughters as your regular share.*

Observation: The high priest could share the dedicated offerings of the Lord with his daughters.

- Deut 13.6ff; 17.2ff; 29.18: *6 If your very own brother, or your son or daughter, or the wife you love, or your closest friend secretly entices you, saying, "Let us go and worship other gods" (gods that neither you nor your fathers have known, 7 gods of the peoples around you, whether near or far, from one end of the land to the other), 8 do not yield to him or listen to him. Show him no pity. Do not spare him or shield him. 9 You must certainly put him to death.....If a man or woman living among you in one of the towns the LORD gives you is found doing evil in the eyes of the LORD your God in violation of his covenant, 3 and contrary to my command has worshipped other gods, bowing down to them or to the sun or the moon or the stars of the sky, 4 and this has been brought to your attention, then you must investigate it thoroughly. If it is true and it has been proved that this detestable thing has been done in Israel, 5 take the man or woman who has done this evil deed to your city gate and stone that person to death.....Make sure there is no man or woman, clan or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations; make sure there is no root among you that produces such bitter poison.*

Observation: The punishment for idolatry and covenant treason were equal for men and women. Both had the power to influence the community and

introduce such 'bitter poison' into the nation.

- Deut 15.12: *If a fellow Hebrew, a man or a woman, sells himself to you and serves you six years, in the seventh year you must let him go free.*

Observation: Both women and men could sell themselves, and both were to go free under the same conditions--no inequality.

- Deut 20.10: *When you march up to attack a city, make its people an offer of peace. 11 If they accept and open their gates, all the people in it shall be subject to forced labor and shall work for you. 12 If they refuse to make peace and they engage you in battle, lay siege to that city. 13 When the LORD your God delivers it into your hand, put to the sword all the men in it. 14 As for the women, the children, the livestock and everything else in the city, you may take these as plunder for yourselves. And you may use the plunder the LORD your God gives you from your enemies.*

Observation: This passage deals with nations at a distance from Israel (v. 15). Both the men and the women could be made into semi-slave labor or "plunder" (if the men were co-operative). If the men were not, only the women would survive for that. It is important to note that the captive women AND men (if they survived) were BOTH treated as 'plunder'--NOT JUST the women!

- Deut 23.17-18: *17 No Israelite man or woman is to become a shrine prostitute. 18 You must not bring the earnings of a female prostitute or of a male prostitute into the house of the LORD your God to pay any vow, because the LORD your God detests them both.*

Observation: Both sexes are equally prohibited from religious prostitution.

### **3. Passages which focus on women's legal rights, property codes, and relationship with the broader legal community.**

- Ex 21.2-4: *"If you buy a Hebrew servant, he is to serve you for six years. But in the seventh year, he shall go free, without paying anything. 3 If he comes alone, he is to go free alone; but if he has a wife when he comes, she is to go with him. 4 If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the woman and her children shall belong to her master, and only the man shall go free.*

Observations: The exact nature of Hebrew 'slavery' is somewhat obscure. Practically, it looks more like a 6-year contracted labor agreement with

room and board included. In the passage above, we want to notice that when a man sold himself as a servant, ALL that 'belonged' to the master was HIM--NOT HIS WIFE. She was not some kind of property that 'transferred' wherever the man went. And, in the case when the master gave the servant a wife (presumably from among his maidservants), it is no wonder it still 'belonged' to his household--no brideprice was paid. When the servant went free, he theoretically could accumulate the necessary capital (or negotiate with the master) to marry the maidservant. It is sufficient for our purposes here simply to note that the wife was not simply a 'automatically transferred asset' upon selling oneself into servanthood.

- We have noted before that property passed to the daughters of Zelophehad via inheritance (Num 27.1-7).
- Num 27.8-9: *"Say to the Israelites, 'If a man dies and leaves no son, turn his inheritance over to his daughter. 9 If he has no daughter, give his inheritance to his brothers.*

Observation: A daughter had HIGHER priority than her father's own brothers!

ANE Context. In the Laws of Lipit-Ishtar (ruler of the city-state of Isin in Sumer, after the Third Dynasty of Ur, 1934-1924bc), this was also the case (Law b): "If a man dies without male offspring, an unmarried daughter shall be his heir" ([LCMAM:26](#))

- Deut 21.18: *If a man has a stubborn and rebellious son who does not obey his father and mother and will not listen to them when they discipline him, 19 his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him to the elders at the gate of his town. 20 They shall say to the elders, "This son of ours is stubborn and rebellious. He will not obey us. He is a profligate and a drunkard. "Then all the men of his town shall stone him to death. You must purge the evil from among you. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid.*

Observation: This passage is VERY interesting. Not only do BOTH parents appear and BOTH speak to the elders at the Gate, but the capital punishment law requiring TWO WITNESSES (Deut 17.6--*On the testimony of two or three witnesses a man shall be put to death, but no one shall be put to death on the testimony of only one witness.* ), implies that the WIFE counted as a witness before the elders at the gates.

- Deut 22.15: *then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders at the gate. 16 The girl's father will say to the*

*elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. 17 Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town,*

Observation: Similar to the above--both father AND mother appear at the gates and produce arguments and evidence.

- *Deut 25.5ff: If brothers are living together and one of them dies without a son, his widow must not marry outside the family. Her husband's brother shall take her and marry her and fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to her. 6 The first son she bears shall carry on the name of the dead brother so that his name will not be blotted out from Israel. 7 However, if a man does not want to marry his brother's wife, she shall go to the elders at the town gate and say, "My husband's brother refuses to carry on his brother's name in Israel. He will not fulfill the duty of a brother-in-law to me." 8 Then the elders of his town shall summon him and talk to him. If he persists in saying, "I do not want to marry her," 9 his brother's widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, take off one of his sandals, spit in his face and say, "This is what is done to the man who will not build up his brother's family line." 10 That man's line shall be known in Israel as The Family of the Unsandaled.*

Observations: The removal of the sandal signified the transfer of inheritance rights to someone else (cf. Ruth 4.7-8). The expected future for a widow was to marry the brother (under Levirate law) and have a kid to pass the inheritance on to. In the case of a non-compliant brother (as in the case above), the widow BECAME the owner of the inheritance (like Naomi). This transfer of property was done at the city gates, indicating that a widow was a full legal agent in these types of transactions, and could 'force the issue' at will.

- [We have already noted the passage in Judges 5.11ff, in which it showed that the woman Deborah 'sat at the gates,' judging with the elders (and probably, judging them as well!).]

#### **4. Passages which show either stricter requirements/penalties on men, and/or preferential treatment/special protection for women.**

Although the above texts indicated that women were at least EQUAL TO men in most respects before God, there is a surprising number of passages which indicate either stricter standards for men, or preferential treatment by God for His daughters.

- Passages in which the men are held to stricter standards (or are singled out to make sure they understand!).
  1. Ex 20.17b: *"You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, . Notice that the man is OBVIOUSLY singled out in the Ten Commandments by the reference to the neighbors "wife"!*
  2. Ex 22.16: *"If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. 17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins. Notice: the man had to make it good--NOT the female!*
  3. The string of sharp commands for sexual purity in Leviticus 18 and Deut 27 is addressed to the male ONLY (the one exception out of 23 verses is vs.23). The male is constantly reminded of the culpability of infidelity and inappropriate sexual behavior. The female is almost ASSUMED everywhere to be 'more righteous'.
  4. Lev 19.20-22: *"If a man sleeps with a woman who is a slave girl promised to another man but who has not been ransomed or given her freedom, there must be due punishment. Yet they are not to be put to death, because she had not been freed. 21 The man, however, must bring a ram to the entrance to the Tent of Meeting for a guilt offering to the LORD. 22 With the ram of the guilt offering the priest is to make atonement for him before the LORD for the sin he has committed, and his sin will be forgiven. Notice: ONLY the man has to bring a sacrifice.*

ANE Context: This was apparently a common situation in the ANE, with similar laws showing up in the Law codes of Ur-Namma (ca. 2100 bc, city of Ur) and of Eshunna (ca. 1770 bc, city of Eshnunna in Sumer). However, in both these codes (LU 8; LE 64--see [LCMAM:18,84](#)), the offender merely pays money to the owner of the slave--there is no real moral guilt involved. In the biblical law, the man must answer to YHWH.

- Passages which provide special (favorable) protection, treatment, or privilege for women.
  1. Ex 21.7-11: *"If a man sells his daughter as a servant, she is not to go free as menservants do. 8 If she does not please the master who has selected her for himself, he must let her be redeemed. He has no right*

*to sell her to foreigners, because he has broken faith with her. 9 If he selects her for his son, he must grant her the rights of a daughter. 10 If he marries another woman, he must not deprive the first one of her food, clothing and marital rights. 11 If he does not provide her with these three things, she is to go free, without any payment of money.*

Observations: A man could sell either his sons or daughters (or himself) into the 6-year 'slavery' contracts (cf. Ne 5.5 and Ex 21.2-3). But in the case of selling the daughter, there were the above constraints on him. One can see the protective nature of this passage, involving marital rights, familial rights, and/or gratuitous freedom. In all cases, the female is cared for and provided for! God build safeguards into the law to avoid exploitation of His daughters.

2. Ex 22.16: *"If a man seduces a virgin who is not pledged to be married and sleeps with her, he must pay the bride-price, and she shall be his wife. 17 If her father absolutely refuses to give her to him, he must still pay the bride-price for virgins.*

Observations: In this case, notice that the violated virgin is still protected. She either gets a home, or, if the father deems it NOT a good idea, she doesn't have to marry the guy!

3. Lev 12.1ff: *The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Say to the Israelites: `A woman who becomes pregnant and gives birth to a son will be ceremonially unclean for seven days, just as she is unclean during her monthly period. 3 On the eighth day the boy is to be circumcised. 4 Then the woman must wait thirty-three days to be purified from her bleeding. She must not touch anything sacred or go to the sanctuary until the days of her purification are over. 5 If she gives birth to a daughter, for two weeks the woman will be unclean, as during her period. Then she must wait sixty-six days to be purified from her bleeding. "`When the days of her purification for a son or daughter are over, she is to bring to the priest at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting a year-old lamb for a burnt offering and a young pigeon or a dove for a sin offering. 7 He shall offer them before the LORD to make atonement for her, and then she will be ceremonially clean from her flow of blood. .*

Observations. This is a fascinating passage. In verse 6, we see that the actual atonement 'price' for a boy or a girl baby was the same (=>equal value), but the amount of time the mother was ceremonially

"unclean" was double for a girl than for a boy. Why the difference, given that the atonement value was the same?

I think the answer might be found in the social understanding of ritual uncleanness. Ritual uncleanness was not a specifically **moral** notion--e.g. houses could be 'unclean' (Lev 14.36: *The priest is to order the house to be emptied before he goes in to examine the mildew, so that nothing in the house will be pronounced unclean.* ). If you look at the general restrictions on someone's behavior while unclean (esp. in Lev 15), you can see that they were not permitted to participate in religious ceremonies, they must avoid touching other community members (e.g. at the market), they must not handle items handled by others, they could not touch beds other than their own, they could not touch clay pots or wooden cooking utensils. In practical terms, they could do NOTHING but stay at home. They could do no housework or cooking, no shopping or cleaning. ALL THEY COULD DO is stay at home and "play with the kids"! What the above passage means, given this understanding of the practical dimensions of 'uncleanness' is that God was simply giving mothers more "time off" for having a girl than for having a boy! Whether this was for the mother's simple enjoyment of the mother-daughter experience, or for the additional bonding, or for additional communication of nurturing warmth (or all of the above), we will not be able to determine from the text. But the fact remains--the mother got to play with her girl babies twice as long as her boy babies before she had to 'go back to work'!

4. Lev 15:19ff "*When a woman has her regular flow of blood, the impurity of her monthly period will last seven days, and anyone who touches her will be unclean till evening.*

Observation: This section describes the restrictions on the woman's activities during her period. In general, they mean exemption from required activities (including 'church'), from potentially uncomfortable sexual activities (cf. 15.24) and from many of the household duties (presumably handled by maidservants, children, relatives, or husband)--amounting to a great deal of flexibility.

5. Lev 19.29: "*Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute* Notice: A rather clear case of protection!
6. Lev 22.12: *If a priest's daughter marries anyone other than a priest,*

*she may not eat any of the sacred contributions. 13 But if a priest's daughter becomes a widow or is divorced, yet has no children, and she returns to live in her father's house as in her youth, she may eat of her father's food.*

Observation: God made special provision for the dis-married daughters of priests.

7. Lev 27.1ff: *The LORD said to Moses, 2 "Speak to the Israelites and say to them: `If anyone makes a special vow to dedicate persons to the LORD by giving equivalent values, 3 set the value of a male between the ages of twenty and sixty at fifty shekels of silver, according to the sanctuary shekel; 4 and if it is a female, set her value at thirty shekels..... 8 If anyone making the vow is too poor to pay the specified amount, he is to present the person to the priest, who will set the value for him according to what the man making the vow can afford.*

Observations: This passages concerns 'temporary slave-servants' of YHWH. A male or female could dedicate himself/herself to the LORD's service, and typically would buy themselves back. If they did NOT pay the redemption price, they were actual servants for life, dedicated to cult-related work (including servants to the priests). Thus, such a vow/dedication amounted to semi-slavery.

What is interesting about this passage is that the redemption value for women is LOWER than that for men. What this CANNOT mean, however, is that the value of female slaves is LESS THAN the value of male slaves, because the law concerning the murder/manslaughter of these indicated IDENTICAL values (cf. Ex 21.20-32 placed the exact same monetary values on both sexes). What this passage nets out at, then, is that the Law simply made it easier for women to buy their freedom than for men (or to have someone else buy it for them)! Perhaps this is a simple recognition of the lower earning power of female slaves(?), but in any case, God made provision for His daughters to have a better shot at buying their freedom than His sons!

8. Num 5.12--the trial of bitter waters (*Sotah*) is a an amazing provision by God for a woman to publicly clear her name (and indict a dysfunctional husband in the process). This is the procedure invoked by a jealous and/or paranoid husband who suspected his wife of infidelity. God gave this law to protect the woman from physical and

economic abuse from a capricious and petty husband. In many of the cultures of that day, men had absolute dictatorial rights over their wives. If they suspected adultery, they were allowed to kill the woman without any appeal on her part. There was not a process of justice, or process where they BOTH had to appear before a higher authority. In fact, in the Code of Hammurabi (c. 1720 BC.), CH 132, women who were suspected of this type of infidelity were required to throw themselves into the Euphrates river--if they drown, they were guilty; if not, they were innocent! (Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, p. 171). God would instead provide a public vindication process, before His leaders, his people, and the couple. If the woman was vindicated, the man would bear the stigma of unfounded and paranoid jealousy, and slanderous accusation before his friends/family (with possible legal consequences). Her rights were protected by this very ceremony. This was a very, very advanced pro-women procedure for those times.

By comparison, in the other law codes of that time, ANYONE could accuse her and force her to undergo the River Ordeal(!). So, the Laws of Ur-Nammu, 14 [ca. 2100bc, Ur in Sumer]: "If a man accuses the wife of a young man of promiscuity but the River Ordeal clears her..." ([LCMAM](#):18).

9. Lev 21.1-3: *The LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: `A priest must not make himself ceremonially unclean for any of his people who die, 2 except for a close relative, such as his mother or father, his son or daughter, his brother, 3 or an unmarried sister who is dependent on him since she has no husband* Notice that the priest is told to provide for his unmarried sisters. God provided for her needs.

10. Num 30.3ff:

"When a young woman still living in her father's house makes a vow to the LORD or obligates herself by a pledge 4 and her father hears about her vow or pledge but says nothing to her, then all her vows and every pledge by which she obligated herself will stand. 5 But if her father forbids her when he hears about it, none of her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand; the LORD will release her because her father has forbidden her. 6 "If she marries after she makes a vow or

after her lips utter a rash promise by which she obligates herself 7 and her husband hears about it but says nothing to her, then her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand. 8 But if her husband forbids her when he hears about it, he nullifies the vow that obligates her or the rash promise by which she obligates herself, and the LORD will release her.

Observations: These passages are sometimes understood as being restrictive of women, when in actuality they are protective of YOUNG women. In both the first case (the young girl in her father's house) and the second case (a rash promise made by a newlywed), the husband can either let her vow stand (and she gets 'credit' from the Lord) or he can nullify it (and get her out of a difficult spot). This is an incredibly flexible and workable situation for the young.

11. Num 30.10:

"If a woman living with her husband makes a vow or obligates herself by a pledge under oath 11 and her husband hears about it but says nothing to her and does not forbid her, then all her vows or the pledges by which she obligated herself will stand. 12 But if her husband nullifies them when he hears about them, then none of the vows or pledges that came from her lips will stand. Her husband has nullified them, and the LORD will release her. 13 Her husband may confirm or nullify any vow she makes or any sworn pledge to deny herself. 14 But if her husband says nothing to her about it from day to day, then he confirms all her vows or the pledges binding on her. He confirms them by saying nothing to her when he hears about them. 15 If, however, he nullifies them some time after he hears about them, then he is responsible for her guilt."

Observations: This situation is a bit more complex than the last, for at first blush it looks like the woman has NO independence at all in this matter. But a closer look reveals some interesting qualification to such a conclusion. First of all, we have cases of women making vows without any record of husband-consent (e.g. I Sam 1-2). So, we have to look at the text and context to see if there are any clues that might restrict the RANGE of application of this husband-approval

requirement.

There are two such considerations. First, the qualifying phrase at the end of verse 13--"to deny herself" is ALWAYS associated in the OT with 'no work' (cf. Lev 16.29; 16.31; 23.27-32; Num 29.7). In this context, this would amount to a vow to stop working at home, in the field, in the market--wherever. This might have disastrous consequences for the well-being of the family and/or community, and might be a decision that warranted a 'second opinion' (like the 'two witness' motif).

Second, the nature of most vow-fulfillments entailed economic resources (e.g. sacrificing sheep or redeeming oneself as a temple-slave (Lev 27 above)). As such, it really required having solitary control over the finances--a situation that widows and divorcees had (cf. 30.9)--but not one of the average Israelite housewife. The person responsible for the 'debt' (so to speak) was protected in this case, from being over-committed by his wife. This over-commitment, in the typical case of the one-income family, would have also had possible adverse effects on the wife. So, a 'second opinion' in matters relating to finances was probably a protection for BOTH the man and the wife.

12. Deut 21.11: *11 if you notice among the captives a beautiful woman and are attracted to her, you may take her as your wife. 12 Bring her into your home and have her shave her head, trim her nails 13 and put aside the clothes she was wearing when captured. After she has lived in your house and mourned her father and mother for a full month, then you may go to her and be her husband and she shall be your wife. 14 If you are not pleased with her, let her go wherever she wishes. You must not sell her or treat her as a slave, since you have dishonored her.*

Observation: Fontaine (SAIANE:157) refers to this as one of "Israel's more humanitarian values extending even to the treatment of female slaves, the 'disposable' persons of the Ancient Near East." One can scarcely read the passage above (with its commands on male restraint!) without sensing God's concern for the protection of this captive female.

13. Deut 22.13-19: *13 If a man takes a wife and, after lying with her, dislikes her 14 and slanders her and gives her a bad name, saying, "I*

*married this woman, but when I approached her, I did not find proof of her virginity," 15 then the girl's father and mother shall bring proof that she was a virgin to the town elders at the gate. 16 The girl's father will say to the elders, "I gave my daughter in marriage to this man, but he dislikes her. 17 Now he has slandered her and said, 'I did not find your daughter to be a virgin.' But here is the proof of my daughter's virginity." Then her parents shall display the cloth before the elders of the town, 18 and the elders shall take the man and punish him. 19 They shall fine him a hundred shekels of silver and give them to the girl's father, because this man has given an Israelite virgin a bad name. She shall continue to be his wife; he must not divorce her as long as he lives.*

Observation: In this passage, the reputation of the women, and the lifelong provision for her needs are focused on. God architects this situation to protect the woman against capricious men.

ANE Context: In a similar case in the Laws of Lipit-Istar (ca. 1930bc), 33, anyone can accuse a woman of promiscuity, and the penalty for slander is only TEN shekels. [[LCMAM:33](#)]

14. Deut 22.25-27: *But if out in the country a man happens to meet a girl pledged to be married and rapes her, only the man who has done this shall die. 26 Do nothing to the girl; she has committed no sin deserving death. This case is like that of someone who attacks and murders his neighbor, 27 for the man found the girl out in the country, and though the betrothed girl screamed, there was no one to rescue her.* Notice: God ASSUMES that the woman would have been righteous and 'cried out'! He builds this 'benefit of doubt' INTO the Law. The man dies; the woman is free.

ANE Context: The Hittite Law in this regard is much harsher (p197, [LCMAM:237](#)): "If a man seizes a woman in the mountains (and rapes her), it is the man's offense, but if he seizes her in her house, it is the woman's offense; the woman shall die." In the biblical version of the 'in-town' rape, BOTH parties are equally guilty---the man is NEVER absolved from responsibility in ANY situations in biblical law (Deut 22.23-24).

15. Deut 24.1: *If a man marries a woman who becomes displeasing to him because he finds something indecent about her, and he writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house,*

*2 and if after she leaves his house she becomes the wife of another man, 3 and her second husband dislikes her and writes her a certificate of divorce, gives it to her and sends her from his house, or if he dies, 4 then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled.*

Observation: This restriction on remarriage to the same party SEEMS to be aimed at the convenient "Vegas-style" divorce/weekend marriage/re-marriage. In this scenario, the primary wife (and hence the oldest) is temporarily divorced, the man marries some 'little young thing' for a short time, divorces the younger one when it is time to 'get back to life', and re-marries the older, proven, faithful, successful first wife. This type of mistreatment of the wife of 'his youth' (Prov 5.18; Mal 2.14-15) is precluded in some cases by this law.

16. Deut 24.5: *If a man has recently married, he must not be sent to war or have any other duty laid on him. For one year he is to be free to stay at home and bring happiness to the wife he has married.*

Observations: The Lord exempts a man from military service--not for the man's happiness, but for the happiness of the wife! God must be concerned about the happiness of those who do the special work of being a wife.

17. On of the more important protections is something NOT in the law. In the famous Law of Hammurabi, for example, if a father killed a woman of the upper class, his DAUGHTER would be killed in punishment(!)--[P209-210 (LWMAM:122)], and if a builder build a structure that collapsed, killing a tenant's son, then the builder's SON would die in return [P230, (LWMAM:125)]. In biblical law, each person dies for their own crime (Dt 24.16: *Fathers shall not be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their fathers; each is to die for his own sin.* ).
- Of special concern to God was the care for a special class of women--the widow.

A few passages and observations will illustrate this.

1. The OT law of Levirate marriage (Dt 25.5, et. al.) was obviously meant for the protection/care of widows. In the ANE context, the Hittite laws (P193, [LCMAM:236](#)) mirrored this: "If a man has a wife,

and the man dies, his brother shall take his widow as wife. (If the brother dies,), his father shall take her..." This is, of course, why Tamar disguises herself as a shrine prostitute in Gen 38 to 'seduce' Judah, her father-in-law, who has NOT fulfilled this obligation to date.

2. Deut 10.17: *For the LORD your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes. 18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing.*
3. Deut 14.28: *At the end of every three years, bring all the tithes of that year's produce and store it in your towns, 29 so that the Levites (who have no allotment or inheritance of their own) and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns may come and eat and be satisfied, and so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands.* Notice that the tithes of every third year were designated for relief work that included needy widows. (cf. Dt 26.12)
4. Deut 16.9ff: *Count off seven weeks from the time you begin to put the sickle to the standing grain. 10 Then celebrate the Feast of Weeks to the LORD your God by giving a freewill offering in proportion to the blessings the LORD your God has given you. 11 And rejoice before the LORD your God at the place he will choose as a dwelling for his Name -- you, your sons and daughters, your menservants and maidservants, the Levites in your towns, and the aliens, the fatherless and the widows living among you.* Notice that the Feast of Weeks had a special emphasis on helping the widows to rejoice.

5. Deut 24.17:

17 Do not deprive the alien or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the LORD your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this. 19 When you are harvesting in your field and you overlook a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the alien, the fatherless and the widow, so that the LORD your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow. 21

When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the alien, the fatherless and the widow.

Observations: God made very explicit allowances and provisions for widows, and these regulations were instrumental in the case of the widow Naomi and her daughter-in-law Ruth (Ruth 2.16ff).

6. Deut 27.19: "*Cursed is the man who withholds justice from the alien, the fatherless or the widow.*" *Then all the people shall say, "Amen!"*  
Notice that this issue was one rehearsed in the public reading of the Covenant law, and in the strongest possible "curse" terms.

### **Summary:**

If we simply list the observations from above, we find quite a significant presence of women in the corpus and design of the Law.

1. Women are addressed in the law, along with the men. (Ex 20.10; Dt 32.19)
2. Women offered gifts as wave offerings and freewill offerings. (Ex 35.22,29)
3. Women performed religious duties and service at the Tent of Meeting. (Ex 38.3)
4. Women were included in the benefits of the priestly families. (Lev 10.14; Num 18.11,19)
5. Women could make Nazirite vows. (Num 6)
6. Head of household women could make un-restricted vows. (Num 30.9)
7. Even young girls could make religious vows to the Lord. (Num 30.3-5)
8. Women were expected to travel to celebrate the cultic feasts. (Deut 12.12,18; 16.11,14)
9. Women were addressed as covenant parties, at the public reading of the Law. (Dt 29.9ff; Dt 31.10ff)
10. Women were prophetesses and worshipped/prayed in the sanctuary. (Miriam, Deborah, Hannah)
11. Women inquired of the Lord. (Rebekah)
12. Mothers were to be equally honored along with Fathers. (Ex 20.12)
13. Crimes against mothers were of the same severity and punishment as crimes against fathers. (Ex 21.15,17; Lev 20.9; Dt 27.16)
14. Male and Female slaves were valued equally. (Ex 21.26ff)
15. Male and Female babies were atoned for with EQUAL sacrifices. (Lev 12.6)
16. Laws of sexual contact and skin diseases applied equally to men and women. (Lev 13; Lev 15.18; Num 5.1-3)
17. Men and women were equally punished when they were guilty. (Lev 20.10-12; Lev 20.27)

18. Women family member of priests were important enough for the priest to become unclean for. (Lev 21.1)
19. Men and women were expected to make material restitution of equal amounts. (Num 5.6)
20. Punishment of covenant treason was identical for both men and women. (Dt 13.6ff; 17.2ff; 29.18)
21. Conditions of commercial sale and release of 6-year slaves were identical for male and female. (Dt 15.12)
22. Men and women could both be considered 'plunder' in foreign military campaigns. (Deut 20.10)
23. Religious prostitution was off-limits for both sexes. (Dt 23.17-18)
24. Wives were not considered property *per se*, even of male slaves. (Ex 21.2-4)
25. Unmarried daughters could get inheritance and property. (Num 27.1-7)
26. A father's daughters had higher inheritance priority than did his brothers. (Num 27.8-9)
27. Women could be witnesses/agents at the Gate--including for capital crimes. (Deut 21.18; 22.15; 25.5ff)
28. One woman apparently was a member of the judging assembly at the Gate (Deborah--cf. Jud 5.11f).
29. Widows, if not accepted for Levirate marriage, had adequate legal rights to effect transfer of inheritance property from a brother-in-law to themselves (by invoking the elders at the Gate in an institutionalized ceremony). (Deut 25.5ff)
30. Men were reminded more often and more forcefully of their sexual obligations. (Ex 20.17; Ex 22.16; Lev 18; Deut 27; Lev 19.20-22)
31. Women were protected in the event of being sold into slavery. (Ex 21.7-11)
32. Virgins were protected and provided for, in case of violation by a man. (Ex 22.16)
33. Women were allowed extra "time off" if they gave birth to a girl baby. (Lev 12.1ff)
34. Women had considerable flexibility in the Law relative to their monthly period. (Lev 15.19ff)
35. God made a law that made it easier for a female slave to buy her freedom. (Lev 27.1ff)
36. God provided a protection-ceremony to vindicate an accused woman. (Num 5.12ff)
37. Young women were allowed to make vows to YHWH without having to bear the consequences of rash vows. (Num 30.3ff)
38. Married women were in structures designed to protect BOTH the man and the wife, from expensive or destructive vows. God built in a 'safety catch.' (Num 30.10ff)
39. Even captive foreign women were provided protection and humane treatment. (Deut 21.11ff)
40. God builds laws to protect women and their reputation from evil men. (Deut

22.13-19)

41. God gives the benefit of the doubt to women, but not to men--in matters of sexual error. (Deut 22.25-27)
42. God creates some boundaries around capricious divorce. (Deut 24.1)
43. God is very desirous of a newlywed wife's happiness. (Deut 24.5)
44. God created both marriage laws, agricultural policies, and financial programs to provide for widows/divorcees (Lev 21.1-3; 22.12; Deut 10.17f; Deut 14.28f; Dt 26.12; Dt 16.9ff; Deut 24.17-21; Deut 27.19).

**In general, we see an almost painstaking attention to detail in God's law, to protect the woman in society, to encourage her religious life, and to facilitate her contribution to biblical history. God seeks His daughters to worship Him in spirit and in truth.**



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# Women in the Heart of God (IIc)

## The Data From the Pre-Monarchy Literature

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[Updated: Feb 2004, added a comment on Jephthah.]

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the historical data in the narratives before the institution of the Kingship in I Samuel 8, the legal data from the Law of Moses, and the **literary data** of the biblical text itself. In this section, we will focus on the LITERARY data. **One: The Literary Data** from the Pre-monarchy period.

In this section, I want to examine how the literary 'use' of women in the text reveals aspects of the authors' worldview on women. To do so, I will consider:

1. The use of quotes from women
2. The portrayal of women participants/heroes
3. The portrayal of women's theology
4. Some aspects of "women over-against men" narrative encounters/contrasts.
5. Unfavorable passages and abusives

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### 1. **The use of quotes from women.**

There is a very large amount of quoted material from women preserved in the narratives. They include prayers, naming, singing, dialogue, vows, and arguments. We will only look at some representative ones.

- Gen 3.2: *The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, `You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"*

Observations: Although we will look at this entire passage later, it is worthy

to note that the 2nd quote recorded from a human was from Eve (the first being a quotation from Adam ABOUT Eve!).

- Gen 4.1-2: *Adam lay with his wife Eve, and she became pregnant and gave birth to Cain. She said, "With the help of the LORD I have brought forth a man."* Notice, the theology of this is very on target.
- Gen 4.25: *Adam lay with his wife again, and she gave birth to a son and named him Seth, saying, "God has granted me another child in place of Abel, since Cain killed him."*
- Gen 16.7ff:

*The angel of the LORD found Hagar near a spring in the desert; it was the spring that is beside the road to Shur. 8 And he said, "Hagar, servant of Sarai, where have you come from, and where are you going?" "I'm running away from my mistress Sarai," she answered. 9 Then the angel of the LORD told her, "Go back to your mistress and submit to her." 10 The angel added, "I will so increase your descendants that they will be too numerous to count." 11 The angel of the LORD also said to her: "You are now with child and you will have a son. You shall name him Ishmael, for the LORD has heard of your misery. 12 He will be a wild donkey of a man; his hand will be against everyone and everyone's hand against him, and he will live in hostility toward all his brothers." 13 She gave this name to the LORD who spoke to her: "You are the God who sees me," for she said, "I have now seen the One who sees me." 14 That is why the well was called Beer Lahai Roi; it is still there, between Kadesh and Bered.*

Observations: The entire dialogue is preserved--not just the outcome. Hagar's theology is good, and she somehow avoids the normal response of 'I have seen His face, therefore I will die' that is often done by the Israelites--e.g. Ex 20.19; Dt 18.16; Gen 32.30; Ex 33.20--but 33.11--(she, of course, is Egyptian). Notice also that she 'names' the LORD.

- Gen 21.6-7: *Sarah said, "God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me." 7 And she added, "Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age."*

Observations: What is interesting about these two quotes is that they carry

NO significance to the story line! The fulfillment of the promise was documented in vs 1-5. Verse 8 resumes with the weaning step. These two verses SEEM only to document the joyous response of Sarah to God's grace. Notice also that we have NO verbal response of thanks or celebration from Abe(!)--Sarah is the responsive one to her Lord's loyal love. It documents how personal the promises were, and how special the fulfillments.

- Gen 25.22: *The babies jostled each other within her, and she said, "Why is this happening to me?" So she went to inquire of the LORD. 23 The LORD said to her, "Two nations are in your womb, and two peoples from within you will be separated; one people will be stronger than the other, and the older will serve the younger."*

Observations: This interaction between the Lord and a woman was also preserved as a dialogue (as in the case of Hagar, and as in the case of men--e.g. Abe in Gen 15). Both parties were quoted.

- Gen 27--the 'trickery of Rebekah' has extended quotes from Rebekah (we will examine this passage more under the 'theology' section).
- Gen 29-30: Rachel and Leah are quoted frequently as they name their children.
- Ex 15.20-21: *Then Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women followed her, with tambourines and dancing. 21 Miriam sang to them: "Sing to the LORD, for he is highly exalted. The horse and its rider he has hurled into the sea."*

Observations: This is a veritable celebration parade, lead by Miriam (cf. I Sam 18.6; 2 Sam 1.20). Miriam sings the opening lines of the Victory Hymn (Ex 15:1), as she leads the women in a musical and dancing parade. The comment that she is a prophetess (often associated with musical composition--I Chr 25.3; Judg 5.1; I Sam 10.5), and the general anonymity of the Victory Hymn naturally suggests that she authored the Hymn (or at least the opening lines of it). This hymn was first sung to (and then probably by,) the women, and then picked up by Moses and the rest of the Israelites (the sequence is not clear in the text).

- Judges 5.1-31. This is called the Song of Deborah. Although Barak also sang it with her, it is clear that Deborah was the author (e.g. "until I, Deborah, arose a mother in Israel"--vs. 7). Apart from the Song of Moses (authored by YHWH and given to Moses to write down, in Deut 31), this is

the longest song in our period.

*On that day Deborah and Barak son of Abinoam sang this song:*

*2 "When the princes in Israel take the lead, when the people willingly offer themselves -- praise the LORD!*

*3 "Hear this, you kings! Listen, you rulers! I will sing to the LORD, I will sing; I will make music to the LORD, the God of Israel.*

*4 "O LORD, when you went out from Seir, when you marched from the land of Edom, the earth shook, the heavens poured, the clouds poured down water.*

*5 The mountains quaked before the LORD, the One of Sinai, before the LORD, the God of Israel.*

*6 "In the days of Shamgar son of Anath, in the days of Jael, the roads were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths.*

*7 Village life in Israel ceased, ceased until I, Deborah, arose, arose a mother in Israel.*

*8 When they chose new gods, war came to the city gates, and not a shield or spear was seen among forty thousand in Israel.*

*9 My heart is with Israel's princes, with the willing volunteers among the people. Praise the LORD!*

*10 "You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider*

*11 the voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel.*

*"Then the people of the LORD went down to the city gates.*

*12 `Wake up, wake up, Deborah! Wake up, wake up, break out in song!*

*Arise, O Barak! Take captive your captives, O son of Abinoam.'*

*13 "Then the men who were left came down to the nobles; the people of the LORD came to me with the mighty.*

*14 Some came from Ephraim, whose roots were in Amalek; Benjamin was with the people who followed you.*

*From Makir captains came down, from Zebulun those who bear a commander's staff.*

- 15 *The princes of Issachar were with Deborah; yes, Issachar was with Barak, rushing after him into the valley. In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart.*
- 16 *Why did you stay among the campfires to hear the whistling for the flocks? In the districts of Reuben there was much searching of heart.*
- 17 *Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan. And Dan, why did he linger by the ships? Asher remained on the coast and stayed in his coves.*
- 18 *The people of Zebulun risked their very lives; so did Naphtali on the heights of the field.*
- 19 *"Kings came, they fought; the kings of Canaan fought at Taanach by the waters of Megiddo, but they carried off no silver, no plunder.*
- 20 *From the heavens the stars fought, from their courses they fought against Sisera.*
- 21 *The river Kishon swept them away, the age-old river, the river Kishon. March on, my soul; be strong!*
- 22 *Then thundered the horses' hoofs -- galloping, galloping go his mighty steeds.*
- 23 *'Curse Meroz,' said the angel of the LORD. 'Curse its people bitterly, because they did not come to help the LORD, to help the LORD against the mighty.'*
- 24 *"Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, most blessed of tent-dwelling women.*
- 25 *He asked for water, and she gave him milk; in a bowl fit for nobles she brought him curdled milk.*
- 26 *Her hand reached for the tent peg, her right hand for the workman's hammer.*
- She struck Sisera, she crushed his head, she shattered and pierced his temple.*
- 27 *At her feet he sank, he fell; there he lay.*  
*At her feet he sank, he fell; where he sank, there he fell -- dead.*
- 28 *"Through the window peered Sisera's mother; behind the lattice she cried out, 'Why is his chariot so long in coming? Why is the clatter of his chariots delayed?'*
- 29 *The wisest of her ladies answer her; indeed, she keeps saying to herself,*
- 30 *'Are they not finding and dividing the spoils: a girl or two*

*for each man, colorful garments as plunder for Sisera, colorful garments embroidered, highly embroidered garments for my neck --  
all this as plunder?'*

*31 "So may all your enemies perish, O LORD!  
But may they who love you be like the sun  
when it rises in its strength."*

There are 4 songs recorded in our period (in descending length order):

1. Song of YHWH--43 verses--Dt 31.1-43.
2. Song of Deborah--31 verses--Judges 5.1-31.
3. Victory Hymn (probably authored by Miriam)--18 verses--Ex 15.1-18.
4. The Well-Song of Israel (unknown authorship)--2 verses--Num 21.17-18.

This means that the ONLY song with certain authorship was written by a woman and preserved in the text. This means that the LONGEST song written by a human was written by a woman and preserved in the text. If Miriam wrote the Victory Hymn (high probability), then ALL the significant songs in the period were authored by women, and preserved in the text.

○ I Sam 2: 1-11:

*Then Hannah prayed and said:  
"My heart rejoices in the LORD; in the LORD my horn is lifted high.  
My mouth boasts over my enemies,  
for I delight in your deliverance.*

*2 "There is no one holy like the LORD; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God.*

*3 "Do not keep talking so proudly or let your mouth speak such arrogance,  
for the LORD is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.*

4 *"The bows of the warriors are broken, but those who stumbled are armed with strength.*

5 *Those who were full hire themselves out for food, but those who were hungry hunger no more.*

*She who was barren has borne seven children, but she who has had many sons pines away.*

6 *"The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.*

7 *The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.*

8 *He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the ash heap;*

*he seats them with princes and has them inherit a throne of honor.*

*"For the foundations of the earth are the LORD's; upon them he has set the world.*

9 *He will guard the feet of his saints, but the wicked will be silenced in darkness.*

*"It is not by strength that one prevails; 10 those who oppose the LORD will be shattered.*

*He will thunder against them from heaven; the LORD will judge the ends of the earth.*

*"He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed."*

Observations: This beautiful (and theologically erudite) prayer, oddly enough, also manifests the occurrence-features of the songs--it is the longest quoted prayer in the period, by far.

Although many prayers are mentioned, only the following ones are recorded as quotes:

1. Hannah's--11 verses--I Sam 2.1-11
2. Moses--5 verses--Num 11.11-15
3. Jacob--4 verses--Gen 32.9-12
4. Moses--4 verses--Dt 9.26-29
5. Abraham's steward--3 verses--Gen 24.12-14

6. Moses--2 verses--Num 10.35-36
7. Moses--single verse prayers in Ex 17.4; Num 12.13; Num 16.22
8. Manoah--single verse prayer in Jud 13.8
9. Samson--single verse prayers in Jud 16.28 and 15.18
10. The nation Israel--single verse prayers in Judg 10.10; 21.3

(This is not counting full dialogues between humans and God--Gen 18.20-33; Ex 33.12-21; Num 14.11-19; Gen 16.7ff)

Notice that the longest prayer recorded is authored by a women in response to God.

## 2. **The portrayal of women participants/heroes**

Here we want to notice the 'placement' and/or contribution to the story-line made by prominent female characters in the narrative.

- The appearances of the Angel of YHWH.

In our period, there are eight individuals given eleven RECORDED/DESCRIBED "private" appearances/interactions of the Angel of YHWH [as opposed to visions--Gen 31.11--and public appearances--the Shekinah Glory (Ex 14.19) and the Bokim Admonition (Jud 2.1)]. Jacob's wrestling with God is also understood this way, although the text does not make that literary point.]:

1. Hagar (twice: Gen 16,21)
2. Abe (twice: Gen 18, 22)
3. Moses (Ex 3.2)
4. Baalam (Num 22)
5. Deborah (Judges 5.23)
6. Gideon (once: Judges 6)
7. Manoah's wife (twice: Jud 13.3,9)

## 8. Manoah (Jud 13.11ff)

Of the eight individuals, three are females (Hagar, Deborah, Manoah's wife)--[37.5%]. Of the eleven appearances, 5 are to these females [45+%]

For a society which allegedly allowed no direct access to God by females [Lerner: "This new order [the Mosaic priesthood] under the all-powerful God proclaimed to Hebrews and to all those who took the Bible as their moral and religious guide that women cannot speak to God" ([WS:TCP:179](#))], these percentages are surprisingly higher than zero! [;>)]

- The roles women played in the historical flow.

This amounts to critical junctures in the flow of history that MIGHT HAVE been radically different without the independent action on the part of women. (These contributions are in ADDITION TO the essential, but more traditional, roles of giving birth, mothering, and family continuance.)

1. Rebekah's decision to marry Isaac, and leave her country.
2. Rebekah's inquiry of the Lord, and the revelation that the blessing had to be on Jacob.
3. Rebekah's trickery of Isaac, so that the birthright went to YHWH's choice.
4. Leah and Rachel's decision to support Jacob in his fleeing Laban (Gen 31)
5. Tamar deceives Judah into fulfilling his Levirite obligation (Gen 38) and gives birth to Perez, an ancestor of Boaz->David->Jesus (Ruth 4.12, 18-20; Matt 1.5)!
6. The Hebrew midwives virtually kept Israel alive (Ex 1-2).
7. His mom saved Moses' life (Ex 1-2)
8. Zipporah saved Moses' life (Ex 4.24ff)
9. God Himself considered Miriam a major leader in the Exodus/Wanderings (Micah 6.4: *4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam.* )

10. The daughters of Zelophehad established a female-inheritance law in Israel, by speaking up. (Num 27 et. al.)
11. The Judge Deborah and the woman Jael were instrumental in virtually saving the nation of Israel. The descriptions of Israel's situation in her song was one of breakdown of most community structures (village life, travel, transportation routes, weaponry). Had Sisera escaped, and built up his army, the continued attacks on Israel would have been disastrous at that point of vulnerability. (In the text, the Deborah Cycle gets approximately the same 'coverage' as the other judges, with the exception of Samson.)
12. God uses the unnamed Patriot Woman of Thebez (Judges 9.50-57) to save a major city in Israel from Abimelech, the "anti-judge", and to fulfill a prophetic curse.
13. Hannah's relationship with the LORD, and vow, gave the powerful figure Samuel to the nation.

Even a cursory consideration of what the consequences for biblical history would have been without the action of these women, leaves one impressed. Although these events do not have the huge massive "body counts" of migrations and battles, their "rudder-like" character was of critical importance to the achievement of God's aims.

### 3. **The portrayal of women's theology/spiritual life.**

If we look at the words and actions of the female characters in our period, we can see the theology they held. From the names of children, to the depiction in songs, to the arguments in prayers--women manifested a true knowledge of the Living and Loving Lord. He had revealed Himself to His daughters.

Let's look at this by noting aspects of theology reflected in the prayers of Hannah (a Hebrew commoner), the Song of Deborah (an Israelite mother, judge, prophet), Miriam (a Hebrew prophetess and leader), one comment from Manoaah's wife (a Hebrew commoner), Rebekah's actions (Aramean), Zipporah (a foreign wife of Moses), Eve, Hagar (an Egyptian), Sarah (a Sumerian), Rachel and Leah (Arameans)--quite a cross-section.

- Eve has a balanced view of sovereignty and responsibility in Gen 4.1-2 ("with the help of the Lord, I have brought forth a man")
- Hagar knows that God can 'see' her, that He can appear visibly to His

creatures, and that the Angel of the Lord IS GOD. (Gen 16.7f)

- Sarah knows that God likes laughter, pleasant surprises, and rejoicing (Gen 21.6-7)
- Rebekah knows to 'inquire' of God about issues--and is not afraid to/constrained from it (Gen 25)
- In the 'trickery of Rebekah', she is aware that 'curses' are somehow 'movable' or 'transferable'--cf. the sacrificial system--Prov 26.2; Gal 3.13; Mt 27.25. She also risks being cursed, to do whatever it took to make sure God's choice for the birthright got that birthright.
- Rachel and Leah understand that: (1)The Lord sees and is responsive to misery; (2) the Lord "hears" and tries to make up for people being 'unloved'; (3) the Lord is to be praised; (4) God is interested in vindicating people.
- Miriam knows that: (1) the Lord likes to be sung to!; (2) The Lord is highly exalted; (3) the Lord is strength and rejoicing; (4) the Lord IS deliverance; (5) God is a warrior--active in Israel's history; (6) God is ultimately responsible for some 'natural' acts that occur with providential timings; (7) God is majestic; (8) God keeps his anger 'leashed' most of the time; (9) God controls natural forces; (10) God is unique in the universe; (11) He is majestic, holy, glorious, awesome, and ACTIVE; (12) He has unfailing love for His redeemed people; (13) He redeems people; (14) God guides His people; (15) He can cause the nations to pause/halt/fail in their opposition to Israel, long enough to see His purposes through to the end; (16) He has desired to dwell with His people in community, closeness, and fellowship; (17) the Lord is eternally sovereign.
- Deborah knows that: (1) It is important for the people of God to be WILLING!; (2) the LORD is awesome, and greater than ANY 'earth-nature' Gods; (3) Israel's rejection of the true God for 'new' ones, brings the curses of the Law--esp. war--into their lives; (4) God's righteous acts are done through righteous warriors; (5) Israelites who refused to help their fellow Hebrews were under judgment; (6) those that assist the people of God in achieving God's directive will are 'blessed' by God; (7) loving God is important, and a key element in being strong for God's purposes.
- Zipporah knew how important covenant fidelity was to YHWH (Ex 4.24f), and that God was no 'respector of persons'.

- Manoah's wife knew (unlike her husband) that God is not a fool! (cf. Judg 13.21: *Manoah realized that it was the angel of the LORD. 22 "We are doomed to die!" he said to his wife. "We have seen God!" 23 But his wife answered, "If the LORD had meant to kill us, he would not have accepted a burnt offering and grain offering from our hands, nor shown us all these things or now told us this."* )
- Hannah had a very deep spiritual life, and had special insights into God's relationship with people: (1) He is a source of rejoicing; (2) His deliverance is DELIGHTFUL; (3) He is unique in holiness; (4) He is unique in existence; (5) He is unique in His ability to support His people; (6) God knows the arrogance of men's words; (7) God weighs attitudes carefully; (8) God reverses the fortunes of the poor and the mighty; (9) God kills and He makes alive; (10) poverty and wealth can be dispensed by the Lord at will; (11) He likes to raise the poor to honor; (12) God has placed the world upon its foundations; (13) He can guard His people; (14) personal strength is not the answer to all problems; (15) God is in heaven; (16) He will judge ALL the earth; (17) He will empower His servants as needed.

This list of theological statements is very rich--both in its Theology Proper and in its view of Providence. Advanced themes are present even this early in Israel's history: individual redemption, community redemption, prayer, future & universal judgment, 'reversal of fortune', God's compassion, His uniqueness.

These selected statements and actions by the women of the day reveal a robust and on-target theological understanding, by a very wide cross-section of women.

(This is not to say, of course, that ALL images of their theology is flawless. The idol of Micah's mom and Rachel and the stolen 'household gods' may be illustrative of borderline belief systems.)

#### 4. **Some aspects of "women over-against men" narrative encounters/contrasts.**

Here we want to look at how women are placed in the narrative vis-á-vis male participants. Do they come off looking like shrews, mice, rats, sages, nobles, or what?

As we look at the more extended interactions in both the events and in dialogues, some interesting patterns emerge.

- In the Fall, Eve is 'deceived by the cunning of the Serpent'--but the man sins DELIBERATELY.

- In the pre-fall escalations of sin, it is the men in power ("sons of god") who victimize the women ("daughters of men").
- As we have seen above, Sarah's interaction with Abraham has been called 'uppity' and 'sage-like.' She is specifically given the same promise set as he, and Abe was ordered by God to do 'whatever' she told him!
- In Isaac's interaction with Rebekah, Rebekah consistently comes off as the more spiritual. From the 'inquiring of the Lord' to the 'trickery of Rebekah', she is portrayed as a fervent, committed, and sagely agent. She is also seen as triumphing over Isaac in that event--and accomplishing the will of YHWH.
- Rachel is truly seen as special to Jacob, as is evident from his 14 years of labor for her hand in marriage!
- Leah and Rachel are seen as counselors and important players in Jacob's decision to flee from Laban (Gen 31).
- We have seen earlier that the Matriarchs play the role of sage in these narratives. ("Having no direct authority of their own, they--on their own initiative--have the power to effect results through their knowledge and their willingness to act upon their knowledge, either through petition and argument or, failing that, through independent actions. In the Pentateuch, such a role is usually filled by women, notably by Sarah, Rebekah, and Rachel." [SAIANE:276])
- Zipporah is seen as saving the life of a disobedient Moses!
- Miriam is seen as a co-leader of Israel (Mic 6.4), although she participates with Aaron in resisting God's honoring of Moses (Num 12).
- Deborah obviously is the superior in her encounter with 'prince' Barak, chiding him for his weakness. She also rebukes publicly and in perpetual-song the failure of several groups within Israel from being brave enough to help in the fight!
- Jael is seen as the loyal and righteous one, over against her husband Heber.
- The daughters of Zelophehad are obviously seen as peer-agents in the legal system.
- In the interchange between Manoah and his wife, his wife obviously is

portrayed as the brighter and more logical of the two.

- In the book of Ruth, the actions of Ruth are cast in a very superior light--the women of the community recognize that "For your daughter-in-law, who loves you and who is better to you than seven sons..." (Ruth 4.15).
- The deep spirituality and commitment of Hannah is drawn in sharp contrast to the weakness of Eli the High Priest, and the turpitude of his evil sons!

When I first looked at this data, it literally forced me to wonder if the final redactor of this material (say post-exilic?) might not have been a woman! The characterizations that we will see in the extra-biblical post-exilic literature will sometimes manifest this kind of "women better than men" attitudes. While I think my reaction is probably over-done, it remains nonetheless impressive to me that women are portrayed by these authors as VERY theologically adept, VERY resourceful, VERY successful in effecting outcomes, generally assertive in their communications/interactions with males, and generally VERY responsive and WONDERFULLY delighted in God and His dealings with them.

I honestly wonder if God didn't 'influence' (smile) the writers of these books to brag a little on His delightful daughters...:>)

## 5. Unfavorable passages and abuses

There are, of course, passages which depict the "other side" of women (being human and all!), and passages in which women are abused/mistreated/victimized. What I want to do here is to consider these passages (briefly) in relation to the issue of their literary import.

I want to see if these passages are used to build any NORMATIVE or REGULATIVE view of women in the period under discussion, or if they count against this generally high valuation of women by the text. Are their sins held up as unique? Are instances of mistreatment held up as 'okay'?

- Eve's sin and curse (Gen 3), is of course balanced out by Adam's sin and curse--no differential here. Just as we have seen, male and female incur equal judgments. [The issue of "rulership" we will get to at the end of the OT summary.]
- The 'sons of god' in Gen 6.1-2: As I understand this passage, this is exploitation of women (and the people who care for them) by males in political authority. This behavior is NOT condoned, because God judged the world with a Flood because of this violence! (Gen 6.5-7)

- Lot's treatment of his daughters (Gen 19): Lot's apparently heartless offer to the men of Sodom of his daughters for abuse(!) was OVERRIDDEN by the Angels. His solution was NOT acceptable to God at all, and the Angels protected them by supernatural action! For the purposes of our study here, this is enough to demonstrate the non-normative/unacceptable character of this act before God.

[However, I want to probe the passage slightly farther, for it has always bothered/puzzled me. Lot is mentioned in the NT as a righteous man, tormented psychologically by the behavior of the people in the city of his dwelling--2 Peter 2.7. This situation obviously produced quite a fragmented spirituality in Lot, since the characteristics that he manifests in the Genesis narratives are FAR from complimentary--he picks his land choice selfishly and foolishly, lives in constant compromise with the inhabitants of Sodom, hesitates in leaving the city, changes his mind about living in Zoar and flees in fear to a cave, gets drunk repeatedly, etc. It may be the case (as most commentators believe) that Lot's offer of his virgin daughters to the men of Sodom was a similar huge character flaw or failure of nerve. Some, however, attempt to explain (not excuse) the severity of this by arguing about how important protection of one's guest was in the culture of the day. Hospitality was of course the norm, but I can personally find no references to such strong imperatives (as would prompt such an action of offering one's virgin daughters) in the Law Codes of the times. (This is not altogether surprising, since Law Codes were produced in larger population centers, which generally had inns. The codes have many passages dealing with innkeepers, for example. See LCMAM for details.) There seems to be something else going on in the text. Notice: (1) Lot emphasizes that his daughters are virgins; (2) his daughters are pledged to be married; (3) the future sons-in-law seem to be in the crowd(!); (4) he uses a moral word for 'wickedness' and an ambiguous word for 'good'; (5) he is well known to the city (he sits in the Gate); (6) they accuse him of trying to 'judge' them. One possible understanding of Lot's action here could be this: Lot was reminding the men of how bad their planned action was, by offering them a theoretical alternative--which WAS contained in virtually all Law Codes of the day--the violation of a virgin pledged to be married was a VERY EXPENSIVE CRIME, monetarily. (In Israel, it would be punishable by death or forced marriage.) By confronting them with this alternative, perhaps he was trying to divert their attention onto the 'evil' of the other alternative (by comparing it with the evil of abusing the daughters). Also, it is distinctly possible that the appeal to the crowd about the daughters was designed to provoke some response from the future sons-in-law, which from all indications in the text, WERE IN THAT CROWD! Perhaps he had

a hope to divide the crowd and so escape the situation. In any event, it is sufficient for our purposes to note that his action was precluded by the Angels, in an act of judgment on the crowd.]

- The in-fighting of wives (Sarah/Hagar, Rachel/Leah, Hannah/Peninnah): This doesn't seem to be such a big deal either, since you have MUCH WORSE in-fighting among the sons of Israel--they even sell one of the brothers into slavery!!!
- Rachel stealing the household gods of Laban: This is a strange event, but not one out-of-context in the ANE. Household gods were sometimes used as proof of inheritance or lineage. In the case of the verdict by Rachel and Leah in Gen 31:14-16, perhaps this was Rachel's attempt to maintain some backward continuity, in case she became disenfranchised from Jacob (through the actions of Leah?). In any rate, the incident is no worse than the idols kept by Achan, which caused the death of Hebrew soldiers and the loss of the 2nd battle in Canaan (Josh 7).
- The rape of Dinah (Gen 34): This abusive situation proves how strongly the Israelites (as opposed to Lot) felt about violation of a daughter. Dinah is raped by a local dignitary, who proceeds to attempt to create a relationship with Israel. Dinah's brothers learn of the rape and respond VERY violently. When confronted about the intensity of the response by their father Jacob, they reply: "*Should he have treated our sister like a prostitute?*" (34.30). Regardless of the commercial advantages of trade with Shechem, violation of Dinah was heinous in the culture/family of Israel.
- Potiphar's wife: This story seems to be included simply to explain how Joseph ended up in jail, thereby meeting Pharaoh's baker/cupbearer. She doesn't seem to be paralleled anywhere else in the period, so I don't make much of it. I don't expect EVERY woman to be perfect, just as I don't expect EVERY man to be even close to perfect!
- Miriam's rebellion (Num 12): Strictly speaking, it is Miriam AND Aaron's rebellion. Aaron is condemned verbally by the LORD also, but because of the duties of High Priest, he cannot be given the skin-disease 'object lesson' like Miriam is. Besides, NONE of the "BIG THREE" escaped censure by God--Aaron was rebuked at least three times (the Golden Calf--Exodus 32; this one with Miriam; and one with Moses--Num 20), and Moses was nearly killed by the Lord in Ex 4.24 and was excluded from the Promised Land for his actions in the Num 20 incident. I fancy Moses would have GLADLY traded the mild 'week of skin disease' of Miriam, for his

'prevented from entering the promised land'! So, Miriam comes out at least on a peer level with the other leadership of Israel.

- Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11):

*And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, 31 whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering." ..... 34 When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of tambourines! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh! My daughter! You have made me miserable and wretched, because I have made a vow to the LORD that I cannot break." 36 "My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me just as you promised, now that the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. 37 But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry." 38 "You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and the girls went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. 39 After the two months, she returned to her father and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite custom 40 that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.*

Most commentators believe that Jephthah literally killed and burned his daughter on an altar somewhere, and that this human sacrifice was condoned by God (since it was a vow thing). It seems to me that this is probably NOT the case--there are just too many incongruities in the text/context for that. Consider:

1. Literal "burnt offerings" HAD TO BE male (Lev 22.18-19). Jephthah's daughter obviously wasn't.
2. What did Jeff THINK would come out of a house? Not animals! He must have known that only a human would have come out.
3. Human sacrifice was STRICTLY forbidden (Dt 12.31) and we have NO record of it being practiced (even in horrible Judges-period

Israel) by mainstream Israel during this period.

4. The lament for the daughter is about 'not marrying' NOT about 'not living'--it makes me wonder if some kind of religious celibacy is not in view. (Maybe the women at the Entrance to the Tent were celibate--Ex 38.8--living as widows in Israel later did on Temple payrolls.)
5. Verse 39 calls his action a 'vow'. Lev 27.28 (coupled with 27.21) allowed people to be given over the Lord, who became servants of the Priests. As devoted to the Lord's service, some of them probably did NOT marry (cf. the Nazarite vow, in its restriction on becoming 'unclean' for family members (Num 6.7) omits the words 'husband' or 'wife'...perhaps it was sometimes involving celibacy. The only Nazies we know, though, were married--Samuel and Samson)
6. As the only child, and if given to the priest in this fashion, Jephthah's entire estate would go to someone else.
7. We have the VERY parallel case of Hannah and Samuel. She takes a vow, and offers her son to the Lord for all his life. (I Sam 1-2), and such vows did NOT allow the person to be redeemed with money (Lev 27.28-29).
8. Burnt offerings were ALWAYS associated with condemnation/evil--not thanksgiving and vows. Even the one non-literal use of it in Dt 13.16 (in which a town is offered as a burnt offering) involves abject judgment/condemnation--NOT at all in view in the Jephthah passage.
9. He would have had to offer her at some cultic site, which would have had a priest. I cannot imagine a priest (even those as lax as elsewhere in the book of Judges) that would have agreed to perform a human sacrifice!

What I have to conclude from this passage is that **Jephthah is using 'burnt offering' in a general 'offering' sense**, and that he is meaning an 'irredeemable vow' as a thank-offering, along the line of Hannah/Samuel. This is the only way to make sense of all the particulars. (Interestingly, Jephthah is surprisingly literate—his knowledge of biblical history, evidenced in the letter to his adversary, shows that he knows the mosaic history—he WOULD have known how bad a literal human sacrifice would have been.)

A recent book by Pamela Reis [OT:RTL] adds some interesting insights to this event:

1. Jeff's vow would have been taken in the town he lived in, and would have been publically known to all—including his daughter
2. The daughter has all the appearances of a 'spoiled' child, flaunter her power over her dad;
3. The daughter has all the appearances of a “paganite” in the passage!
4. Giving the daughter over to God (as I suggested above) might have forced her to remain unmarried (since she could have done no housewifely work as dedicated to the Lord). This would have forced her (in her understanding) to remain in her father's house (instead of at the tabernacle, as I postulated above).
5. Jephthah's vow is accordingly 'not rash'--he probably expected a male servant to come out *deliberately*—as an advancement to the cultic life.

The net effect of her understanding is the same: there was no human sacrifice, nor any devaluation of women in the passage.

- The Levite and his concubine (Jud 19f). This is one of the most abnormal passages in scripture. It is so filled with aberrations of ethics and law, and is specifically INTENDED to show how EVIL Israel had become during the period of the Judges! But even in this weird story, one can still see glimmers of a 'better' ethic from the Law. Consider first some of the 'weirdness' of this passage:

1. An unnamed Levite marries a concubine OUTSIDE his tribe (19.1).
2. This priest is polygamous!
3. She is unfaithful (but is not killed).
4. The Levite over-parties with the father.
5. There was no hospitality in the square in Gibeah.
6. The scenario of Sodom repeats--some 'wicked men' surround the house and demand to be allowed to sexually abuse one of the two

male guests.

7. The "old man" (the house-owner) offers them his virgin daughter (age unspecified, but presumably older) and the man's concubine for their "entertainment".
8. The wicked men refuse, but the Old Man pushes the concubine out (not his daughter!)
9. They rape and kill her.
10. The Levite callously, without ANY sign of affection or grief, hauls her home, cuts her up into pieces (becoming unclean in the process), and mails her to all Israel.
11. When all Israel gathers in outrage (they apparently took issue with the rape, but not the offering by the OLD MAN?!), the Levite tells a 'white-washed' version of the story. This version omits the pushing of the concubine out the door, and the attempted 'exchange' of the victims for females.
12. The Levite rightly condemns the wicked men of Gibeah, but accepts NO blame for himself or the Old Man.
13. The tribes of Israel are outraged at this rape (showing that the female--even a concubine-- was still valued highly by the majority).
14. The tribe of Benjamin will NOT turn over the wicked men--they obviously don't have the same sense of ethics as does the majority.
15. War ensues.

Now, there are a few important points from this of relevance to my thesis here:

1. The violation of the concubine was NOT approved by Israel, EVEN UNDER the assumption of the potential murder of the priest (20.4-11). Indeed, it was called 'vileness'.
2. The obvious linkage of this story to that of Sodom is to HIGHLIGHT the exceptional character of this incident--it is NOT NORMAL for Israel.

3. This horrible event was remembered for centuries as being a "low water mark" for Israel. (cf. Hosea 9.9: *They have sunk deep into corruption, as in the days of Gibeah.*)
4. The questionable ethical character of the Old Man, and of the Levite, certainly doesn't suggest the thought that they are representative of all Israel in this matter.

I have to conclude that the outrage of Israel actually supports a 'higher view' of female value, than the 'lower view' seemingly exemplified by the Old Man.

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**Summary:**

**The time from the creation of the world to the establishment of the monarchy in Israel was a time of rapid change and of the swirling of many cultural contexts together. The gravitational force of the Abrahamic/Sarahic Covenant, the creation of a nation via the Exodus, and the roller-coaster experience of Israel in the Land form the major focii around which events are held in place.**

**In this dance of history, women appear as full participants--often singing, often praying, often arguing, often 'saving the day'. Their hearts seem so responsive to God, and the recorders of that history recognize the experiencing of the Wondrous God of Israel in their words. The writers of these books see that often it is the female who exemplifies what covenant loyalty is all about, what 'loving God with all your heart and mind and soul and strength' is all about, what the exaltation of the humble is all about.**

**The women that grace and animate many of these pages are clever and effective, and make their contributions at critical junctures in the history of God's unfolding purposes in history. They are victimized sometimes, and taken for granted often, but they know their God and 'delight in His deliverance'.**



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[\(Reference Abbreviations\)](#)

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# Women in the Heart of God (3a)

## The Data From the Monarchy Literature

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[updated 10/11/96]

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the **historical** data in the narratives/literature between the institution of the Kingship (in I Samuel 8) and the division of the kingdom after Solomon (approx I Kgs 12), the **literary data** within those texts, and the **portrayal of women** in the "leisure" literature of the period (e.g. Psalms and Wisdom books). In this section, we will focus on the HISTORICAL data.

**One: The Historical Data** from the Monarchy-period narratives.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. General indications of their valuation/status in the society
2. Passages in which they participate in the cult
3. Their roles as Sages
4. Their roles as heroes/leaders and as the 'voice and memory of the nation'

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One preliminary remark should be made here. The main thematic focus of the bulk of these narrative texts will be the establishment and expansion of the Monarchy: the request for a king, the mistake of Saul, the rise of David, the flowering of the nation under Solomon. Most of the characters (although the 'extras' are few in number, due to this theme) play integral parts in this royal plotline. Therefore, it is significant when details--apparently incidental to this theme--are kept and even highlighted in this historical flow.

Accordingly, the mentions of women in the narrative portions must be given additional weight, when compared with those in the pre-monarchy narratives.

**1. General indications of their valuation/status in the society**

- I Sam 8.13: *Samuel told all the words of the LORD to the people who were*

*asking him for a king. 11 He said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. 12 Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. 13 He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.*

Observation: Samuel tries to talk Israel out of asking for a king. One of the arguments he uses is that they will lose their daughters to royal service. Daughters were valued enough to be used in such an argument (along with sons).

- *I Sam 15.32-33: Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him confidently, thinking, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." 33 But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal.*

Observation: The judgment of the cruelty of the Amalekites was couched in terms of a mother's loss!

- *I Sam 20.30: Saul's anger flared up at Jonathan and he said to him, "You son of a perverse and rebellious woman! Don't I know that you have sided with the son of Jesse to your own shame and to the shame of the mother who bore you?"*

Observation: Saul insults Jonathan's mom (his wife!), but STILL appeals to the principle of not 'shaming her'--on the same par with not 'shaming himself'. The reputation of a mother was strong enough of a value to be used as an appeal in this argument.

- *I Sam 25.39: Then David sent word to Abigail, asking her to become his wife.*

Observation: King David ASKED this women (a widow at that point) to be his wife.

- *2 Sam 1.26: 26 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.*

Observation: This moving account in the Lament of David over Saul and Jonathan shows how wonderful the love of women was held to be. In

finding something 'wonderful' to base the comparison with the loyalty of Jonathan for David, David can find nothing higher than 'the love of women.'

- 2 Sam 12.3: *The LORD sent Nathan to David. When he came to him, he said, "There were two men in a certain town, one rich and the other poor. The rich man had a very large number of sheep and cattle, 3 but the poor man had nothing except one little ewe lamb he had bought. He raised it, and it grew up with him and his children. It shared his food, drank from his cup and even slept in his arms. It was like a daughter to him.*

Observation: This passage is the famous 'thou art the man' confrontation between Nathan the prophet and David the sinner. For our purposes, we simply must note that the picture Nathan paints, of the total affection of this father for this lamb, is summarized by "it was like a daughter to him." The highest expression of a father's love was seen in his relationship to a DAUGHTER! The description in this passage is replete with terms and actions of closeness and affection. There can be no doubt that the people of Israel knew that a father had a special love for a daughter (and this is what made the passage so powerful against David). And, to a woman who calls the God of the Universe "Father," the implications should be obvious!

- 2 Samuel 13--the Rape of Tamar.

Observations: This sordid tale of Amnon's male treachery and violence, and the portrayal of the utmost nobility, virtue, wisdom on the part of Tamar, draws these two characters in sharpest relief. Rape was not excused--even for those in authority. Although David is outraged by this action, he is paralyzed into inaction (perhaps by his own recent heinous sin with Bathsheba). Revenge is dealt out later by Absalom. By all accounts, this passage highlights the virtue of this woman, the evil of Amnon, the absolute wickedness of this crime against a woman, and the value of a good reputation of women in the society.

- 2 Sam 14.1-5: *Joab son of Zeruiah knew that the king's heart longed for Absalom. 2 So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there. He said to her, "Pretend you are in mourning. Dress in mourning clothes, and don't use any cosmetic lotions. Act like a woman who has spent many days grieving for the dead. 3 Then go to the king and speak these words to him." And Joab put the words in her mouth. 4 When the woman from Tekoa went to the king, she fell with her face to the ground to pay him honor, and she said, "Help me, O king!" 5 The king asked her,*

*"What is troubling you?"*

Observations: This woman from a nearby rural town was admitted into the presence of the king to make a formal/legal request! (Forget appearing at the gates--who needs that, when you can appeal to king himself?!) It is not obvious to David that she is in any way a sage--the text is clear that there is some level of disguise going on here. Women had access to the king (we can also see this in the reigns of Solomon and later kings).

- I Kings 2.19: *When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat down at his right hand.*

Observation: This incredible passage shows the value placed by the wisest king of Israel on his mother. Giving her a throne is not mere affection--it is empowerment! (Queen mothers in the ANE exerted considerable power.) He bows to her, rises to meet her, and places her at the place of highest honor ('at his right hand').

- Joab and women: It is interesting to note that Joab is the main character linked to THREE wise-women: he has the main interaction with the Wise woman of Abel (2 Sam 20), he uses and recalls the story of the Patriot of Thebez (2 Sam 11), and he uses the wise woman of Abel to secure the return of Absalom to the royal city (2 Sam 14). Joab--the leading military commander of the day--apparently had quite a respect for the abilities of women in leadership/responsibility roles! And, given that he was a very violent man--I Kings 2.5-- (and perhaps therefore representative of many males in leadership roles), this may reflect a higher male respect for women in that period than is often believed. **This is important to take note of--the leading military commander of the day PROBABLY reflected a 'majority view' of women, and Joab's view was one of obvious respect.**

## 2. Passages in which they participate in the cult

- I Sam 9.10f: *"Good," Saul said to his servant. "Come, let's go." So they set out for the town where the man of God was. 11 As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some girls coming out to draw water, and they asked them, "Is the seer here?" 12 "He is," they answered. "He's ahead of you. Hurry now; he has just come to our town today, for the people have a sacrifice at the high place. 13 As soon as you enter the town, you will find him before he goes up to the high place to eat. The people will not begin*

*eating until he comes, because he must bless the sacrifice; afterward, those who are invited will eat. Go up now; you should find him about this time."*

Observations: Although this passage does not indicate that these girls were planning to go to the sacrifice, they certainly had in-depth knowledge of the ceremony and proceedings. They knew that Samuel had arrived in the town, that the sacrifice was scheduled soon, that the sacrifice had NOT started yet, where the sacrifice was to be held, that the sacrifice would be accompanied by a feast, that the blessing must be administered by the seer BEFORE the eating could start, that participants had to be invited. This strongly suggests that they either had participated in these before, or were educated about the cultic practices.

- 2 Sam 6.17-19: *They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. 18 After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. 19 Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.*

Observations: This was a public religious ceremony that accompanied the arrival of the Ark in Jerusalem. This ceremony is complete with burnt offerings, fellowship offerings, and official blessings. The food given to the men and women Israelites in vs. 19 MAY HAVE BEEN a wave or thank offering. In any case, this ceremony included both men and women equally--and both received the gifts from the king. A very public ceremony (and the women were NOT 'staying at home!').

- Psalm 68.24ff:

*Your procession has come into view, O God,  
the procession of my God and King into the sanctuary.  
25 In front are the singers, after them the musicians;  
with them are the maidens playing tambourines.  
26 Praise God in the great congregation;  
praise the LORD in the assembly of Israel.*

Observations: Although the Psalms are not narrative lit per se, they do occasionally provide historical views of actual cultic practices of the day. In Psalm 68, called a 'psalm of David', the author described one of the major cultic processions. It was perhaps led by the ark (and maybe the king),

then the singers, the musicians, and the 'maidens'. This passage is significant because, in the description of the Davidic/Solomonic 'offices' of singers and musicians, we see no mention of women. (e.g. I Chr 15). However, in the Psalm 68 passage we see them accompanying the men(?), and they also show up in this capacity in post-exilic times as well (e.g. Ez 2.65 points out that there were male and female singers, and then in 2.70 these get grouped in with "The priests, the Levites, the singers, the gatekeepers and the temple servants "). What MIGHT be occurring in the I Chr 15 passage is that David decides to model some aspects of the Levite ministry AFTER the beautiful pattern of the female ministry of song/celebration.

- I Chr 16 recounts the same event as 2 Sam 6--the movement of the Ark to Jerusalem. The only other item it adds to the data is that it records the presentation of a Psalm to the people, who respond (v.36): " Then all the people said "Amen" and "Praise the LORD." This is clearly a cultic celebration that was attended by and participated in by women (eg. I Chr 16.3).

It should be noted that in the passages describing this period, we do not have much description of cultic activities, but where we do, women are generally present and involved significantly.

### 3. **Their roles as Sages**

We have already seen sage-like behavior in the pre-monarchical period, but here it becomes explicit. We have two specific women who are called 'wise women' (2 Sam 14 and 20).

- Let's note the summary of a respected scholar in the field first (SAIANE:187ff):

"The narratives contained in 2 Samuel 14 and 20 tell the tales of two unnamed women, one from Tekoa and one from Abel, who clearly exhibit the qualities of leadership. Analysis of these stories allows the following observations about the female sage:

1. The use of the epithet "wise woman" without any further identifying comments suggests that the role was one known at least to the original audiences of the stories.

2. Allowing for some possibility that a Judean editor may have harmonized an originally more diverse picture, the fact that wise women are said to live in both a northern and a southern city suggests a commonality of experience between north and south with respect to this role.

3. The use of the mother-imagery in both of these stories, though metaphorical, seems to point back indirectly to a certain social reality, namely, that the authority vested in designated wise women derives from their primary social role in the education of children and management of the patriarchal household (the bet-'ab).

4. The possibility for female leadership beyond the family level is suggested by N. K. Gottwald's analysis of the tribe as "an autonomous association of segmented extended families grouped in village/neighborhood protective associations . . . functionally interlocking through inter-marriage, practices of mutual aid, common worship, and a levy of troops." In such settings, young women were the bonding elements between families and often between villages. They were intimate with at least two family groups and trained, however informally, to function as interfamilial diplomats. Such factors-combined with the pre- and early monarchic periods' decentralized leadership and its demands for the contribution of women to the survival of the community-would have expanded the scope of the wise mother's potential authority.

5. The use of proverbs (2 Sam 14:14, 20:18) by these women as part of their negotiating strategy mirrors one of the defining activities of the sage as seen both in the wisdom literature and in narrative texts portraying counselors (e.g., 2 Sam 16:23; 17:8, 10-12). From this verbal acumen, and from the overall skill and authority with which the women accomplish their sensitive tasks, we should infer a significant degree of training and

experience in positions of leadership.

6. The stories about the wise women provide two of the clearest representatives of what has been called clan or family wisdom. Their performances suggest that the distinction between the educative wisdom of the familial patriarchs and matriarchs and the political wisdom of diplomats is not absolute, nor is politics the exclusive domain of sages in the royal court. As Carole Fontaine has shown throughout her "Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament", we must be alert to inter- and intra-tribal negotiation and conflict as possible *Sitze im Leben* for specific sapiential genres.

7. The narrative presentation of the two women shows an overlap with narratives concerning other types of Israelite leaders. The parable enacted by the wise woman of Tekoa parallels that told by the prophet Nathan to David on another occasion (2 Samuel 12). The positioning and verbal strategies of the wise woman of Abel are identical to those used by military leaders in three different incidents (2 Sam 2:18-23, 24-28; 2 Kgs 18:17-36). Although these comparisons may be more the result of literary stylization than historical representation, there is an other feature of their roles that cannot be ignored. These women, especially she of Abel, seem to be doing what we would expect elders to do, in particular, representing their people in national political military situations. It is at least possible that the wise woman of Tekoa has a personal interest in the restoration of Absalom, given his popularity among the people (cf. 2 Sam 15:2-6). As for the wise woman of Abel, although the storyteller focuses on her surrendering Sheba to Joab, there is an elliptical suggestion that her negotiations have the equally important purpose of protecting the rest of the rebel's followers (cf. 2 Sam 20:1, 14, 21-22). She, too, seems to have a discreet hand in national politics.

8. The concerns voiced by the wise women reveal that they were active tradents of the Yahwistic covenantal values of land and inheritance (2Sam 14:16, 20:19). This latter point should caution against arbitrary division of a so-called secular wisdom tradition from 'religious' Yahwism."

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The above analysis highlights the fact that the sage-role was NOT peculiar to females, nor limited to a certain geography or political alignment.

- 2 Samuel 14: (1) Joab sent away to get this women (apprx 11 miles). (2) She has theatrical abilities. (3) She strongly confronts the king with all the 'uppity' of the matriarchs! (cf. vs 13: *The woman said, "Why then have you devised a thing like this against the people of God? When the king says this, does he not convict himself, for the king has not brought back his banished son?* ). (4) She points out the king's inconsistency. (5) Her soteriology is superb! (vs. 14: *But God does not take away life; instead, he devises ways so that a banished person may not remain estranged from him.* ) (5) She is very familiar with the legal system (vs. 11).

This woman was a master of many arts. She masterfully engineers and controls the conversation, with the desired outcome achieved--a true Sage.

- 2 Sam 20:14ff:

*Sheba passed through all the tribes of Israel to Abel Beth Maacah and through the entire region of the Berites, who gathered together and followed him. 15 All the troops with Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maacah. They built a siege ramp up to the city, and it stood against the outer fortifications. While they were battering the wall to bring it down, 16 a wise woman called from the city, "Listen! Listen! Tell Joab to come here so I can speak to him." 17 He went toward her, and she asked, "Are you Joab?" "I am," he answered. She said, "Listen to what your servant has to say." "I'm listening," he said. 18 She continued, "Long ago they used to say, 'Get your answer at Abel,' and that settled it. 19 We are the peaceful and faithful in Israel. You are trying to destroy a city that is a mother in Israel. Why do you want to swallow up*

*the LORD's inheritance?" 20 "Far be it from me!" Joab replied, "Far be it from me to swallow up or destroy! 21 That is not the case. A man named Sheba son of Bicri, from the hill country of Ephraim, has lifted up his hand against the king, against David. Hand over this one man, and I'll withdraw from the city." The woman said to Joab, "His head will be thrown to you from the wall." 22 Then the woman went to all the people with her wise advice, and they cut off the head of Sheba son of Bicri and threw it to Joab. So he sounded the trumpet, and his men dispersed from the city, each returning to his home. And Joab went back to the king in Jerusalem.*

Observations: (1) This woman gets a hearing in the middle of a battering-ram event! (2) She negotiated with Joab, the commander of the army. (3) He listens to her! (4) She appeals to his tradition and to covenantal-theological values. (5) She makes the commitment without even asking the elders! (6) She succeeds and saves the city! (7) In the process she averts the dividing of Israel at this point (Sheba was leading Israel to revolt against David--"So all the men of Israel deserted David to follow Sheba son of Bicri. ", verse 2). (8) She calls the city a "mother in Israel" -- and appeals to this in the argument. This is a masterful woman, dealing well with both military leaders, the elders of the city, and in controlling her responses in a very threatening situation.

- There are a couple of other passages in which the sage-like behavior of women is apparent (along the same lines of the matriarchs).
  - I Sam 19.11: *Saul sent men to David's house to watch it and to kill him in the morning. But Michal, David's wife, warned him, "If you don't run for your life tonight, tomorrow you'll be killed." 12 So Michal let David down through a window, and he fled and escaped. 13 Then Michal took an idol and laid it on the bed, covering it with a garment and putting some goats' hair at the head. 14 When Saul sent the men to capture David, Michal said, "He is ill." 15 Then Saul sent the men back to see David and told them, "Bring him up to me in his bed so that I may kill him." 16 But when the men entered, there was the idol in the bed, and at the head was some goats' hair. 17 Saul said to Michal, "Why did you deceive me like this and send my enemy away so that he escaped?" Michal told him, "He said to me, 'Let me get away. Why should I kill you?'"*

Observations: Similar to the stories in Genesis, this story shows the

cunning of Michal. She advises David on a course of action, assists him in the escape, implements a rather clever deception that fools the king's envoy, and comes up with a clever explanation to save her own life! This certainly fits the pattern of independent action--part of the profile of the sage.

- I Sam 25: The story of Abigail. This chapter-long account of the interplay between Abigail, David, and Nabal ("fool") contains a definite counter-position between the 'wise' Abigail and the 'fool' Nabal. (We will look more at this in the literary section, but let's notice some of the details of the account.)
  1. She was intelligent and beautiful (v.3)
  2. Her virtues were contrasted with her husband's lack thereof.(v.3)
  3. The servants knew they were in danger--and one of them had confidence in Abigail enough to appeal to her wisdom (v.14-17), ending with "Now think it over and see what you can do..."
  4. She immediately reacts (v. 18)
  5. She hides her gift from Nabal--the element of deception (v. 19)
  6. She responds to David in respect (vv. 23-24)
  7. She unselfishly tries to shield the others by requesting all the blame upon her. (v.24)
  8. She makes a linguistic/proverbial statement (v. 25) characteristic of sages.
  9. She does NOT try to defend her husband's evil (like Jael, no "my husband-right or wrong" here!) (v.25)
  10. She makes a detailed and powerful argument, mixed it with good 'salesmanship', in persuading David from an act of sinful violence. (vv.26-31).
  11. She is VERY MUCH aware of how the Lord works (vv.26-31) and is also aware of the promises God had made to David! (vv. 28, 30)
  12. She makes the regular 'practical' appeal of the sage at the end (v.31).
  13. David responds appropriately to her (vv.32-35)

This woman is so highly praised in this account, and demonstrates quick-thinking, a deep understanding of human nature, solid theological understanding, excellent persuasive/argumentation skills,

and independent action.

- 2 Sam 13: We have already noted that Tamar (in the story of the Rape of Tamar) manifested considerable argumentative wisdom, even though it was ineffective against the brutality of her foe.

Overall, the narratives illustrate that the social power of sages, and the effectiveness of sage-life behavior were will within the reach of the women of the period. [There are those who argue that this Sage role was suppressed under the monarchy [so SAIANE:190; [WS:TCP:8-10](#) et. al.], but the fact that Joab knows of, could find and use such a female sage only 10 miles from the royal city counts rather heavily against this idea!]

#### 4. **Their roles as heroes/leaders and as the 'voice and memory of the nation'**

First, passages in which women were **heroes or critical contributors** in the sequence of events.

- I Sam 19.11--We have already seen how Michael saved David's life. Without her advice/action/risk, the monarchy could have looked VERY different!
- I Sam 25.33: Abigail keeps David from avenging himself--a major motif in chapters 24 and 26. She probably saved David from additional discipline/judgment from God (like Ziporah did for Moses!)
- Abigail is consistently referred to as the 'widow of Nabal' in the narratives. As his widow, she would have had considerable wealth and political power in the region of Hebron (David's later coronation site).
- 2 Sam 11.18f: *Joab sent David a full account of the battle. 19 He instructed the messenger: "When you have finished giving the king this account of the battle, 20 the king's anger may flare up, and he may ask you, 'Why did you get so close to the city to fight? Didn't you know they would shoot arrows from the wall? 21 Who killed Abimelech son of Jerub-Besheth? Didn't a woman throw an upper millstone on him from the wall, so that he died in Thebez?"*

Observations: The woman patriot of Thebez (which we looked at in the pre-monarchy discussions) is **STILL REMEMBERED** at this time, by Joab and probably David!! The details of the story are current knowledge on the part of the commander-in-chief of David's army. [I wonder if Joab was thinking about this event, as we talked up the wall at the Wise Woman of

Abel?!!!!]

- 2 Sam 17.18ff: *Jonathan and Ahimaaz were staying at En Rogel. A servant girl was to go and inform them, and they were to go and tell King David, for they could not risk being seen entering the city. 18 But a young man saw them and told Absalom. So the two of them left quickly and went to the house of a man in Bahurim. He had a well in his courtyard, and they climbed down into it. 19 His wife took a covering and spread it out over the opening of the well and scattered grain over it. No one knew anything about it. 20 When Absalom's men came to the woman at the house, they asked, "Where are Ahimaaz and Jonathan?" The woman answered them, "They crossed over the brook." The men searched but found no one, so they returned to Jerusalem.*

Observations: Here you have another sage-like action, that parallels the famous action of Rahab in Jericho. This action of hiding the spies and deceiving the forces of Absalom, probably saved David's life, and consequently, had a massive impact on the future of the nation.

- 2 Sam 20: The Wise Woman of Abel averted civil war/division of the kingdom at a critical juncture in the monarchy's history.
- 1 Kings 1.11ff:

*Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king without our lord David's knowing it? 12 Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' 14 While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and confirm what you have said." 15 So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. 16 Bathsheba bowed low and knelt before the king. "What is it you want?" the king asked. 17 She said to him, "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: 'Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.' 18 But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it. 19 He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep,*

*and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. 20 My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his fathers, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals." 22 While she was still speaking with the king, Nathan the prophet arrived. 23 And they told the king, "Nathan the prophet is here." So he went before the king and bowed with his face to the ground. 24 Nathan said, "Have you, my lord the king, declared that Adonijah shall be king after you, and that he will sit on your throne? 25 Today he has gone down and sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep. He has invited all the king's sons, the commanders of the army and Abiathar the priest. Right now they are eating and drinking with him and saying, 'Long live King Adonijah!' 26 But me your servant, and Zadok the priest, and Benaiah son of Jehoiada, and your servant Solomon he did not invite. 27 Is this something my lord the king has done without letting his servants know who should sit on the throne of my lord the king after him?" 28 Then King David said, "Call in Bathsheba." So she came into the king's presence and stood before him. 29 The king then took an oath: "As surely as the LORD lives, who has delivered me out of every trouble, 30 I will surely carry out today what I swore to you by the LORD, the God of Israel: Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne in my place." 31 Then Bathsheba bowed low with her face to the ground and, kneeling before the king, said, "May my lord King David live forever!"*

Observations: This pivotal passage shows Nathan and Bathsheba together REVERSING the actions of Adonijah, and putting Solomon on the throne! God had told David that Solomon was to succeed him, and David, in turn, had promised Bathsheba (cf. I Chrn 22.9; 17.11). David, on his deathbed, was unaware that a different son than Solomon had proclaimed himself king (and undoubtedly would have killed Solomon at the earliest opportunity). Nathan and Bathsheba act quickly and sagely to reverse this situation, and arouse the King to proclaim Solomon king. Thus, God's will is achieved in spite of human attempts otherwise, by the actions of a prophet and a woman. History would not have been the same but for these actions.

- I Kings 2.19: *When Bathsheba went to King Solomon to speak to him for Adonijah, the king stood up to meet her, bowed down to her and sat down on his throne. He had a throne brought for the king's mother, and she sat down at his right hand.*

Observations: In the history of Israel, many queen-mothers exerted great influence over the nation. This single scene is the most in-depth look at how much respect they could garner, from their king-sons. Bathsheba is accorded much power and influence by virtue of this action of Solomon.

Second, we have passages which connect women to the '**voice and memory of the nation**'.

- I Sam 18.6ff: *When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. 7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands." 8 Saul was very angry; this refrain galled him. "They have credited David with tens of thousands," he thought, "but me with only thousands. What more can he get but the kingdom?" 9 And from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.*

Observations: (1) The women came out of ALL the towns (indicating a social/community role?). (2) Their song was somehow UNIFORM throughout the towns already(!) (3) Saul is surprisingly alarmed by this song of "mere women"--indicating that it had more importance than might be surmised from the text.

Now, if we attempt to get behind this reaction of Saul, we can see a pattern emerge.

1. In I Sam 21.11, we read *That day David fled from Saul and went to Achish king of Gath. 11 But the servants of Achish said to him, "Isn't this David, the king of the land? Isn't he the one they sing about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"* . This song was known to the Philistines in one of the major cities of that kingdom. But the text points out that this message is 'sung about in their dances'. This piece of history had somehow become institutionalized in song and dance, and was perpetuated therein. In other words, the singing and dancing of the communities PRESERVED THIS INFORMATION. The women (at least a part of, if not most of, the "singers and dancers") were the carriers of the memory of major historical events in the nation.

2. I Sam 29.4: *But the Philistine commanders were angry with him and said, "Send the man back, that he may return to the place you assigned him. He must not go with us into battle, or he will turn against us during the fighting. How better could he regain his master's favor than by taking the heads of our own men? 5 Isn't this the David they sang about in their dances: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands'?"* Note: the leaders of the OTHER Philistine towns ALSO know of this song--it had wide currency and even affected the cultures surrounding Israel.
3. Now, consider again Judges 5.10-11: *"You who ride on white donkeys, sitting on your saddle blankets, and you who walk along the road, consider the voice of the singers at the watering places. They recite the righteous acts of the LORD, the righteous acts of his warriors in Israel. . This verse describes a role of the "singers at the watering places".* These singers recite the acts of YHWH and the acts of His warriors (e.g. Saul and David). The watering places are the main points of inter-community exchange, as travelers would need water and rest for their animals. Watering places play prominently in the stories of the Patriarchs and Moses. These singers obviously played a major communication role within Israel, and it is worthy to note that the majority of characters described as being 'at the watering places' in the OT are women.
4. At this point in Israel's history--prior to the 'settling down' of the monarchy into full court life--much of the memory of Israel's history would have been transmitted through these types of means. There were of course many written records (I&II Samuel, I&II Kings, I&II Chronicles refer to a dozen or more), but the widespread inter-community dissemination of the 'righteous acts of YHWH and His warriors', to a nation with various levels of literacy, would have been accomplished by (1) the teaching priests--of various levels of effectiveness at this time(!) and (2) the women 'singers' who were apparently HIGHLY effective. [This effectiveness can be seen in our period by Joab's knowledge of the hero of Thebez, by Abigail's knowledge of the promises of YHWH to David, and by the Philistines' knowledge of the very lyrics of the Victory Song of Saul and David.]
5. In Psalm 68:11: *"The Lord gives the command; The women who proclaim (publish or preach) the tidings are a great host"* (NASV), the role of women as "mass messengers" is linked EXPLICITLY

with YHWH's message! As such, they play some level of prophet-like role in the nation at large. This would certainly be cause for Saul to be concerned, if their messages were closely invested with some level of prophetic authority.

6. This view accords well with the precision of the remembrance of the Song of Moses (sung and maybe authored by Miriam) and by that of the Song of Deborah. The fact that these pieces were remembered in such detail over such long periods of time testify to the effectiveness of the transmission process.

It certainly looks like the women of Israel were the 'memory' of the community and nation. (This is NOT to say that there were no men singers at the watering places at all, but the text normally associates such celebratory singing with the women.)

- 2 Sam 1.17-20 and 24:

*David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan, 18 and ordered that the men of Judah be taught this lament of the bow (it is written in the Book of Jashar):*

*19 "Your glory, O Israel, lies slain on your heights.  
How the mighty have fallen!*

*20 "Tell it not in Gath,  
proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon,  
lest the daughters of the Philistines be glad,  
lest the daughters of the uncircumcised rejoice.*

*24 "O daughters of Israel,  
weep for Saul,  
who clothed you in scarlet and finery,  
who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold.*

Observations: The interesting thing is that the daughters are somehow chosen to represent the voice of the nation--either rejoicing over victory or lamenting over loss. The 'daughter' was somehow in tune with the fortunes of a nation and was illustrative of its heart and feelings. This motif occurs often in scripture (esp. in the prophetic lit--e.g. Is 10.30; Jer 4.31; La 4.21).

Thus we see that the women played an important part in (1) articulating the feelings of the people toward their fortunes; and (2) disseminating that

information throughout the nation. They were indeed, the "memory and voice" of the heart of the common people at this time.

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**Summary:**

1. Daughters were valuable enough to be used in an argument against kingship.
2. Mothers should not be shamed.
3. The love of a women was held in highest esteem.
4. The highest expression of a father's affection can be seen in his relationship with his daughter.
5. The virtue of women is highly prized.
6. Mothers of kings were duly honored and accorded authority and respect.
7. Young girls were very familiar with cultic practices (probably through participation)
8. Women participated fully and freely in public cultic ceremonies and celebrations.
9. Women singers were involved in sacred worship along with the men singers.
10. Women are consistently portrayed as Sages or sage-like, exerting great influence over the leaders and over the events of the nation.
11. Women's roles as sages were not confined to rural areas, geographical areas, or some type of 'subordinate discourse'--their wisdom speeches show the same forms and approaches used by male sages and leadership.
12. These women show mature theological positions and excellent articulation/argumentation skills.
13. These women seem to exert considerable authority/influence over male leadership.
14. These women manifest a wide range of independent action.
15. They are responsible for numerous critical events in the biblical history:
  1. One saves David's life
  2. One keeps David from avenging himself--probably also saving his life
  3. One was probably pivotal in gaining Calebite support for David's consolidation of the kingdom (e.g. Abigail)
  4. One hid the spies and probably saved the life of David again.
  5. One diverted a civil war.
  6. One was co-conspirator in seeing to it that God's appointed king (e.g. Solomon) made it to the throne, in spite of adverse conditions.
  7. One was installed as Queen-mother by the greatest king in OT history.
16. Women played a central role in the articulation and dissemination of national history throughout the communities of Israel.

**One can easily see from this data, that women were VERY important in both the history and consciousness of Israel. As sages, they spoke and practiced**

**wisdom; as singers, they shaped the national identity of Israel; as worshippers, they co-celebrated with all the men; as agents, they were critical in the establishment of the RIGHT kings! God used His daughters mightily in His service, and undoubtedly delighted in their every victory and every song.**



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# Women in the Heart of God (3b)

## The Data From the Monarchy Literature

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(Updated: 10/08/96)

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the [historical data](#) in the narratives/literature between the institution of the Kingship (in I Samuel 8) and the division of the kingdom after Solomon (approx I Kgs 12), the **literary data** within those texts, and the [portrayal of women](#) in the "leisure" literature of the period (e.g. Psalms and Wisdom books). In this section, we will focus on the LITERARY data in the historical portions of the texts.

**Two: The LITERARY Data** from the Monarchy-period narratives.

There are six passages involving women which stand out in the text, in such a way as to suggest an emphasis on the women (either as role models or as foils against which to denigrate the men):

1. The account of Abigail
2. The Rape of Tamar
3. The loyalty of Rizpah
4. The words of Bathsheba
5. The words of the Sage-women
6. The Victory Song of David and Saul

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### 1. **The account of Abigail**

*Now Samuel died, and all Israel assembled and mourned for him; and they buried him at his home in Ramah. Then David moved down into the Desert of Maon. 2 A certain man in Maon, who had property there at Carmel, was very wealthy. He had a thousand goats and three thousand sheep, which he was shearing in Carmel. 3 His name was Nabal and his wife's name was Abigail. She was an intelligent*

*and beautiful woman, but her husband, a Calebite, was surly and mean in his dealings. 4 While David was in the desert, he heard that Nabal was shearing sheep. 5 So he sent ten young men and said to them, "Go up to Nabal at Carmel and greet him in my name. 6 Say to him: `Long life to you! Good health to you and your household! And good health to all that is yours! 7 "`Now I hear that it is sheep-shearing time. When your shepherds were with us, we did not mistreat them, and the whole time they were at Carmel nothing of theirs was missing. 8 Ask your own servants and they will tell you. Therefore be favorable toward my young men, since we come at a festive time. Please give your servants and your son David whatever you can find for them.'" 9 When David's men arrived, they gave Nabal this message in David's name. Then they waited. 10 Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. 11 Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" 12 David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. 13 David said to his men, "Put on your swords!" So they put on their swords, and David put on his. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. 14 One of the servants told Nabal's wife Abigail: "David sent messengers from the desert to give our master his greetings, but he hurled insults at them. 15 Yet these men were very good to us. They did not mistreat us, and the whole time we were out in the fields near them nothing was missing. 16 Night and day they were a wall around us all the time we were herding our sheep near them. 17 Now think it over and see what you can do, because disaster is hanging over our master and his whole household. He is such a wicked man that no one can talk to him." 18 Abigail lost no time. She took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, a hundred cakes of raisins and two hundred cakes of pressed figs, and loaded them on donkeys. 19 Then she told her servants, "Go on ahead; I'll follow you." But she did not tell her husband Nabal. 20 As she came riding her donkey into a mountain ravine, there were David and his men descending toward her, and she met them. 21 David had just said, "It's been useless -- all my watching over this fellow's property in the desert so that nothing of his was missing. He has paid me back evil for good. 22 May God deal with David, be it ever so severely, if by morning I leave alive one male of all who belong to him!" 23 When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David*

*with her face to the ground. She fell at his feet and said: "My lord, let the blame be on me alone. Please let your servant speak to you; hear what your servant has to say. 25 May my lord pay no attention to that wicked man Nabal. He is just like his name -- his name is Fool, and folly goes with him. But as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my master sent. 26 "Now since the LORD has kept you, my master, from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, as surely as the LORD lives and as you live, may your enemies and all who intend to harm my master be like Nabal. 27 And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my master, be given to the men who follow you. 28 Please forgive your servant's offense, for the LORD will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my master, because he fights the LORD's battles. Let no wrongdoing be found in you as long as you live. 29 Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my master will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the LORD your God. But the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. 30 When the LORD has done for my master every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him leader over Israel, 31 my master will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the LORD has brought my master success, remember your servant." 32 David said to Abigail, "Praise be to the LORD, the God of Israel, who has sent you today to meet me. 33 May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands. 34 Otherwise, as surely as the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, who has kept me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, not one male belonging to Nabal would have been left alive by daybreak." 35 Then David accepted from her hand what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. I have heard your words and granted your request." (I Sam 25.1-35)*

The entire chapter 25 is devoted to the story of Abigail and Nabal. The above portion details the interactions between the three; the rest of the chapter tells of how Nabal dies of a heart attack (stroke?) and how David and Abigail are married.

We have already looked at the characteristics of the historical events--here we wish to note its role in the text.

Commentators have been quite puzzled by this passage; it is sandwiched in between two chapters dealing with Saul, and Saul does not even show up in the

passage until the last verse and even then only obliquely. The various suggestions all have some merit: that this passage explains how David developed a power-base in Calebite territory prior to his coronation in Hebron, that this passage "points out" the Folly of Saul by symbolically identifying him with Nabal, that the passage is to contrast the wife that Saul gave David (i.e. Michal) with the wife that God gave David (e.g. Abigail), and/or to identify the low-water mark of David's life (his fortunes improve starting in chapter 26).

All of these have merit, of course, but I still find it odd that the scene is reported in such vivid detail. Truly Abigail is painted in such glowing terms throughout the passage. One commentator (Word commentary) comments on the details of verse 42 (*Abigail quickly got on a donkey and, attended by her five maids, went with David's messengers and became his wife.*): "The narrator never lets us forget Abigail's virtues or wealth."

This exaltation of Abigail's character is obviously also deliberately done at the expense of her husband--Nabal. Not only does SHE identify his name with Folly, but in the process a perfect Wisdom vs. Folly contrast is set up, as in Proverbs 1-9. This "contrast" is identified by some commentators as being a device for contrasting the 'wisdom' of David's obedience to God with Saul's 'folly'. There would, of course, be numerous vehicles to do such in that case, and that a woman is used for the purpose I find beautiful and instructive.

From a literary standpoint, it is also important to note the her sage-speech in vv.23-31 is one of the longer quotes in the period (esp. when one excludes YHWH and the three kings--Saul, David, Solomon).

## 2. The Rape of Tamar (2 Sam 13)

*In the course of time, Amnon son of David fell in love with Tamar, the beautiful sister of Absalom son of David. 2 Amnon became frustrated to the point of illness on account of his sister Tamar, for she was a virgin, and it seemed impossible for him to do anything to her. 3 Now Amnon had a friend named Jonadab son of Shimeah, David's brother. Jonadab was a very shrewd man. 4 He asked Amnon, "Why do you, the king's son, look so haggard morning after morning? Won't you tell me?" Amnon said to him, "I'm in love with Tamar, my brother Absalom's sister." 5 "Go to bed and pretend to be ill," Jonadab said. "When your father comes to see you, say to him, 'I would like my sister Tamar to come and give me something to eat. Let her prepare the food in my sight so I may watch her and then eat*

*it from her hand." 6 So Amnon lay down and pretended to be ill. When the king came to see him, Amnon said to him, "I would like my sister Tamar to come and make some special bread in my sight, so I may eat from her hand." 7 David sent word to Tamar at the palace: "Go to the house of your brother Amnon and prepare some food for him." 8 So Tamar went to the house of her brother Amnon, who was lying down. She took some dough, kneaded it, made the bread in his sight and baked it. 9 Then she took the pan and served him the bread, but he refused to eat. "Send everyone out of here," Amnon said. So everyone left him. 10 Then Amnon said to Tamar, "Bring the food here into my bedroom so I may eat from your hand." And Tamar took the bread she had prepared and brought it to her brother Amnon in his bedroom. 11 But when she took it to him to eat, he grabbed her and said, "Come to bed with me, my sister." 12 "Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. Such a thing should not be done in Israel! Don't do this wicked thing. 13 What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel. Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you." 14 But he refused to listen to her, and since he was stronger than she, he raped her. 15 Then Amnon hated her with intense hatred. In fact, he hated her more than he had loved her. Amnon said to her, "Get up and get out!" 16 "No!" she said to him. "Sending me away would be a greater wrong than what you have already done to me." But he refused to listen to her. 17 He called his personal servant and said, "Get this woman out of here and bolt the door after her." 18 So his servant put her out and bolted the door after her. She was wearing a richly ornamented robe, for this was the kind of garment the virgin daughters of the king wore. 19 Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went.*

The Rape of Tamar is significant historically in that it explains why Amnon, David's firstborn, did not become king--he was killed by Absalom over the violation of his sister. But this being the case does not require the level of detail we have in the text. The elaborate set-up, and vivid detail of Tamar's dialogue would not be required for this purpose, but rather are indications that something else is going on.

Tamar's purity is a more vivid example of Uriah's integrity, and her arguments

with Amnon--not even answered by him in the text at all(!)--reflects the wisdom and high ethics that we see from most of the biblical women. She appeals to several sources of authority/power, but to no avail against the mindless impulses that he is helplessly captive to.

- *"Don't, my brother!" she said to him. "Don't force me. "* (She makes it quite clear this is NOT "consensual"!)
- *"Such a thing should not be done in Israel! "* (She appeals to the "community consequences" theological issue--individual sins sometimes had HUGE impact on the nation (cf. Achan's trespass in Josh 7))
- *"Don't do this wicked thing. "* (She points out that it is MORAL evil of the highest sort.)
- *"What about me? Where could I get rid of my disgrace? "* (She points to the long-term social implications for her status, and the irreversibility of the act.)
- *"And what about you? You would be like one of the wicked fools in Israel."* (She points to the long-term implications for HIS status--using the 'FOOL' word (another NABAL!))
- *"Please speak to the king; he will not keep me from being married to you."* (This is a double-pronged approach: (1) mention of the king MIGHT cause him to re-think this deal and (2) it advises him to compromise without giving up on his goal.)

Notice the wide-range of this argumentation repertoire: theology, ethics, community-ethos, guilt over her long-term loss of respect, embarrassment of being labeled a "fool" in Israel, royal reprisal, compromise. In rational situations, these arguments would (and did) carry the day. But the king's son will chose self-serving violence over the wisdom and righteousness of this woman. And the narrator makes this quite clear to us--in the details of her purity (and consequently, of the depths of her disgrace), the intensity of her feelings (the Hebrew structure is filled with staccato, short-burst appeals--logic screaming to be heard), and the sage-like wisdom of her arguments.

It is also tragic to note that the violation of the 'lamb, which was loved as a father loves his daughter' (of 2 Sam 12) was fulfilled literally in the violation of David's daughter Tamar. One can scarcely miss the connection between the innocence/beauty of Tamar, and the beloved daughter-lamb of God's word through Nathan. His evil recoiled upon himself (Psalm 7.16: *The trouble he causes recoils on himself; his violence comes down on his own head.*).

### 3. **The loyalty of Rizpah (2 Sam 21.8ff)**

*But the king took Armoni and Mephibosheth, the two sons of Aiah's daughter Rizpah, whom she had borne to Saul, together with the five sons of Saul's daughter Merab, whom she had borne to Adriel son of Barzillai the Meholathite. 9 He handed them over to the Gibeonites, who killed and exposed them on a hill before the LORD. All seven of them fell together; they were put to death during the first days of the harvest, just as the barley harvest was beginning. 10 Rizpah daughter of Aiah took sackcloth and spread it out for herself on a rock. From the beginning of the harvest till the rain poured down from the heavens on the bodies, she did not let the birds of the air touch them by day or the wild animals by night. 11 When David was told what Aiah's daughter Rizpah, Saul's concubine, had done, 12 he went and took the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. (They had taken them secretly from the public square at Beth Shan, where the Philistines had hung them after they struck Saul down on Gilboa.) 13 David brought the bones of Saul and his son Jonathan from there, and the bones of those who had been killed and exposed were gathered up.*

This passage highlights the loyalty of Rizpah to her deceased family members. They had not been given a decent burial, and she kept vigil over their bodies until rain was granted to the land (God had withheld rain until justice had been done for the Gibeonites.). But this act of loyalty prompted David to do 'the right thing' as well. He followed the example of this woman in honoring the dead. This woman protected these bodies from wild animals. She is an example of commitment to David (in the text) and to us (through the text.)

#### **4. The words of Bathsheba (1 Kgs 1:11ff)**

*Then Nathan asked Bathsheba, Solomon's mother, "Have you not heard that Adonijah, the son of Haggith, has become king without our lord David's knowing it? 12 Now then, let me advise you how you can save your own life and the life of your son Solomon. 13 Go in to King David and say to him, 'My lord the king, did you not swear to me your servant: "Surely Solomon your son shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne"? Why then has Adonijah become king?' 14 While you are still there talking to the king, I will come in and confirm what you have said." 15 So Bathsheba went to see the aged king in his room, where Abishag the Shunammite was attending him. 16 Bathsheba bowed low and knelt before the king. "What is it you want?" the king asked. 17 She said to him, "My lord, you yourself swore to me your servant by the LORD your God: 'Solomon your son*

*shall be king after me, and he will sit on my throne.' 18 But now Adonijah has become king, and you, my lord the king, do not know about it. 19 He has sacrificed great numbers of cattle, fattened calves, and sheep, and has invited all the king's sons, Abiathar the priest and Joab the commander of the army, but he has not invited Solomon your servant. 20 My lord the king, the eyes of all Israel are on you, to learn from you who will sit on the throne of my lord the king after him. 21 Otherwise, as soon as my lord the king is laid to rest with his fathers, I and my son Solomon will be treated as criminals."*

This passage is important historically because it explains how Solomon became king (instead of an older sibling), but from our point of view it highlights the savvy of Bathsheba. In the set-up, she is alerted to the problem by Nathan and coached on how to approach the king, but when she gets into the appeal to the king, she adds elements of her own. She mentions the celebratory sacrifices (of which David is so incredibly fond of), the use of apparently royal resources for this (!), the actual ring-leaders of this 'initiative', the implicit danger of the non-invite of Bathsheba and Solomon, the importance of his PERSONAL pronouncement before the nation, and the inevitable criminalization of Solomon/Bathsheba that will follow.

This argumentation--going far beyond Nathan's simple advice--is a very sage-like approach, approximating the 'court-sage' styles of Ahithophel and Hushai (2 Sam 15-17). It is no wonder that she is according queen-mother status by her also-wise son (I Kings 2.19).

## 5. **The words of the Sage-women**

The Wise Women of 2 Sam 14 and 20 are interesting in that their words are carefully recorded and woven into the plots. In chapter 14, we have the elaborate discourse by the Wise Woman of Tekoa (vv 4-20). This is a VERY long quote, punctuated occasionally by brief statements of David. It is a model of persuasion, theology, confrontation, --and effectiveness!

There MAY be an implied contrast here also in Joab (who cannot secure the return of Absalom) versus the Woman (who can). He must use a sage-woman to accomplish what he cannot with HIS form of "power".

It is also interesting to note that Joab is the main character linked to THREE wise-women: he has the main interaction with the Wise woman of Abel (2 Sam 20), he uses and recalls the story of the Patriot of Thebez (2 Sam 11), and he uses the wise woman of Abel to secure the return of Absalom to the royal city (2 Sam

14). Joab--the leading military commander of the day--apparently had quite a respect for the abilities of women in leadership/responsibility roles! And, given that he was a very violent man--I Kings 2.5-- (and perhaps therefore representative of many males in leadership roles), this may reflect a higher male respect for women in that period than is often believed. **This is important to take note of--the leading military commander of the day PROBABLY reflected a 'majority view' of women, and Joab's view was one of obvious respect.**

In 2 Sam 20, we have the story of the Wise Woman of Abel--with Joab as the main participant. Again, the very detailed words of the sage are record, even the proverb-quote passage. There is no particular reason for this level of detail to be in the text--it would suffice to record that the CITY of Abel handed Sheba over. But the narrator of 1 and 2 Sam--in keeping with his very high portrayals of female nobility, intelligence, savvy (cf. Abigail, Bathsheba, Rizpah, the two Sages, Tamar, even Michal generally)--is careful to keep reminding us of their intricate connection with the biblical history.

## 6. The Victory Song of David and Saul (I Sam 18.6f)

*When the men were returning home after David had killed the Philistine, the women came out from all the towns of Israel to meet King Saul with singing and dancing, with joyful songs and with tambourines and lutes. 7 As they danced, they sang: "Saul has slain his thousands, and David his tens of thousands."*

The Victory Song of David and Saul is first mentioned in I Sam 18.6, but is mentioned two other times by the Philistines! This song, written by women and sung by women, echoed all over the land of Palestine. It was mentioned by the writer in detail (as the other songs of women in the OT), and repeated in those Philistine-contexts verbatim. This song obviously impressed the writer with its historical importance. Just as the tale of the daughters of Zelophehad are mentioned THRICE in the OT, so too is this celebration song of the women. [We have seen earlier that the song was more than just a song--it was almost the 'newspaper' AND the 'annual' of the nation at that time.] Saul's concern over it indicates the importance it played to history, and by explicit mention thrice, to the literary work of the author of 1st and 2nd Samuel.

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**Summary:** The inclusion of number passages with inordinate amount of quote-detail from women, leads one to believe that their words were important and taken seriously,

and their characters were used to contrast with key male figures of the day.

1. Abigail is shown to be vastly superior to her husband Nabal.
2. Abigail is shown to be ethically superior to David.
3. Tamar is shown to be vastly superior to Amnon, the king's son--in many areas.
4. Rizah (a concubine of Saul) is shown to be ethically more sensitive and compassionate than David.
5. Bathsheba is shown to be an "equal or better" court-sage than most.
6. The wise woman of Tekoa is shown to be needed by/more effective than, Joab.
7. The wise woman of Abel is shown to be "better" than the other elders of her town (including the males).
8. The wise woman of Abel is shown to be equal to Joab (and more powerful than Sheba).

**In historical materials dominated by the stories about the kingship, these snapshots of women's excellencies are VERY pronounced. It almost looks like the Father is bragging on His daughters again...;>)**



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# Women in the Heart of God (3c)

## The Data From the Monarchy Literature

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(Updated: Jun 1/2003)

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In this period, we have THREE sources of primary data: the [historical data](#) in the narratives/literature between the institution of the Kingship (in I Samuel 8) and the division of the kingdom after Solomon (approx I Kgs 12), the [literary data](#) within those texts, and the **portrayal of women** in the "leisure" literature of the period (e.g. Psalms and Wisdom books). In this section, we will focus on the data in the "leisure literature" of the period.

**Three: The Data from the "Leisure Literature"** of the Monarchy-period.

As the monarchy consolidated, and the internal wars between the house of Saul and the house of David died off, the nation entered a relative time of peace. This was predominantly at the time of Solomon, but probably included the later years of David as well. In this time of peace (relatively speaking), the people began to have 'leisure' time, and occupy 'literary' type responsibilities. David and Solomon appointed singers and musicians, and Solomon was famous for the proverbs he authored. It is during this period in which 'leisure' time was used to produce non-narrative literature, and in which 'official' jobs were created that focuses on literary and/or historical writing, that we find the production of the Song of Songs, Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. While these writings were probably edited later on numerous occasions (e.g. Proverbs 25.1), their core material was probably constructed during this time period. As such, they provide us with some 'reflective' material to examine, for the portraiture of women in the period.

The material we have to work with here is:

1. The Song of Songs--a love story between Solomon and the Shulammitte
2. The Book of Ruth--a story set in the period of the Judges, but used in a lineage of David; the tale of the loyalty of a Moabitess named Ruth.
3. Psalms--the collection of short poems, chants, prayers, etc.--mostly by David and his official writers
4. The Book of Job--a wisdom story about a non-Israelite's struggle with inexplicable misfortune.
5. Proverbs--a collection of wise-sayings and admonitions
6. Ecclesiastes--a strange monologue about the apparent incomprehensibility of life.

I will consider these in the order of 'ease' and 'obviousness' of contents. For example, the Song is a veritable dance in celebration of personal love, whereas the probable "Devil's

Advocate" position of Ecclesiastes makes its pronouncements more difficult to understand.

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## 1. **The Song of Songs**

This work is a purely 'secular' work. It is a love story, like other love stories and poems of the ANE, and does not reveal much theological content. Yet it is quite elevated in its view of female sexuality. So, [WS:WWR:187](#):

The general biblical view of sexual love is that within marriage it is right and good. Thus the Song of Songs praises erotic love, reaching a biblical high-water mark regarding healthy sexual attitudes. Most scholars are of the opinion that the Song of Songs originally was secular love poetry, and for our purposes its most remarkable quality is the lovers' mutuality. The female is able to pursue the male without fear of being branded a harlot; the male is able to submit to the female without being branded unmanly. Insofar as the Song of Songs was taken to be an allegory for Israel's relations with God, it placed sexual passion near the heart of the covenant. The biblical God therefore became very different from the apathetic God of Greek philosophy. Yahweh could yearn, suffer, and lament the transgressions of his beloved, like a wronged husband (see Hosea).

This is not to say this was the norm, but it does reveal that it was certainly understandable in the period. So, Evans in [WS:WIB:23-24](#): *"There is no male dominance, no female subordination, and no stereotyping of either sex. The woman is independent, fully the equal of the man...it does show that in Old Testament thought the concept of mutuality and equality between the sexes could be envisaged as possible and even perhaps as desirable..."*

But the inclusion of this book in the biblical canon--in spite of the vast amount of human dissension, discussion, and reservations--leads me to believe that the Author felt rather strongly about making this statement!

## 2. **The Book of Ruth**

Again, this is fairly obvious in its point--the hero and main characters are women. A woman is used to demonstrate the essence of loyalty. She is praised by men and women alike, and is the only Moabite known to have entered Israelite society (against the prohibition in Deut 23.3). She even shows up in the genealogy of Jesus.

Ruth is a marvelously crafted short story, presumably written down during the reign of David [the genealogy at the end stops at David and not Solomon]. It is very woman-centered in its language (e.g. 1.8--"return to your mother's house") and in plot ([WS:TSOS:115ff](#)). We have noted before that the setting demonstrated that childless widows could own and sell property (e.g. 4.9) Ruth is said in the end to be better than "seven sons."

### 3. The Psalms

The Psalms are generally focused on God and the individual, and accordingly do not furnish much data about women. There are a few references, though, that are in keeping with the general themes we have seen lived out in Israel.

- God is a defender of widows (*A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.* Ps 68.5)
- God sustains the widow (*The LORD watches over the alien and sustains the fatherless and the widow,* Ps 146.9)
- He gives barren women not only children, but HAPPINESS as well (*He settles the barren woman in her home as a happy mother of children.* Ps 113.9)
- He forbids infanticide of sons OR daughters (*They sacrificed their sons and their daughters to demons. 38 They shed innocent blood, the blood of their sons and daughters,* Ps 106.37ff)
- Fathers and mothers have EQUAL ability to affect the fortunes of their children (*May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the LORD; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out.* Ps 109.14)
- "Maidens" are called to praise and worship, along with males. (*young men and maidens, old men and children. 13 Let them praise the name of the LORD, for his name alone is exalted;* Ps 148.12)
- One of the blessings of the Lord is daughters both beautiful and integrally functional to the nation (*Then our sons in their youth will be like well-nurtured plants, and our daughters will be like pillars carved to adorn a palace.* Ps 144.12).

### 4. The Book of Job

The book of Job is a fascinating study. Job is held up as a model of faith by God Himself in Ezek 14.14,20. Job is NOT an Israelite (he is from the land of Uz--probably northeast of Palestine), but is an occasion of God's boasting(!)

As such, Job represents the cultural and legal context of Israel, many laws and customs of which were shared by the Israelites. [It is generally understood that the content of the Law in the OT would not have been adequate to administer the society--see the discussion by Walton in AILICC:83] Although we cannot assume that Israel shared all of Job's practices/ethics, it is safe to assume that she had "equal or higher" requirements on the part of YHWH.

With that in mind, let's look at some of the women-related ideas in Job:

1. Job 1.4: *His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them.* Note: His sons considered his daughters at least "party equals".
2. Job 1.5: *When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a burnt offering for each of them, thinking, "Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts." This was Job's regular custom.* Note: Job considered purification important for both his sons AND daughters.
3. He consistently defends his righteousness, often by appealing to how he treated widows (Job 22.9; 24.3; 24.21; 29.13; 31.16,18)
4. He also defends his righteousness by maintaining his chastity and fidelity to his wife (Job 31.1,9)--implying that standards of sexual conduct were also binding on males.

There are two passages I want to make a special point of.

**First**, in Job 38.28, God is speaking:

*Does the rain have a father?  
Who fathers the drops of dew?  
29 From whose womb comes the ice?  
Who gives birth to the frost from the heavens*

NOTICE: God describes Himself in terms of BOTH genders--father and mother.

**Second**, in Job 42.13, we see that daughters could receive inheritance ALONG WITH living brothers, at the discretion of the dad:

*And he also had seven sons and three daughters. 14 The first daughter he named Jemimah, the second Keziah and the third Keren-Happuch. 15 Nowhere in all the land were there found women as beautiful as Job's*

*daughters, and their father granted them an inheritance along with their brothers.*

NOTICE: The daughters are named and lauded, but not the sons. The daughters were given an inheritance ALONG with their brothers. This means, in the legal context of Israel, that daughters did NOT have to be "brother-less" to inherit property (like the daughters of Zelophehad were). If it were possible outside of Israel, it quite possibly was a part of Israel's legal system as well. (The fact of the naming of the daughters in the Job passage, might suggest that in those genealogies in which a 'sister' is named, what is in view is this type of inheritance, although we have no hard evidence one way or the other.)

Overall, we see a rather high treatment of women in Job, ranging from Job's inclusion of his daughters in every aspect of their culture--festive, ritual, legal--, to God's use of the female image to portray his relationship to creation.

## 5. The Book of Proverbs

Proverbs is the quintessential wisdom literature. It contains many different forms of wisdom sayings and instructions, and has much to say about women. Let's go through it and note some of these passages.

1. The first thing to note is that wisdom instruction came from both father AND mother:

*Listen, my son, to your father's instruction  
and do not forsake your mother's teaching. (Prov 1.8)*

*My son, keep your father's commands  
and do not forsake your mother's teaching. (Prov 6.20)*

*Listen to your father, who gave you life,  
and do not despise your mother when she is old.*

*23 Buy the truth and do not sell it;  
get wisdom, discipline and understanding.*

*24 The father of a righteous man has great joy;  
he who has a wise son delights in him.*

*25 May your father and mother be glad;  
may she who gave you birth rejoice! (Prov 23.22ff)*

2. Marriage is portrayed as a COVENANT (as in other passages)-Prov 2.17 (cf. Ezek 16.8, 5960; Mal 2.14-16).
3. We should note the healthy view of sexuality (similar to that of the Song), in

the context of emphasis on male sexual fidelity (Prov 5.16-20):

Drink water from your own cistern,  
running water from your own well.  
16 Should your springs overflow in the streets,  
your streams of water in the public squares?  
17 Let them be yours alone,  
never to be shared with strangers.  
18 May your fountain be blessed,  
and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth.  
19 A loving doe, a graceful deer --  
may her breasts satisfy you always,  
may you ever be captivated by her love.  
20 Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress?  
Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife?

4. The above mentioned emphasis on fidelity to a wife is echoed in 6.28-29: *Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? 29 So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished.*
5. Intimacy with wisdom is signified by a term of closeness/endearment-- "sister"! (Say to wisdom, "You are my sister," and call understanding your kinsman Prov 7.4)
6. Wisdom is personified as a woman in chapters 8-9:

*Does not wisdom call out?  
Does not understanding raise her voice?  
2 On the heights along the way,  
where the paths meet, she takes her stand;  
3 beside the gates leading into the city,  
at the entrances, she cries aloud:  
4 "To you, O men, I call out;  
I raise my voice to all mankind.  
5 You who are simple, gain prudence;  
you who are foolish, gain understanding.  
6 Listen, for I have worthy things to say;  
I open my lips to speak what is right.*

*Wisdom has built her house;  
she has hewn out its seven pillars.  
2 She has prepared her meat and mixed her wine;  
she has also set her table.  
3 She has sent out her maids, and she calls  
from the highest point of the city.  
4 "Let all who are simple come in here!"*

*she says to those who lack judgment.  
5 "Come, eat my food  
and drink the wine I have mixed.  
6 Leave your simple ways and you will live;  
walk in the way of understanding.*

Notice that this female figure stands at 'the gates', calls to the men (8.4, 34), and throws a well-announced banquet for teaching the simple. That a female is portrayed as a personification of wisdom certainly seems reasonable in light of the historical narrative sections studied so far, and these passages in Proverbs will only carry their force if a female sage is an intelligible (and perhaps even common) figure in that historical period.

7. Father and mothers are often joined in parallel statements: *The proverbs of Solomon: A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother.* (10.1; cf. also 15.20; 20.20; 23.25; 28.24; 30.11,17)
8. Kindhearted women are held up as foils for evil men(!) in 11.16: *16 A kindhearted woman gains respect, but ruthless men gain only wealth.*
9. The 'beauty ethic' find little place in Proverbs--character is ALWAYS held in higher honor than beauty:

*Like a gold ring in a pig's snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion. (11.22)*

*Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting;  
but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised. (31.30)*

10. Women are held to be examples of numerous virtues: kindness (11.16), noble character (12.4), wisdom (14.1), prudence (19.14), discretion (11.22), reverence for YHWH (31.30).
11. Wives are specially called "good" and a cause of blessing from God(!)--*He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the LORD.* (18.22). And, they are also considered to be "gifts" from God --*Houses and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the LORD.* (19.14).
12. As stated so often, God has a special heart for widows (15.25)--*The LORD tears down the proud man's house but he keeps the widow's boundaries intact.* (notice the implicit statement of legal standing of widows vis-a-vis property rights.)
13. We should note that part of Proverbs was WRITTEN by a woman: *The sayings of King Lemuel -- an oracle his mother taught him:* (Prov 31.1). This women is, of course, also a leader--a Queen Mother.
14. The female wisdom figure of chapters 8 and 9 is given real 'flesh' in the closing illustration of the book--the Godly Woman of chapter 31:

- 14 *She is like the merchant ships, bringing her food from afar.*  
15 *She gets up while it is still dark; she provides food for her family and portions for her servant girls.*  
16 *She considers a field and buys it; out of her earnings she plants a vineyard.*  
17 *She sets about her work vigorously; her arms are strong for her tasks.*  
18 *She sees that her trading is profitable, and her lamp does not go out at night.*  
19 *In her hand she holds the distaff and grasps the spindle with her fingers.*  
20 *She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy.*  
21 *When it snows, she has no fear for her household; for all of them are clothed in scarlet.*  
22 *She makes coverings for her bed; she is clothed in fine linen and purple.*  
23 *Her husband is respected at the city gate, where he takes his seat among the elders of the land.*  
24 *She makes linen garments and sells them, and supplies the merchants with sashes.*  
25 *She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come.*  
26 *She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.*  
27 *She watches over the affairs of her household and does not eat the bread of idleness.*  
28 *Her children arise and call her blessed; her husband also, and he praises her:*  
29 *"Many women do noble things, but you surpass them all."*  
30 *Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the LORD is to be praised.*  
31 *Give her the reward she has earned, and let her works bring her praise at the city gate.*

There have been entire books written on the virtues of this woman, but for our purposes here we need only to notice verse 26: *She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue.*. This is a wise woman, and one that everyone pays attention to, for instruction.

There are those that suggest that Proverbs STILL denigrates women as a group(!).  
So, [WS:AST:19](#):

This raising up of wisdom as a female image is contrasted throughout the text with attacks on loose women, on adventuresses, on those women who lead men astray. This is, in fact, a textbook for young men, and as such it established polar opposites of female imagery; ethereal wisdom contrasts sharply with living, sexual women.

This seems a bit wide of the mark. There are so many more negative statements about men in Proverbs than women (e.g. 1.18; 2.12; 3.31,32; 4.14-17; 5.22; 6.19; 6.32; 9.7; 11.7; 11.12; 11.16, 17, 18, 20; 12.7; 12.12...just for starters!). Perhaps in this text "ethereal righteousness contrasts sharply with living, practical men."

## 6. Ecclesiastes

This book is one of the strangest in the bible. It is classified in ANE studies in the genre of 'pessimism literature,' along with such works as the Egyptian "Dispute of a Man with his Soul (*ba*)" [[ANET:405](#)] or "The Harpers' Songs" [[ANET:467](#)]. These non-Israelite works:

These all express a high degree of cynicism regarding the value of life, the coherence of the created system, and the role played by deity.  
(AILICC:187)

In his analysis of the practical differences between Ecc. and these pessimistic works, Walton summarizes (AILICC:189):

...the practical results were not very much different. What difference did exist resurfaced in beliefs about God. For the author of Ecclesiastes, though ritualism and legalism are both discarded (5.1-7; 7.15-18), the fear of God is one tenet not singled out as meaningless; it is rather encouraged because of the meaninglessness of everything else (5.7). God is taken seriously. In contrast to this, the Egyptian works do not bring deity into the issue, while the Mesopotamian work includes religious practice (ritual) in its cynicism...The ancient Near Eastern advice then is "Enjoy life," while the Israelite advice is "Enjoy life and fear God."

Now, this is a rather significant difference. This MAY imply that Ecc was written as a counter-pose to ANE 'pessimism', or that large portions of the text are a teaching device to get the student to see the logical conclusions of judging things that way --that is, only applying "under the sun" values.

Indeed, one of the best scholars on the wisdom literature, Derek Kidner, suggests that the Teacher devotes large chunks of the text to the "devil's advocate" position, while always concluding each section with a bit of more realistic (in the context of God) optimism [*The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes*, IVP:1985.]

Think about this for a second. IF as traditional evangelical scholarship maintains, the author of the Song of Songs, much of Proverbs, and Ecclly are all Solomon or a close circle of associates, then Ecclly MUST be taken in the context of the glowing praises and valuation of women (and wisdom, and rationality, etc.) in those related books. Consider some of the more bizarre statements of Ecclly that would make sense in either a (1) "spoof" of ANE pessimistic positions; or (2) a teaching "devils advocate" approach:

1. 10.19: *19 A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything.*
2. Everything (except God) is called "meaningless".
3. 7.16ff: *Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise -- why destroy yourself? 17 Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool -- why die before your time? 18 It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all extremes.*
4. And the relevant passage for our study--7.28f:

*while I was still searching but not finding --  
I found one upright man among a thousand,  
but not one upright woman among them all.  
This only have I found:  
God made mankind upright,  
but men have gone in search of many schemes."*

[Now this contrast between "one good man, but NO good women" could be a simple 'stair-step' proverbial device of the form "N things the Lord hates; yea, N+1 things He despises". This would make the verse fit the verse 29, which glups them all together in their aberrant behavior.]

If this understanding is correct, then the (possibly negative statement about no righteous women) plays into a "devil's advocate" position and is NOT the real position of the author(s) of Ecclly, Song, and Proverbs (!). Indeed, the author in another bitter passage says *26 I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. (7.26)*, but this escape is apparently not from ALL women, for he advises the student to *Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, (9.9)*, In other words, "they can't ALL be bad"!

This view is essentially supported by Murphy in WBC. He points out that the comment on women in 7.26 (" I found more bitter than death the woman who is a trap, whose heart is snares and nets, whose hands are fetters; one who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her. ") a comment on adultery, and not on women:

"The reader may be caught off guard after the elaborate introduction to Qoheleth's search in v 25. The discovery seems to be merely an old topos celebrated in the wisdom literature (cf. Prov 2:16–19; 5:1–4; 7:22–23; 9:13–18; cf. also 22:15; 23:27–28): the adulterous woman. The description fits a certain type of woman against whom the sages railed; it is not a description of the female sex per se. H. Hertzberg rightly observes that Qoheleth does not condemn woman as such. ... A different perspective of Qoheleth's view of woman emerges from 9:9. The description in v 26a has the ring of a proverbial saying about a particular type of woman, and it is expressed in parallelism.... He shared the traditional Israelite values about sexual morality and would be merely reflecting these in the terminology of v 26: adultery is wrong and fidelity is good."

And Murphy explicited finds the author *rejecting* the proposition of asymmetry:

"The usual interpretation of this verse is that Qoheleth discovered one good man but no good woman. R. N. Whybray is correct in insisting that the verse "does not state what it is that the speaker has sought, and which he has, or has not, found." It is the context (vv 26 and 29) that justifies the assumption that the specific meaning deals with moral conduct: good, trustworthy, etc. Then the statement is reminiscent of Prov 20:6, "Who can find a man worthy of trust?" (cf. Prov 31:10). The alleged discovery of Qoheleth does not speak well for man (one in a thousand!), much less for woman. In support of this view many examples of misogyny from various ages and cultures could be instanced. It is true that Hellenistic Judaism shared in the general failure to appreciate women properly, and it would be no surprise to find Qoheleth a child of his time. **But is the intent of v 28 to disparage women?** Our translation indicates that he **rejects** a saying that is demeaning to women. **v 29 contains his verdict on all human beings, men and women alike, and would be anticlimactic after a misogynistic statement.** The series of "discoveries" in vv 26–28 seems to be threefold: (1) v 26 concerns the saying about the adulterous women (which can be duplicated in Proverbs and the wisdom tradition); (2) **vv 27–28 deal with a saying about one in a thousand (man not woman), which is found *not* to be true;** (3) v 29 presents a statement about humankind, which is found to be true. "

This instructional motif is also present in the use of the "under the sun" phrase.

The teacher often points out that using the valuation-grid of "under the sun" leads to this frustration (i.e. revelation is needed!!!). And, without proper valuation standards, all men and women look bad, life looks meaningless, and we had best just have a party.

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**Summary:**

1. The Song describes the beauty of mutual physical love (the "desire for your husband" of Gen 3 is apparently okay!)
2. The Book of Ruth paints a deliberate portrait of a good woman hero.
3. The Book of Psalms' occasional references describe women's' involvement and valuation in the society.
4. The Book of Job, as a microcosm of ANE life, displays several passages with positive info about women--legal, social, family, care of--even a female image of God.
5. The Book of Proverbs is replete with the virtues of ordinary women, and the sage-like character and roles show up throughout.
6. The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches that bad standards affect ones valuation of ALL of life--including women.

**All in all, the "leisure literature" shows an EXTREMELY high view of women (parts of it are even authored by women). When the nation of Israel got around to reflecting on its historical situation, its worldview, and its blessing by YHWH, women were recognized as being key (and beneficial) players in the covenant community.**



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# Women in the Heart of God (4a)

## The Data From the Divided Monarchy Literature

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[updated 11/8/96]

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This period of time stretches from the division of the Kingdom after the death of Solomon, until the destruction of Jerusalem after 600 B.C.

The literature of this period come from two types of sources--historical and prophetic. The historical material is given in I Kings 12 through the end of 2nd Kings, and II Chronicles. The prophetic literature that falls into this period occurs in the books of Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Of these, Jonah, Amos, Hosea dealt with the Northern Kingdom (generally), and Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah focused on the Southern Kingdom.

This period is a period of high turmoil, so there is little or no 'leisure literature' of the period. (Lamentations was produced AFTER the Fall of Jerusalem, and will be covered in THAT time period.)

So, in this period, we have TWO sources of primary data: the **historical** data in the narratives/literature between the division of the Kingdom (in I Kings 11-12) and the Fall of the Jerusalem, and the [data in the prophetic writings](#) within that period. In this section, we will focus on the HISTORICAL data.

**One: The Historical Data** from the Divided Kingdom-period narratives.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. The importance of the Queen-mother (and the Queen)
2. Specific ways God used women in His plan
3. Interactions between God and women in the text
4. Aspects of the literary portrayal of women in the lit
5. Indications of their relative "equality" within the culture
6. Passages illustrating their legal status

7. Indications of their roles in the cult and other public life
8. The outstanding women heroes and role-models of the period.

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## 1. The importance of the Queen-mother (and the Queen)

It is commonly assumed that, since all the kings of Israel were men, that women had no access to governmental power. We will see that this is very wrong, esp. in this period. Not only will we see an official 'court prophetess' (i.e. Huldah), but we will see a continuation of the queen-mother position instituted by Solomon in I Kings 2.

Some might object that their power was only derived from their relationship with a male (which is actually excepted at least once in the biblical record with Athaliah--2 Kgs 11). But strangely enough, this makes access to power MORE AVAILABLE to women than men. Think about this: ANY women could marry a king and so become a queen, and possibly a queen-mother if any of her sons came to the throne (a study of the backgrounds of the queen-mothers of Israel would show an incredible diversity of backgrounds of the wives). But a male could only become a king if he were born of the reigning king! Bloodlines are so much more restrictive than are marriages--for accession to power.

In the U.S.A, there was a popular saying when I was a kid--"any boy could become president." But in Israel, this was NOT the case--"NO boy can become king--except one of the handful born in the court!". But, "any woman could marry the king--and become a queen" would have been true in Israel of this period (and was actually demonstrated in actual practice.)

Let's look at some of the passages that illustrate aspects of the status, power, and influence of the queen.

- I Kings 14.1: *At that time Abijah son of Jeroboam became ill, 2 and Jeroboam said to his wife, "Go, disguise yourself, so you won't be recognized as the wife of Jeroboam.. [Notice: the wife of the king apparently either was (1) well known by sight as a public figure; or (2) especially attired in regal clothes (more likely). Either of these would indicate special status in the public eye.]*
- The whole story in I Kings 14 is interesting:

*6 So when Ahijah heard the sound of her footsteps at the door, he said, "Come in, wife of Jeroboam. Why this pretense? I have been sent to you with bad news. 7 Go, tell Jeroboam that this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: `I raised you up from among the people and made you a leader over my people Israel. 8 I tore the kingdom away from the house of David and gave it to you, but you have not been like my servant David, who kept my commands and followed me with all his heart, doing only what was right in my eyes. 9 You have done more evil than all who lived before you. You have made for yourself other gods, idols made of metal; you have provoked me to anger and thrust me behind your back. 10 " `Because of this, I am going to bring disaster on the house of Jeroboam. I will cut off from Jeroboam every last male in Israel -- slave or free. I will burn up the house of Jeroboam as one burns dung, until it is all gone. 11 Dogs will eat those belonging to Jeroboam who die in the city, and the birds of the air will feed on those who die in the country. The LORD has spoken!" 12 "As for you, go back home. When you set foot in your city, the boy will die. 13 All Israel will mourn for him and bury him. He is the only one belonging to Jeroboam who will be buried, because he is the only one in the house of Jeroboam in whom the LORD, the God of Israel, has found anything good.*

Notice that (1) Jeroboam trusted his wife with this important task--instead of his other possible agents; (2) God delivers a prophecy to the wife, and entrusts it to her care and delivery; (3) no criticism of the queen-wife is made; (4) her son is actually complimented in the message from God!!; and (5) she faithfully performs all the tasks she is asked to do--in spite of the possible reprisals of her husband due to the 'strong' message.

- I Kings 14.31: *And Rehoboam rested with his fathers and was buried with them in the City of David. His mother's name was Naamah; she was an Ammonite.. [This passage illustrates that the king's lineage is given from the mother--the father is assumed to be the previous monarch. Notice also that the point about 'any girl could become queen' extended even to foreigners who were forbidden to participate in the cult!--cf. Dt 23.3: *No Ammonite or Moabite or any of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD, even down to the tenth generation..]**
- I Kings 15.9ff: *In the twentieth year of Jeroboam king of Israel, Asa became king of Judah, 10 and he reigned in Jerusalem forty-one years. His*

*grandmother's name was Maacah daughter of Abishalom. 11 Asa did what was right in the eyes of the LORD, as his father David had done. 12 He expelled the male shrine prostitutes from the land and got rid of all the idols his fathers had made. 13 He even deposed his grandmother Maacah from her position as queen mother, because she had made a repulsive Asherah pole. Asa cut the pole down and burned it in the Kidron Valley..*

Notice carefully that the queen mother was a 'position' that was NOT automatic! The fact that the good king Asa 'deposed' his grandmother indicates that 'queen mother' was a position with definite authority and power. This would have involved public announcements as well. [see also 2 Chr 15.16]

- 2 Chr 22.2f: *Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned in Jerusalem one year. His mother's name was Athaliah, a granddaughter of Omri. 3 He too walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother encouraged him in doing wrong. [Notice simply that the queen mother had considerable influence over the king.]*
- 2 Kings 10.12: *Jehu then set out and went toward Samaria. At Beth Eked of the Shepherds, 13 he met some relatives of Ahaziah king of Judah and asked, "Who are you?" They said, "We are relatives of Ahaziah, and we have come down to greet the families of the king and of the queen mother."*

Here was a diplomatic party from the Southern kingdom to the North. The relatives of the king of Judah were paying a 'political' visit to the relatives of the king of Israel. Notice that the dignitaries mentioned included the king and the queen mother BOTH, and the families of BOTH. The queen mother is apparently a very important personage.

- 2 Kings 11.1: *When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. 2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. 3 He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.*

Notice that this queen mother had sufficient power and influence to rule "without a male" for SIX years! She must have had adequate support from the large majority of court "males". The significance of this for our study here is that the populace didn't apparently think it too odd. In other words, the queen mother was apparently involved enough in the day-to-day ruling

of the kingdom to not be 'out of character' in ruling alone. This indicates that the range of power and responsibility of the queen mother, although not delineated in the bible, was considerably larger than is commonly imagined.

The queen-mother figure (and to a lesser extent the queen) exerted considerable influence in governmental affairs. She was a recognized leader, had an official position, and was the subject of diplomatic visits. She was involved in the active ruling of the country to the extent that it was not incomprehensible for one to reign by herself for years.

## 2. Specific ways God used women in His plan.

There were a number of situations where God used women to further His plan in history--with the instruments of His work spanning the entire spectrum of social status--from queen mother to captive slave girl in Syria. Let's look at some of these.

- I Kings 17:9: *Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 8 Then the word of the LORD came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."*

Notice: God had specifically instructed a foreign woman to take care of his 'lead' prophet of the time! This person gets a direct command from God (non-mediated) and is the single means of support for the prophet Elijah.

- 2 Kings 5: *1 Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy. 2 Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. 3 She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." 4 Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. 5 "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents of silver, six thousand shekels of gold and ten sets of clothing.*

Compare with the end of the story (verse 17): *"If you will not," said Naaman, "please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of*

*mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD.*

This "conversion" of a gentile military commander, from the worship of the foreign god Rimmon, to the true God YHWH, started with a captive Israelite slave girl speaking up! She somehow knew about Elijah and had faith in his prophetic ministry. She apparently also cared enough for her master and mistress to speak up.

- *2 Kings 11.1: When Athaliah the mother of Ahaziah saw that her son was dead, she proceeded to destroy the whole royal family. 2 But Jehosheba, the daughter of King Jehoram and sister of Ahaziah, took Joash son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the royal princes, who were about to be murdered. She put him and his nurse in a bedroom to hide him from Athaliah; so he was not killed. 3 He remained hidden with his nurse at the temple of the LORD for six years while Athaliah ruled the land.*

Here we have a future queen mother keeping the future good king Joash alive. Joash will be a positive influence on the nation, but he would have been killed by Athaliah had his mother not been used of God to save his life.

- *2 Kings 22.14:*

*Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Acbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to speak to the prophetess Huldah, who was the wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem, in the Second District. 15 She said to them, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: Tell the man who sent you to me, 16 'This is what the LORD says: I am going to bring disaster on this place and its people, according to everything written in the book the king of Judah has read. 17 Because they have forsaken me and burned incense to other gods and provoked me to anger by all the idols their hands have made, my anger will burn against this place and will not be quenched.' 18 Tell the king of Judah, who sent you to inquire of the LORD, 'This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says concerning the words you heard: 19 Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I have spoken against this place and its people, that they would become accursed and laid waste, and because you tore your robes and wept in my*

*presence, I have heard you, declares the LORD. 20 Therefore I will gather you to your fathers, and you will be buried in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster I am going to bring on this place.'" So they took her answer back to the king. 1 Then the king called together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. 2 He went up to the temple of the LORD with the men of Judah, the people of Jerusalem, the priests and the prophets -- all the people from the least to the greatest. He read in their hearing all the words of the Book of the Covenant, which had been found in the temple of the LORD. 3 The king stood by the pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the LORD -- to follow the LORD and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, thus confirming the words of the covenant written in this book. Then all the people pledged themselves to the covenant.*

In this event, the good king Josiah had discovered what was apparently the core of the book of Deuteronomy. He sends his royal 'cabinet' to the prophetess Huldah, who delivers a message to the king from the LORD. This message is so used by God to stir the king to action, that massive reforms sweep the nation, staving off disaster for a while. God used His faithful daughter Huldah to get a message of judgment (and implicit hope) to the person who could make a difference.

"It is possible that Huldah's career involved some sort of official position in the temple, since the Mishnah--a compilation of Jewish commentary and traditions completed in about 200CE--states that the two southern gates to the Temple Mount were called the Huldah Gates (Middoth 1.3). But she seems especially to have merited renown as a scholar, for it is on that basis that the king and high priest seek her opinion on the authenticity of the newly discovered scroll...The nature of her reputation seems all the more extraordinary when one realizes that Hilkiyah immediately seeks her counsel, apparently never considering an approach to a male member of any school of priests, prophets, or sages." ([WS:TSOS:144](#)).

- A special category of usage of women agents was that of *patronage*.

Patronage is a system that generally occurs in most developed societies. There are people of means who basically support (financially) individuals with specialized functions in the culture. We are most familiar in Western culture with things like 'patron of the arts'--meaning someone who donates resources/money to art institutions and artists. But there have also been

patrons of the sciences and patrons of the church. [Patronage was highly developed in the Greco-Roman world, as we shall see in the NT section of this course.]

Of relevance to our study here, is that God assigned 'patrons' to support his prophets, while they carried on full-time ministries to His people. These patrons were NOT men--they were women. The two most famous prophets to the Northern Kingdom--Elijah and Elisha--had patronage relations of this sort.

- I Kings 17.9ff: *Now Elijah the Tishbite, from Tishbe in Gilead, said to Ahab, "As the LORD, the God of Israel, lives, whom I serve, there will be neither dew nor rain in the next few years except at my word." 2 Then the word of the LORD came to Elijah: 3 "Leave here, turn eastward and hide in the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan. 4 You will drink from the brook, and I have ordered the ravens to feed you there." 5 So he did what the LORD had told him. He went to the Kerith Ravine, east of the Jordan, and stayed there. 6 The ravens brought him bread and meat in the morning and bread and meat in the evening, and he drank from the brook. 7 Some time later the brook dried up because there had been no rain in the land. 8 Then the word of the LORD came to him: 9 "Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."*

We have already seen how God had apparently spoken to this woman, but here we note that the subject of that command was *patronage* of the famous prophet Elijah. She keeps him alive for quite some time (although she was actually funded by a miracle from YHWH--vv.13-16: *Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: `The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"* 15 *She went away and did as Elijah had told her. So there was food every day for Elijah and for the woman and her family. 16 For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the LORD spoken by Elijah. ).* Notice that this woman was a poor widow, with a son.

- 2 Kings 4.8: *One day Elisha (note: Elijah's successor) went to*

*Shunem. And a well-to-do woman was there, who urged him to stay for a meal. So whenever he came by, he stopped there to eat. 9 She said to her husband, "I know that this man who often comes our way is a holy man of God. 10 Let's make a small room on the roof and put in it a bed and a table, a chair and a lamp for him. Then he can stay there whenever he comes to us."*

Although this was apparently not a full-time deal (although Elisha probably took food from the couple for his journeys), it was significant enough for Elisha to consider how to 'repay' the woman (no mention of the husband) in vvs. 13-14. [This relationship continued for quite some time.] Notice that this woman was a rich wife, without a son.

We do not have indications of how widespread this patronage "system" was, with respect to the prophets, but given that the first prophets were so supported, and that Jesus--the Prophet like unto Moses--was so supported (cf. Luke 8.3: *Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. These women were helping to support them out of their own means.*), we certainly would be on safe ground to assume that the tradition of female patronage of at least SOME prophets continued throughout the OT and inter-testamental periods.

### 3. Interactions between God and women in the text

There are several passages in which God's direct interaction and/or relationship with women *per se* can be seen.

1. I Kings 17.9: *"Go at once to Zarephath of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a widow in that place to supply you with food."* [Notice: We have already noted that God gave a direct command to this foreign widow.]
2. I Kings 17.13ff: *Elijah said to her, "Don't be afraid. Go home and do as you have said. But first make a small cake of bread for me from what you have and bring it to me, and then make something for yourself and your son. 14 For this is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: `The jar of flour will not be used up and the jug of oil will not run dry until the day the LORD gives rain on the land.'"* [Notice: as the story continued, God delivered a special prophecy of hope and assurance to this woman, from the leading national prophet!]

3. 2 Kings 4:

*The wife of a man from the company of the prophets cried out to Elisha, "Your servant my husband is dead, and you know that he revered the LORD. But now his creditor is coming to take my two boys as his slaves." 2 Elisha replied to her, "How can I help you? Tell me, what do you have in your house?" "Your servant has nothing there at all," she said, "except a little oil." 3 Elisha said, "Go around and ask all your neighbors for empty jars. Don't ask for just a few. 4 Then go inside and shut the door behind you and your sons. Pour oil into all the jars, and as each is filled, put it to one side." 5 She left him and afterward shut the door behind her and her sons. They brought the jars to her and she kept pouring. 6 When all the jars were full, she said to her son, "Bring me another one." But he replied, "There is not a jar left." Then the oil stopped flowing. 7 She went and told the man of God, and he said, "Go, sell the oil and pay your debts. You and your sons can live on what is left."*

Notice that God provided for this widow of a prophet--through the ministry of Elisha.

4. The only two resurrections of the dead in the OT are both to the women patrons of Elisha and Elijah (above). The fact that one of these women was destitute, while the other was wealthy, indicates that it was NOT simply 'compassion' on the widow--the only thing common to them was their sex.
5. 2 Kings 8:1: *Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years." 2 The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years.*

Notice that God delivered a very practical prophecy to this woman--and apparently not to anyone else!

6. The case of the prophetess Huldah in 2 Kings 22:14ff, clearly shows that He interacted with women prophets in the same basic fashion as men prophets. The process of prophetic inspiration is generally considered one of the most intimate of relationships with God.

#### 4. Aspects of the literary portrayal of women in the lit.

The historical material falls into the same pattern we have seen before--women are used to show the 'better qualities' we are to have. They are also represented in the narratives as having a wide range of important function in this generally difficult time.

- All of the patronage sections have extensive quotations from the women--the dialogue is preserved in some detail.
- The women are seen to witness to the reality of the One God, the authority of His servants, and the reality of His worldview:
  1. The widow patron of Elijah (I Kgs 17) is quoted in detail, and demonstrates a knowledge of sin (vs.17)
  2. Her confession (vs 24:*Then the woman said to Elijah, "Now I know that you are a man of God and that the word of the LORD from your mouth is the truth."*)
  3. The widow of the prophet in 2 Kgs 4 had faith enough to approach Elisha and to get 'enough jars'!
  4. The witness of the captive Israelite slave girl in 2 Kgs 5.2 was exemplary.
  5. The tenacious faith of the rich patron of Elisha was incredible in its strength (2 Kgs 4), resulting in the raising of her son from the dead.
- The obedience of the rich patron to the prediction of famine was perfect. (2 Kgs 8.1ff: *Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years."* 2 *The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years.*
- And obviously, the prophecy of Huldah is recorded in all its detail (2 Kgs 22). From a historical standpoint, it may be significant that there were at least two well-known male prophets in Jerusalem at this time--Zephaniah and Jeremiah. But God chose to use Huldah to deliver His critical message to the King.
- As opposed to the vast amount of evil men of the period, we only have record of two 'evil' women--Jezebel (a foreigner) and Athaliah (a decedent

of Omri, an evil king of the North). The rest of the women are models of faith and action for the Lord's purposes.

- It is in this period that the Lord begins to address the nations and cities as "daughters". At first, we see only references to local concepts like "daughters of Jerusalem" or "daughter of Babylon" or "Virgin daughter of Zion". So, 2 Kings 19.20ff: *Then Isaiah son of Amoz sent a message to Hezekiah: "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: I have heard your prayer concerning Sennacherib king of Assyria. 21 This is the word that the LORD has spoken against him: "The Virgin Daughter of Zion despises you and mocks you. The Daughter of Jerusalem tosses her head as you flee . This prophecy of Isaiah, embedded in the historical narrative foreshadows what we will find in the written prophets, and will be developed into images in which Israel is portrayed as the daughter of YHWH and/or the wife of YHWH. Far from demeaning these terms, this usage will demonstrate the high value of these terms--esp. for the Lord.*
- The 'tone' of the women's exchanges with men are anything but 'submissive and cowering'!
  - The widow's bitter statement to Elijah is strong: (1 Kgs 17.17ff: *Some time later the son of the woman who owned the house became ill. He grew worse and worse, and finally stopped breathing. 18 She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?"*
  - The rich patron's words to Elisha are strong, as are her independent actions: (2 Kgs 4.16,27ff: *"No, my lord," she objected. "Don't mislead your servant, O man of God!" and When she reached the man of God at the mountain, she took hold of his feet. Gehazi came over to push her away, but the man of God said, "Leave her alone! She is in bitter distress, but the LORD has hidden it from me and has not told me why." 28 "Did I ask you for a son, my lord?" she said. "Didn't I tell you, `Don't raise my hopes'?" 29 Elisha said to Gehazi, "Tuck your cloak into your belt, take my staff in your hand and run. If you meet anyone, do not greet him, and if anyone greets you, do not answer. Lay my staff on the boy's face." 30 But the child's mother said, "As surely as the LORD lives and as you live, I will not leave you." So he got up and followed her.)*
  - Huldah pulled no punches in delivering God's message of judgment to Josiah.

## 5. Indications of their relative "equality" within the culture.

There are many general indications of female 'equality' before God in the narratives. They are held equally guilty, are equally punished, have a high degree of influence, and are valued highly (and coordinately).

- As bad as the king Ahab was, his wife--the infamous Jezebel--was a considerable influence in this (1 Kgs 21.25): *(There was never a man like Ahab, who sold himself to do evil in the eyes of the LORD, urged on by Jezebel his wife. 26 He behaved in the vilest manner by going after idols, like the Amorites the LORD drove out before Israel.)*
- Consistently, God confronted the Israelites with their horrible practice of child sacrifice, but in each case he was careful to point out that daughters were JUST AS IMPORTANT as sons. So, 2 Kgs 17.17: *They sacrificed their sons and daughters in the fire.* (See also 2 Kgs 23.10).
- In the same way, "sons and daughters" occur a number of times in contexts of 'equal value'--compare:
  1. 2 Chrn 13.21: *But Abijah grew in strength. He married fourteen wives and had twenty-two sons and sixteen daughters.*
  2. 2 Chrn 24.2-3: *Joash did what was right in the eyes of the LORD all the years of Jehoiada the priest. 3 Jehoiada chose two wives for him, and he had sons and daughters.*
  3. 2 Chrn 28.8: *8 The Israelites took captive from their kinsmen two hundred thousand wives, sons and daughters.*
  4. 2 Chrn 29.9: *"This is why our fathers have fallen by the sword and why our sons and daughters and our wives are in captivity."*
- 2 Chrn 15.12-13: *They entered into a covenant to seek the LORD, the God of their fathers, with all their heart and soul. 13 All who would not seek the LORD, the God of Israel, were to be put to death, whether small or great, man or woman.* [Notice--the covenant was equally binding on men and women, with equal penalty for both.]

## 6. Passages illustrating their legal status

There are two very interesting pieces of data in this period--the story of Elisha's patron, and the occurrence of women's names in genealogies.

First, in the story of Elisha's patron, she is forewarned by God of a coming famine and flees to a foreign country (2 Kings 8):

*Now Elisha had said to the woman whose son he had restored to life, "Go away with your family and stay for a while wherever you can, because the LORD has decreed a famine in the land that will last seven years." 2 The woman proceeded to do as the man of God said. She and her family went away and stayed in the land of the Philistines seven years. 3 At the end of the seven years she came back from the land of the Philistines and went to the king to beg for her house and land. 4 The king was talking to Gehazi, the servant of the man of God, and had said, "Tell me about all the great things Elisha has done." 5 Just as Gehazi was telling the king how Elisha had restored the dead to life, the woman whose son Elisha had brought back to life came to beg the king for her house and land. Gehazi said, "This is the woman, my lord the king, and this is her son whom Elisha restored to life." 6 The king asked the woman about it, and she told him. Then he assigned an official to her case and said to him, "Give back everything that belonged to her, including all the income from her land from the day she left the country until now."*

Notice that this woman has access to the King of Israel (v5), has a public official assigned to her case by the king (v6), is given her home and land back(v6), and even is given the income from the property accrued during her absence!

Now, EITHER this woman is doing all this WITHOUT her husband (who was alive, but old, in 4.14) or, more likely, she is doing this as a widow (although with a son). In either case, this is remarkable access to legal structures.

Second, in 2 Chr 31.17-18: *And they distributed to the priests enrolled by their families in the genealogical records and likewise to the Levites twenty years old or more, according to their responsibilities and their divisions. 18 They included all the little ones, the wives, and the sons and daughters of the whole community listed in these genealogical records.*

The important thing to notice here is that the wives and children were listed in the genealogical records--one of the cornerstones of their legal system.

## 7. **Indications of their roles in the cult and other public life.**

There are a couple of "public" scenes in the narrative and a few indications of cultic roles by women.

1. The case of Huldah the prophetess is obviously related to the central core of Israel's covenant with God.
2. *2 Chrn 20.5,13: Then Jehoshaphat stood up in the assembly of Judah and Jerusalem at the temple of the LORD in the front of the new courtyard and 13 All the men of Judah, with their wives and children and little ones, stood there before the LORD.*

Notice that this public fast/assembly/covenant action was attended by ALL the relevant parties--including the wives.

3. *2 Chrn 35.25: Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments.*

Jeremiah PROBABLY wrote these laments before the Exile (on the occasion of Josiah's death), and the Chronicler's remark about the men and women singers probably points back to the period immediately after the death of Josiah. Thus, women were involved in the public lamenting of kings and transmission of tradition in the nation.

## 4. **The outstanding women heroes and role-models of the period.**

Several major heroes emerge from the historical data in these narratives:

1. The patron of Elijah (directly interacting with God)
2. The patron of Elisha (a model of support and tenacity)
3. The widow of the prophet (with such great expectations of God)
4. Huldah, the prophetess (spoke the word of God fearlessly to the king)
5. Joash's mother (who saved the good king's life)

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**Summary:**

There are several major points that arise in this set of data:

1. We saw the emergence or development of **THREE** powerful female roles: patron, queen-mother, prophetess--with seemingly **NO** restrictions on women's access to these.
2. Key figures of the period were supported or saved by women (Elijah, Elisha, Joash).
3. In this period we saw the only OT resurrections--**ALL** done for women.
4. We saw women as models of faith in, and obedience to, the revelation of God.
5. They are seen to have had access to the 'normal' legal systems of the day.
6. They are shown to be strong personages, esp. in dealing with God's messengers.
7. They are seen to be active in public life and in cultic and/or informational ministries.

**Interestingly, in spite of some claims that womens' roles were REDUCING during this period, we have seen the opposite--their influence and power in the society was increased substantially, through the growth of several important social roles: patron, queen-mother, prophetess. The portraits painted of them are real, vibrant, strong, influential--and loyal to their Father.**



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[\(Reference Abbreviations\)](#)

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# Women in the Heart of God (4b)

## The Data From the Divided Monarchy Literature

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[updated 11/9/96]

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This period of time stretches from the division of the Kingdom after the death of Solomon, until the destruction of Jerusalem after 600 B.C.

The literature of this period come from two types of sources--historical and prophetic. The historical material is given in I Kings 12 through the end of 2nd Kings, and II Chronicles. The prophetic literature that falls into this period occurs in the books of Jonah, Amos, Hosea, Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah. Of these, Jonah, Amos, Hosea dealt with the Northern Kingdom (generally), and Micah, Isaiah, and Jeremiah focused on the Southern Kingdom.

This period is a period of high turmoil, so there is little or no 'leisure literature' of the period. (Lamentations was produced AFTER the Fall of Jerusalem, and will be covered in THAT time period.)

So, in this period, we have TWO sources of primary data: the **historical** data in the narratives/literature between the division of the Kingdom (in I Kings 11-12) and the Fall of the Jerusalem, and the **data in the prophetic writings** within that period. In this section, we will focus on the PROPHETIC data.

**One: The Prophetic Data** from the Divided Kingdom-period prophetic literature.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. Indications of cultural power
2. Indications of relative 'equality' in the culture
3. Situations in which females were used by God in His plan
4. Glimpses of aspects of women's lives.
5. Indications of value
6. Instances of God's care for women

Once we have examined that data, we will discuss some of the 'difficult' passages relative to women's status/image in the culture of the data.

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## 1. **Indications of cultural power**

There are many, many indications of women's power and influence in this period, but most of them reflect abuse. In the historical literature, we saw several good ones--patronage, prophecy, and good queen-mothers. But we began to see abuses of that power by women as well--the cases of Jezebel (queen of the North) and Athaliah (queen mother in the south) stood out.

In the prophetic literature--which is generally focused on reform (and hence, aimed at the 'negatives' of the situation) and future promises (to give hope in the midst of judgment)--most of the 'behavior addressed' will be negative. And, unfortunately, in this period the abuses are not confined to male agents--the women become oppressive and arrogant also.

The Queen-mother will still figure in this literature somewhat (although the addressees will broaden to the entire ruling class). So, indications of the existence/influence of the Queen-mother can be found in:

*Jer 13.17-18: But if you do not listen, I will weep in secret because of your pride; my eyes will weep bitterly, overflowing with tears, because the LORD's flock will be taken captive. 18 Say to the king and to the queen mother, "Come down from your thrones, for your glorious crowns will fall from your heads."*

Notice that the queen mother has a throne, a crown, and inappropriate pride!

*Jer 22.24ff: "As surely as I live," declares the LORD, "even if you, Jehoiachin son of Jehoiakim king of Judah, were a signet ring on my right hand, I would still pull you off. 25 I will hand you over to those who seek your life, those you fear -- to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and to the Babylonians. 26 I will hurl you and the mother who gave you birth into another country, where neither of you was born, and there you both will die."*

Notice that threatened judgment on the king was accompanied equally by that on the queen mother.

And, from a literary standpoint, the tone of exchanges between men and women still manifest that 'non-subordinate' character--cf. Jer 38.21-22: *But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: 22 All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say to you: "They misled you and overcame you -- those trusted friends of yours. Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.'*

But by far and away, the clearest indication that we have of female power in that society is the MISUSE of that power, addressed in the confrontations of the prophets.

- Amos 4.1: *Hear this word, you cows of Bashan on Mount Samaria, you **women who oppress the poor and crush the needy** and say to your husbands, "Bring us some drinks!"*

Here were wives with sufficient power to oppress and crush the lower class, and the affluence to afford a luxury life-style.

- Is 3.11ff: *Woe to the wicked! Disaster is upon them! They will be paid back for what their hands have done. 12 **Youths oppress my people, women rule over them.** O my people, your guides lead you astray; they turn you from the path. 13 The LORD takes his place in court; he rises to judge the people. 14 The LORD enters into judgment against the elders and leaders of his people: "It is you who have ruined my vineyard; the plunder from the poor is in your houses. 15 What do you mean by **crushing my people** and grinding the faces of the poor?" declares the Lord, the LORD Almighty. 16 The LORD says, "**The women of Zion are haughty**, walking along with outstretched necks, flirting with their eyes, tripping along with mincing steps, with ornaments jingling on their ankles. 17 Therefore the Lord will bring sores on the heads of the women of Zion; the LORD will make their scalps bald."*

Notice that these women 'rule' over the people, are 'haughty', are considered 'elders and leaders', and have plundered the poor and needy.

- Is 4.4f: *The Lord will wash away the filth of the women of Zion; he will cleanse the bloodstains from Jerusalem by a spirit of judgment and a spirit of fire.*

The literary parallelism between 'filth' and 'bloodstains' indicates that the women of Zion were guilty of bloodshed.

- Is 9.17: *Therefore the Lord will take no pleasure in the young men, nor will he pity the fatherless and widows, for everyone is ungodly and wicked, every mouth speaks vileness.*

Even the widows were wicked and spoke vileness!

What this indicates is substantial cultural/social power on the part of women.

## 2. Indications of relative 'equality' in the culture

There are a number of indications in the prophets that women received equal punishment, equal treatment, equal honor, were held to equal standards, and had equal access to legal structures.

- Amos 8.13f: *"In that day "the lovely young women and strong young men will faint because of thirst. 14 They who swear by the shame of Samaria, or say, 'As surely as your god lives, O Dan,' or, 'As surely as the god of Beersheba lives' -- they will fall, never to rise again."* [Notice that the young men and WOMEN are equally punished.]
- Is 24.1-2: *See, the LORD is going to lay waste the earth and devastate it; he will ruin its face and scatter its inhabitants -- 2 it will be the same for priest as for people, for master as for servant, for mistress as for maid, for seller as for buyer, for borrower as for lender, for debtor as for creditor.* [Notice again that women are equally judged in this prophecy.]
- Jer 6.11: *But I am full of the wrath of the LORD, and I cannot hold it in. "Pour it out on the children in the street and on the young men gathered together; **both husband and wife** will be caught in it, and the old, those weighed down with years.* [Notice that both husband and wife are equally 'caught'.]
- Jer 7.18: *The children gather wood, the fathers light the fire, and the women knead the dough and make cakes of bread for the Queen of Heaven. They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. 19 But am I the one they are provoking? declares the LORD. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?* [Notice that the women are equally involved in the apostasy.]
- Jer 11.21: *"Therefore this is what the LORD says about the men of Anathoth who are seeking your life and saying, 'Do not prophesy in the*

*name of the LORD or you will die by our hands' -- 22 therefore this is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine. [Notice that the daughters suffer equally with the sons.]*

- Jer 16.7: *No one will offer food to comfort those who mourn for the dead -- not even for a father or a mother -- nor will anyone give them a drink to console them. [Notice--equal treatment for father and mother.]*
- Jer 44.9: *Have you forgotten the wickedness committed by your fathers and **by the kings and queens** of Judah and the wickedness committed **by you and your wives** in the land of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem? [Notice that the evil agents were equally the men and the women.]*
- Jer 44.19ff: *The women added, "When we burned incense to the Queen of Heaven and poured out drink offerings to her, did not our husbands know that we were making cakes like her image and pouring out drink offerings to her?" 20 Then Jeremiah said to all the people, both men and women, who were answering him, 21 "Did not the LORD remember and think about the incense burned in the towns of Judah and the streets of Jerusalem by you and your fathers, your kings and your officials and the people of the land? 22 When the LORD could no longer endure your wicked actions and the detestable things you did, your land became an object of cursing and a desolate waste without inhabitants, as it is today. 23 Because you have burned incense and have sinned against the LORD and have not obeyed him or followed his law or his decrees or his stipulations, this disaster has come upon you, as you now see." [Notice that both the men and the women were involved DELIBERATELY in violating the covenant of YHWH.]*
- Jer 51.11f: *"You are my war club, my weapon for battle -- with you I shatter nations, with you I destroy kingdoms, 21 with you I shatter horse and rider, with you I shatter chariot and driver, 22 with you I shatter man and woman, with you I shatter old man and youth, with you I shatter young man and maiden, [Notice that the agent that God would raise up for judgment upon the nation would do so equally upon men and women.]*
- A special group of 'equality' passages comprise those that show that the men were held to the same or higher standards of sexual morality.
  - Hos 4.14f: *"I will not punish your daughters when they turn to prostitution, nor your daughters-in-law when they commit adultery, because the men themselves consort with harlots and sacrifice with shrine prostitutes [Notice that God will not judge the evil of the*

women because the men are guilty--no double standard here!]

- Jer 5.7: *"Why should I forgive you? Your children have forsaken me and sworn by gods that are not gods. I supplied all their needs, yet they committed adultery and thronged to the houses of prostitutes. 8 They are well-fed, lusty stallions, each neighing for another man's wife. 9 Should I not punish them for this?" declares the LORD.* [Notice that it is only the men who are singled out for rebuke in this area!]
- Jer 29.21: *This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says about Ahab son of Kolaiah and Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, who are prophesying lies to you in my name: "I will hand them over to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and he will put them to death before your very eyes. 22 Because of them, all the exiles from Judah who are in Babylon will use this curse: 'The LORD treat you like Zedekiah and Ahab, whom the king of Babylon burned in the fire.' 23 For they have done outrageous things in Israel; they have committed adultery with their neighbors' wives and in my name have spoken lies, which I did not tell them to do. I know it and am a witness to it," declares the LORD.* [Notice that YHWH will judge these false male prophets for both deception AND for sexual misconduct--"outrageous things".]

So, the men are certainly held to sexual standards--at least as high as the women.

- There are a few passages that give us a glimpse of their access to/usage of LEGAL power.
  - Micah 2.8: *Lately my people have risen up like an enemy. You strip off the rich robe from those who pass by without a care, like men returning from battle. 9 You drive the women of my people from their pleasant homes.* [Notice that women could possess 'pleasant' homes.]
  - Is 1.16-18,23: *Take your evil deeds out of my sight! Stop doing wrong, 17 learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the **case of the widow**... Your rulers are rebels, companions of thieves; they all love bribes and chase after gifts. They do not defend the cause of the fatherless; the **widow's case** does not come before them.* [Notice that the widow is said to have a 'case'--a legal term.]

- Is 10.1: *Woe to those who make unjust laws, to those who issue oppressive decrees, 2 to deprive the poor of their rights and withhold justice from the oppressed of my people, making widows their prey and robbing the fatherless.* [Notice that the widow's situation is stated in a specifically LEGAL context--laws, rights, justice--indicating access to the legal system. They were NOT "non-entities"!]
- Jer 3.1: *"If a man divorces his wife and she leaves him and marries another man, should he return to her again?"* [Apparently, divorced women were allowed by law to re-marry.]

So, although we don't have a lot of data about the legal situation in these passages, what we DO have supports a general position that women/widows had access to legal power.

The fact that women were held to be equally responsible and held to equal standards indicates a general co-responsibility to the covenant, and their access to legal power supports a 'relative equality.'

### 3. Situations in which females were used by God in His plan

Here we have a few bits of very interesting data.

- Hos 1.4f: *Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call him Jezreel, because I will soon punish the house of Jehu for the massacre at Jezreel, and I will put an end to the kingdom of Israel. 5 In that day I will break Israel's bow in the Valley of Jezreel." 6 Gomer conceived again and gave birth to a daughter. Then the LORD said to Hosea, "Call her Lo-Ruhamah, {Lo-Ruhamah means not loved.} for I will no longer show love to the house of Israel, that I should at all forgive them. 7 Yet I will show love to the house of Judah; and I will save them -- not by bow, sword or battle, or by horses and horsemen, but by the LORD their God."* [Notice that God used both the sons and daughters of Hosea as 'naming signs' in His prophetic message.]
- Is 7.14: *Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel.* [Notice that this VERY famous sign centers on a woman!--"a [virgin](#)".]
- Jer 38.22: *But if you refuse to surrender, this is what the LORD has revealed to me: 22 All the women left in the palace of the king of Judah will be brought out to the officials of the king of Babylon. Those women will say*

to you: "*They misled you and overcame you -- those trusted friends of yours. Your feet are sunk in the mud; your friends have deserted you.*" [Notice that God uses these women as a judgment on the disobedient king! Their taunts have power and force.]

- We also see the 'singing newspaper' roles of women in a few spots, except that the messages are those of grief instead of joy and victory:
  - Is 32.11f:

*Tremble, you complacent women; shudder, you daughters who feel secure! Strip off your clothes, put sackcloth around your waists. 12 Beat your breasts for the pleasant fields, for the fruitful vines 13 and for the land of my people, a land overgrown with thorns and briars -- yes, mourn for all houses of merriment and for this city of revelry.*

- Jer 9.17ff:

*This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Consider now! Call for the wailing women to come; send for the most skillful of them. 18 Let them come quickly and wail over us till our eyes overflow with tears and water streams from our eyelids. 19 The sound of wailing is heard from Zion: 'How ruined we are! How great is our shame! We must leave our land because our houses are in ruins.'" 20 Now, O women, hear the word of the LORD; open your ears to the words of his mouth. Teach your daughters how to wail; teach one another a lament.*

#### **4. Glimpses of aspects of women's lives.**

1. Adornment was not frowned upon: *Does a maiden forget her jewelry, a bride her wedding ornaments?* (Jer 2.32)
2. Aggressive 'pursuit' of love was accepted: *How skilled you are at pursuing love! Even the worst of women can learn from your ways.* (Jer 2.33)

3. Dancing was a part of their life: *4 I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel. Again you will take up your tambourines and go out to dance with the joyful.* (Jer 31.4--God draws from the everyday image.)
4. Marriage was altogether an honorable estate:
  - It was used for the image in Hosea of God's relationship to the nation.
  - Bridegrooms were to rejoice over their brides: *as a bridegroom rejoices over his bride, so will your God rejoice over you.* (Is 62.5--also an image picked up by God for His relationship with Israel.)
5. They were significant agents in the household: *For a son dishonors his father, a daughter rises up against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- a man's enemies are the members of his own household.* (Micah 7.6)

## 6. Indications of value

As in the other periods, indications of value occur in the coordinate statements (e.g. "sons and daughters"), in "relative" statements (e.g. "better than sons and daughters"), and in "worth" statements (e.g. "I will exile your sons and daughters").

1. *to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters;* (Is 56.5)
2. *From our youth shameful gods have consumed the fruits of our fathers' labor -- their flocks and herds, their sons and daughters. 25 Let us lie down in our shame, and let our disgrace cover us. We have sinned against the LORD our God, both we and our fathers; from our youth till this day we have not obeyed the LORD our God."* (Jer 3.24ff)
3. *They will devour your harvests and food, devour your sons and daughters;* (Jer 5.17)
4. *They have built the high places of Topheth in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to burn their sons and daughters in the fire -- something I did not command, nor did it enter my mind.* (Jer 7.31)

5. *The wise will be put to shame; they will be dismayed and trapped. Since they have rejected the word of the LORD, what kind of wisdom do they have? 10 Therefore I will give their wives to other men and their fields to new owners. From the least to the greatest, all are greedy for gain; prophets and priests alike, all practice deceit. (Jer 8.9ff)*
6. *And the people they are prophesying to will be thrown out into the streets of Jerusalem because of the famine and sword. There will be no one to bury them or their wives, their sons or their daughters. I will pour out on them the calamity they deserve. (Jer 14.16ff)*
7. *This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: 5 "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens and eat what they produce. 6 Marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage, so that they too may have sons and daughters. (Jer 29.4ff--notice they were supposed to bear daughters also!)*
8. *35 They built high places for Baal in the Valley of Ben Hinnom to sacrifice their sons and daughters to Molech, though I never commanded, nor did it enter my mind, that they should do such a detestable thing and so make Judah sin. (Jer 32.35)*
9. *Everyone was to free his Hebrew slaves, both male and female; no one was to hold a fellow Jew in bondage. 10 So all the officials and people who entered into this covenant agreed that they would free their male and female slaves and no longer hold them in bondage. They agreed, and set them free. (Jer 34.9f)*
10. *Woe to you, O Moab! The people of Chemosh are destroyed; your sons are taken into exile and your daughters into captivity (Jer 48.46)*

However, in this period we get some **NEW** data--positive literary images involving daughters, wives, mothers, and God.

1. We have already seen in the [historical](#) section, the emergence of whole populations as the 'daughter' of a city/state. This is much more pronounced in this section. In addition to the obvious Daughter of Zion (e.g. Mich 1.13; 4.8, 13; Isaiah-6x; Jer 4.31; 6.2) and Virgin Israel (e.g. Amos 5.2; Jer 18.13; 31.21), we get "daughters of": Gallim (Is 10.30), Tarshish (Is 23.10), Sidon (Is 23.12), Babylon (Isaiah 47.1,2,5), Egypt (Jer 46.11, 24), and Dibon (Jer 48.18). There is absolutely NO HINT that any of these images are negative in the least.

2. Indeed, we even begin to get exalted portraits of this Daughter of Zion:

*As for you, O watchtower of the flock, O stronghold of the Daughter of Zion, the former dominion will be restored to you; **kingship will come to the Daughter of Jerusalem.**" (Micah 4.8)*

*"Rise and thresh, O Daughter of Zion, for I will give you horns of iron; I will give you hoofs of bronze and you will break to pieces many nations." (Mich 4.13)*

Notice that this daughter is given ascription of Royalty and Military might!

3. But beyond even this, we start to get images in which Israel is portrayed as the daughter of YHWH or the wife of YHWH--a VERY high valuation of those images!

*"Speak this word to them: "Let my eyes overflow with tears night and day without ceasing; for **my virgin daughter** -- my people -- has suffered a grievous wound, a crushing blow. (Jer 14.17)*

*How long will you wander, O unfaithful daughter? (jer 31.22)*

*But like a woman unfaithful to her husband, so you have been unfaithful to me, O house of Israel," declares the LORD. (Jer 3.20--so also Hosea)*

*For your Maker is your husband -- the LORD Almighty is his name (Is 54.5)*

4. But the most AMAZING of all, in these prophetic passages, are the texts in which God uses a female image for Himself--to communicate His depth of care, concern, commitment to His people:

*Woe to him who says to his father, 'What have you begotten?' or to his mother, 'What have you brought to birth?' 11 "This is what the LORD says -- the Holy One of Israel, and its Maker: Concerning things to come, do you question me about my children, or give me orders about the work of my hands? (Is 45.10ff)*

*"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you! 16 See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me. (Is 49.15)*

*As a mother comforts her child, so will I comfort you; and you will be comforted over Jerusalem." (Is 66.13)*

These are high-images of the female person--God as mother, God as father of His daughter, God as husband of His wife. With these images, the high value of women to God can be clearly seen.

## 7. Instances of God's care for

This period has its share of God's urging the leaders to take care of His widows (cf. Mic 2.9; Is 1.17, 23; 10.2; Jer 7.6; 22.3), but also has two NEW indications of God's tender concern for His daughters: the 'payback' to the oppressed in Jer 40.10 and the Return/eschatological promises to the nation.

The first of these is God's 'payback' to the women (and poor) that had been oppressed/robbed by the leadership:

*11 When all the Jews in Moab, Ammon, Edom and all the other countries heard that the king of Babylon had left a remnant in Judah and had appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan, as governor over them, 12 they all came back to the land of Judah, to Gedaliah at Mizpah, from all the countries where they had been scattered. And they harvested an abundance of wine and summer fruit. ( Jer 40.10f)*

These were the poor of the land, who obeyed the prophets. The later prophets had told the righteous to flee the land, and those that obeyed, returned to harvest an abundance.

But the SECOND indication--the specific inclusion of females in the grand Return and/or eschatological promises of God--is powerful. Consider these promises:

*I will say to the north, 'Give them up!' and to the south, 'Do not hold them back.' Bring my sons from afar and **my daughters** from the ends of the earth -- 7 everyone who is called by my name, whom I created*

*for my glory, whom I formed and made." (Is 43.6)*

*This is what the Sovereign LORD says: "See, I will beckon to the Gentiles, I will lift up my banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry **your daughters** on their shoulders. 23 Kings will be your foster fathers, and their queens your nursing mothers. (Is 49.22)*

*"Lift up your eyes and look about you: All assemble and come to you; your sons come from afar, and **your daughters** are carried on the arm. 5 Then you will look and be radiant, your heart will throb and swell with joy; (Is 60.4)*

*Then **maidens will dance** and be glad, young men and old as well. I will turn their mourning into gladness; I will give them comfort and joy instead of sorrow. 14 I will satisfy the priests with abundance, and my people will be filled with my bounty," declares the LORD. (Jer 31.13)*

One cannot help but notice the specific mentions of females in these promises--their release, their joy, their restoration. God assures His daughters that His heart is concerned for them, and that His plans include them in the fullest.

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There are **two passages** that come up in this literature, that COULD be understood to reflect a lower view of women.

The **first** passage is Is 4.1: *In that day seven women will take hold of one man and say, "We will eat our own food and provide our own clothes; only let us be called by your name. Take away our disgrace!"*

What it LOOKS LIKE is that it is 'disgraceful' for a women NOT to be married. Actually, however, 'disgrace' is linked to 'not being able to contribute to an inheritance' in the OT.

Let's look at the pattern and context.

The context is one of extreme financial duress and the prophecy is of virtual decimation of the male population through war:

*6 A man will seize one of his brothers at his father's home, and say, "You have a cloak, you be our leader; take charge of this heap of ruins!" 7 But in that day he will cry out, "I have no remedy. I have no food or clothing in my house; do not make me the leader of the people." (Is 3.6ff)*

*12 I will make man scarcer than pure gold, more rare than the gold of Ophir. (Is 13.12)*

*8 I will make their widows more numerous than the sand of the sea. (Jer 15.8)*

The broader context of this issue can be seen in parts of Psalms 127 and 128:

*Sons are a heritage from the LORD, children a reward from him. 4 Like arrows in the hands of a warrior are sons born in one's youth. 5 Blessed is the man whose quiver is full of them. They will not be put to shame when they contend with their enemies in the gate. (Ps 127)*

*Blessed are all who fear the LORD, who walk in his ways. 2 You will eat the fruit of your labor; blessings and prosperity will be yours. 3 Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your sons will be like olive shoots around your table. 4 Thus is the man blessed who fears the LORD. (Ps 128)*

The import of these passages (also echoed in the blessing/cursing of Deut) is that children are a sign of God's blessing. Sons, specifically, provided military protection from 'enemies'. The Hebrews took this a step farther--childlessness was therefore seen as a sign of God's "non-blessing", and therefore a source of reproach/disgrace. This can be seen in a couple of places.

*Then God remembered Rachel; he listened to her and opened her womb. 23 She became pregnant and gave birth to a son and said, "God has taken away my disgrace." (Gen 30.23)*

*They told him, "This is what Hezekiah says: This day is a day of distress and rebuke and disgrace, as when children come to the point of birth and there is no strength to deliver them. (2 Kings 19.3)*

*"Sing, O barren woman, you who never bore a child; burst into song, shout for joy, you who were never in labor; because more are the children of the desolate woman than of her who has a husband," says the LORD. 2 "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes. 3 For you will spread*

*out to the right and to the left; your descendants will dispossess nations and settle in their desolate cities. 4 "Do not be afraid; you will not suffer shame. Do not fear disgrace; you will not be humiliated. You will forget the shame of your youth and remember no more the reproach of your widowhood. (Is 54.1ff--Notice that barrenness is linked to descendants and territory.)*

To show that the link is between "disgrace" and "no-contribution-to-inheritance" see:

*Instead of their shame my people will receive a double portion, and instead of disgrace they will rejoice in their inheritance; and so they will inherit a double portion in their land, and everlasting joy will be theirs. (Is 61.7)*

*Remember, O LORD, what has happened to us; look, and see our disgrace. 2 Our inheritance has been turned over to aliens, our homes to foreigners. (Lam 5.1)*

What this nets out to is that the inability to make a contribution to the expansion of the tribal or national group was a source of 'disgrace'. Although the biblical text typically puts this in the context of women--esp. barren or widows--**it ALSO applied to men!** A man could be 'shamed' by not having children as well. This is the obvious implication of the curse on Jehoiachin in Jer 22.30:

*This is what the LORD says: "Record this man as if childless, a man who will not prosper in his lifetime, for none of his offspring will prosper, none will sit on the throne of David or rule anymore in Judah."*

And, in Isaiah 56.3ff:

*And let not any eunuch complain, "I am only a dry tree." 4 For this is what the LORD says: "To the eunuchs who keep my Sabbaths, who choose what pleases me and hold fast to my covenant -- 5 to them I will give within my temple and its walls a memorial and a name better than sons and daughters; I will give them an everlasting name that will not be cut off.*

This last passage shows the link between offspring and 'name' (the capability of carrying the memorial/inheritance on).

So, although we normally associate the 'disgrace of childlessness' with OT women, the OT itself shows that it is NOT a female-only issue. Men could also (and did) experience the same 'reproach'.

The **second** passage is Is 19.16: *In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them. (and*

the similar Jer 50.37: *In that day the Egyptians will be like women. They will shudder with fear at the uplifted hand that the LORD Almighty raises against them. And the land of Judah will bring terror to the Egyptians; everyone to whom Judah is mentioned will be terrified, because of what the LORD Almighty is planning against them. ).*

At first blush, this type of an image could be taken as a 'slur' on women (so [WS:AHTO:20](#)), but this assumes that it is 'bad' to tremble at the judgment of YHWH!!! That women would 'shudder with fear' at such an obvious horror MIGHT be an indication of 'sound judgment'!! But let's look at the "soldier/woman" comparison issue a little closer.

Now, if this image were used in modern times, in which women participate in modern military practice, then I would tend to agree with the slur-hypothesis. But, in the case of Israelite women who were neither trained nor outfitted for war to 'shudder with fear' at the awesome army of the Lord (in the future) does not seem to fall into that category very cleanly.

If we look at the 'normal' soldier/woman comparisons, we can see the 'normal' pattern:

*In that day the hearts of Moab's warriors will be like the heart of a woman in labor. (Jer 48.41)*

*In that day the hearts of Edom's warriors will be like the heart of a woman in labor. (Jer 49.22)*

*This is what the LORD says: "Look, an army is coming from the land of the north; a great nation is being stirred up from the ends of the earth. 23 They are armed with bow and spear; they are cruel and show no mercy. They sound like the roaring sea as they ride on their horses; they come like men in battle formation to attack you, O Daughter of Zion." 24 We have heard reports about them, and our hands hang limp. Anguish has gripped us, pain like that of a woman in labor. (Jer 6.22f)*

[Notice on this last passage that the 'report' of verse 24 is what causes the 'anguish'--as in Is 19.20.]

Most of the soldier-women comparisons key in on the intensity of the birth pains, but one seems to focus in on the lack of training-acquired physical endurance required for the labor-intensive warfare of those times:

*Babylon's warriors have stopped fighting; they remain in their strongholds. Their strength is exhausted; they have become like women. (Jer 51.30)*

This general lack of preparation, lack of training, lack of deliberate military-style physical conditioning, and lack of weapons on the part of women renders this 'slur-hypothesis' highly dubious. Instead, the image of women--skilled, trained, equipped for non-military roles--responding in terror to the armies of brutal nations is a very vivid and realistic one--without any 'slurs' included:

*36 A sword against her false prophets! They will become fools. A sword against her warriors! They will be filled with terror. 37 A sword against her horses and chariots and all the foreigners in her ranks! They will become women. A sword against her treasures! They will be plundered.*

It should also be noted that we do have a few examples in the OT of women who did 'war-like' and courageous military-type acts--the Patriot Woman of Thebez (Judges 9.50-52, recalled by Joab in 2 Sam 11.21) and the act of Jael, who took the chance of the violent commander Sisera waking up, and killed him with a hammer and tent peg (e.g Jud 4.17ff).

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### **Summary:**

In the prophetic literature of this period, we see old and new elements in our picture of women in the bible:

1. We see the same indications of cultural power in the Queen mother.
2. We see NEW indications of cultural power in the ABUSE of that power by women.
3. Women are still equally responsible to the covenant demands, equally judged and guilty when in the wrong, and equally punished in history.
4. Women are NOT held to a higher sexual standard than men--BOTH sexes are held to high standards by God.
5. We saw that even widows--the allegedly "non-entitites of the ANE"--had legal rights and status in Israel.
6. We have several passages in which God uses females as signs and as judgments on the men.
7. Women still manifest the social role of 'singing newspapers'.
8. The glimpses we have of women's lives indicate that their distinctives were honored.
9. Women show up in 'indications of value' throughout the literature.
10. VERY significantly, we have the NEW data in which YHWH is portrayed in female imagery, or as husband/father to Israel the wife/daughter.
11. We see the deliberate specification of females *per se* in the promises of the future

by YHWH.

12. We saw that the objections about 'disgrace' and 'soldiers vs. Women' did NOT indicate a low/constrictive view of women

**Overall, this body of literature contributes substantially to a high-view of women's status. We see the exaltation of female imagery of God and His relationships, we see the use of females in the revelatory work of God, we see the obvious social power of women (in their abuse of it), and we see God's deliberate specification of women's exalted future in His promises to the nation. Women are thus seen to be integral to God's work in history--both revelatory and salvific. And in the glorious promises of God--His daughters matter to Him.**



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# Women in the Heart of God (5)

## The Data From the Exilic and Post-Exilic Community

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[updated 11/16/96]

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This period of time stretches from the destruction of Jerusalem after 600 B.C. to the close of the OT writings (apprx 400bc).

The literature of this period comes from three types of sources--historical, prophetic, and one piece of "professional literature"--Lamentations. The historical material is given in Ezra, Nehemiah, and Esther. The prophetic literature that falls into this period occurs in the books of Ezekiel, Daniel, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi.

This period is a period of high turmoil also, especially culturally, so the only 'leisure literature' of the period is a "professional" mourning piece--Lamentations--produced AFTER the Fall of Jerusalem.

The biblical literature is not very extensive, compared to earlier periods, but many of the same basic elements that we saw in earlier periods are evidenced here as well.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. The social visibility of women in this period
2. Indications of cultural power & responsibility
3. Indications of status and value in the culture
4. Indications of God's care and heart for women

Once we have examined that data, we will discuss some of the passages that could be seen as being 'slurs' on women.

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### 1. **The social visibility of women in this period**

Women are very visible, from a 'public standpoint' in this period--in domestic, governmental, and cultic areas.

- They show up in public lists and events.
  - *Ezr 2.64: The whole company numbered 42,360, 65 besides their 7,337 menservants and maidservants; and they also had 200 men and women singers. [Notice that the women singers were part of the 'official counts' of the leaders.]*
  - *Ezr 10.1: While Ezra was praying and confessing, weeping and throwing himself down before the house of God, a large crowd of Israelites -- men, women and children -- gathered around him. They too wept bitterly. [Notice that the women were part of this visible gathering of public mourning.]*
  - *Neh 12.21ff:*

*27 At the dedication of the wall of Jerusalem, the Levites were sought out from where they lived and were brought to Jerusalem to celebrate joyfully the dedication with songs of thanksgiving and with the music of cymbals, harps and lyres. 28 The singers also were brought together from the region around Jerusalem -- from the villages of the Netophathites, 29 from Beth Gilgal, and from the area of Geba and Azmaveth, for the singers had built villages for themselves around Jerusalem. 30 When the priests and Levites had purified themselves ceremonially, they purified the people, the gates and the wall. 31 I had the leaders of Judah go up on top of the wall. I also assigned two large choirs to give thanks. One was to proceed on top of the wall to the right, toward the Dung Gate. 32 Hoshaiah and half the leaders of Judah followed them, 33 along with Azariah, Ezra, Meshullam, 34 Judah, Benjamin, Shemaiah, Jeremiah, 35 as well as some priests with trumpets, and also Zechariah son of Jonathan, the son of Shemaiah, the son of Mattaniah, the son of Micaiah, the son of Zaccur, the son of Asaph, 36 and his associates -- Shemaiah, Azarel, Milalai, Gilalai, Maai, Nethanel, Judah and Hanani -- with musical instruments prescribed by David the man of God. Ezra the scribe led the procession. 37 At the Fountain Gate they continued directly up the steps of the City of David on the ascent to the wall and passed above the house of David to the Water Gate on the east. 38 The*

*second choir proceeded in the opposite direction. I followed them on top of the wall, together with half the people -- past the Tower of the Ovens to the Broad Wall, 39 over the Gate of Ephraim, the Jeshanah Gate, the Fish Gate, the Tower of Hananel and the Tower of the Hundred, as far as the Sheep Gate. At the Gate of the Guard they stopped. 40 The two choirs that gave thanks then took their places in the house of God; so did I, together with half the officials, 41 as well as the priests -- Eliakim, Maaseiah, Miniamin, Micaiah, Elioenai, Zechariah and Hananiah with their trumpets -- 42 and also Maaseiah, Shemaiah, Eleazar, Uzzi, Jehohanan, Malkijah, Elam and Ezer. The choirs sang under the direction of Jezrahiah. 43 And on that day they offered great sacrifices, rejoicing because God had given them great joy. The women and children also rejoiced. The sound of rejoicing in Jerusalem could be heard far away.*

Women play two roles here: as part of the choir/singers (vs 29), and as part of the audience (v.43).

■ Ezek 13.17ff:

*"Now, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imagination. Prophecy against them 18 and say, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own? 19 You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live. 20 "Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds. 21 I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall*

*prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 22 Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, 23 therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD."*

Notice that these women of power were singled out in the prophecy--highly visible in that day . (We have seen earlier cases of this as well: Amos 4.1; Is 3.11ff; 4.4f)

- They show up as heroes and role-models in the events/literature.
  - Neh 3.6ff: *The Jeshanah Gate was repaired by Joiada son of Paseah and Meshullam son of Besodeiah. They laid its beams and put its doors and bolts and bars in place. 7 Next to them, repairs were made by men from Gibeon and Mizpah -- Melatiah of Gibeon and Jadon of Meronoth -- places under the authority of the governor of Trans-Euphrates. 8 Uzziel son of Harhaiah, one of the goldsmiths, repaired the next section; and Hananiah, one of the perfume-makers, made repairs next to that. They restored Jerusalem as far as the Broad Wall. 9 Rephaiah son of Hur, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, repaired the next section. 10 Adjoining this, Jedaiah son of Harumaph made repairs opposite his house, and Hattush son of Hashabneiah made repairs next to him. 11 Malkijah son of Harim and Hasshub son of Pahath-Moab repaired another section and the Tower of the Ovens. 12 Shallum son of Hallohesh, ruler of a half-district of Jerusalem, **repaired the next section with the help of his daughters.***

Notice that in this partial "official" list of the workers in rebuilding the city, are the daughters of one of the rulers. This list would be a public document (like the plaques on buildings, describing who sponsored/did the work). These daughters were in very respected company, judging by the titles and names on the list!

- Esther is an obvious hero for the period. Her courage in 4.15, for example, is exemplary: *Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 16 "Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will*

*fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish."*

Esther not only is declared 'better than' all the other women in Persia, but saves the entire people of Israel by her actions! The story teems with examples of her cooperation with her uncle, and her sage-like independent action. That God has used her in a great deliverance (cf. 4.14) is obvious from both the results (9.1-10) and the various 'providential timings' that occur in the book (e.g. 7.8!). What an example!

Notice that only ONE public figure of the period has literature written ABOUT them (as opposed to BY them): Esther! (The other major figures of the period--Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah--wrote their own stories.)

- They had public ministries of prophecy.

Although all of the recorded instances we have indicate a MIS-use of this prophetic role, that does NOT give us cause to believe that ALL such women misused this responsibility. There probably WERE some good ones around. Be that as it may, the 'bad' ones demonstrate adequately that these women had highly visible roles in the community.

It is also highly significant that there is no powerful kingship during this period, suggesting that the prophetic role was elevated in status along with the priestly/scribal ones(cf. Neh 6.14f below).

- Neh 6.14f: *Remember Tobiah and Sanballat, O my God, because of what they have done; remember also the prophetess Noadiah and the rest of the prophets who have been trying to intimidate me.*
- Ezek 13.17ff : *"Now, son of man, set your face against the daughters of your people who prophesy out of their own imagination. Prophesy against them 18 and say, `This is what the Sovereign LORD says: Woe to the women who sew magic charms on all their wrists and make veils of various lengths for their heads in order to ensnare people. Will you ensnare the lives of my people but preserve your own? 19 You have profaned me among my people for a few handfuls of barley and scraps of bread. By lying to my people, who listen to lies, you have killed those who should not have died and have spared those who should not live. 20 "`Therefore this is what the Sovereign LORD says: I am against your magic charms with which you ensnare*

*people like birds and I will tear them from your arms; I will set free the people that you ensnare like birds. 21 I will tear off your veils and save my people from your hands, and they will no longer fall prey to your power. Then you will know that I am the LORD. 22 Because you disheartened the righteous with your lies, when I had brought them no grief, and because you encouraged the wicked not to turn from their evil ways and so save their lives, 23 therefore you will no longer see false visions or practice divination. I will save my people from your hands. And then you will know that I am the LORD."*

We have already looked at this passage as indication of their public role, but it is important to also note that this passage follows the 1st half of the chapter in which the (male) prophets are also publicly confronted with their evil.

- They were used as symbols/figures in the prophetic messages.
  - The evil nation(s) are referred to as "unfaithful wives" and "evil sisters" in many passages (Ezek 16) and will receive the punishment appropriate to those roles (Ezek 23.45f).
  - Female characters (both good and bad) occur in the visions of Zechariah (5.7f): *Then the cover of lead was raised, and there in the basket sat a woman! 8 He said, "This is wickedness," and he pushed her back into the basket and pushed the lead cover down over its mouth. 9 Then I looked up -- and there before me were two women, with the wind in their wings! They had wings like those of a stork, and they lifted up the basket between heaven and earth. 10 "Where are they taking the basket?" I asked the angel who was speaking to me. 11 He replied, "To the country of Babylonia to build a house for it. When it is ready, the basket will be set there in its place."* [Notice that the winged-people who removed the 'iniquity' were female.]
  - One of the more graphic figures is the wife of Ezekiel. Her death was timed by God to be used as an object lesson to Israel. She is called the "delight of Ezekiel's eyes" in 24.15ff, and is compared to the Temple!
- Women were involved in the cult.
  - We have already noted the passages in which prophetesses were

involved.

■ Neh 8.2-8:

*2 So on the first day of the seventh month Ezra the priest brought the Law before the assembly, which was made up of men and **women** and all who were able to understand. 3 He read it aloud from daybreak till noon as he faced the square before the Water Gate in the presence of the men, women and others who could understand. And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law. 4 Ezra the scribe stood on a high wooden platform built for the occasion. Beside him on his right stood Mattithiah, Shema, Anaiah, Uriah, Hilkiyah and Maaseiah; and on his left were Pedaiah, Mishael, Malkijah, Hashum, Hashbaddanah, Zechariah and Meshullam. 5 Ezra opened the book. All the people could see him because he was standing above them; and as he opened it, the people all stood up. 6 Ezra praised the LORD, the great God; and all the people lifted their hands and responded, "Amen! Amen!" Then they bowed down and worshiped the LORD with their faces to the ground. 7 The Levites -- Jeshua, Bani, Sherebiah, Jamin, Akkub, Shabbethai, Hodiah, Maaseiah, Kelita, Azariah, Jozabad, Hanan and Pelaiah -- instructed the people in the Law while the people were standing there. 8 They read from the Book of the Law of God, making it clear and giving the meaning so that the people could understand what was being read.*

Notice that women were explicitly mentioned as being in the assembly, listening attentively to the Law, praising the Lord, worshipping the Lord. Notice also that women were instructed by the Levites in the Law (8.7)--no exclusion from study of Torah here!

- Neh 10.28: *"The rest of the people -- priests, Levites, gatekeepers, singers, temple servants and all who separated themselves from the neighboring peoples for the sake of the Law of God, **together with their wives** and all their sons and daughters who are able to understand -- 29 all these now join their brothers the nobles, and bind themselves with a curse and an oath to follow the Law of God given through Moses the servant of God and to obey carefully all the*

*commands, regulations and decrees of the LORD our Lord.*

Notice that women were involved in the public re-confirmation of the nation to serve YHWH.

- We have also noted that women singers were involved in the dedication of the temple (as part of the choirs and worshippers).
- [Notice that in every public assembly recorded in the period, women are specifically mentioned as being there and participating. Hmmm, I see a pattern here...]

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## 2. Indications of cultural power & responsibility

We saw in the Divided Monarchy period that there were several indications of women's cultural power, but that most of the manifestations of this were negative. This period will show the same pattern of women's power, responsibility, and equal-guilt before the Lord.

- We have already noted the considerable power of the prophetesses.
- Esther, of course, rose to considerable power in Persia: *29 So Queen Esther, daughter of Abihail, along with Mordecai the Jew, wrote **with full authority** to confirm this second letter concerning Purim.* (Est. 9.29).
- In Ezek 16.38 we have an popular allusion/reference to women being able to 'shed blood'--quite a statement of power (cf. Also 23.45)! ( *38 I will sentence you to the punishment of women who commit adultery and who shed blood; I will bring upon you the blood vengeance of my wrath and jealous anger.*)
- Oppressive, haughty and powerful women were apparently common enough to be used as a 'guilt image' of the nation! ( "*Now this was the sin of your sister Sodom: She and her daughters were arrogant, overfed and unconcerned; they did not help the poor and needy. 50 They were haughty and did detestable things before me. Therefore I did away with them as you have seen.* Ezek 16.49).
- We have already seen their role in the covenant renewal ceremony.
- Women are singled out (among the men, of course) as being idolaters in the

prophecies of Ezek. Cf. 8.12ff:

*12 He said to me, "Son of man, have you seen what the elders of the house of Israel are doing in the darkness, each at the shrine of his own idol? They say, 'The LORD does not see us; the LORD has forsaken the land.'" 13 Again, he said, "You will see them doing things that are even more detestable." 14 Then he brought me to the entrance to the north gate of the house of the LORD, and I saw **women** sitting there, mourning for Tammuz. 15 He said to me, "Do you see this, son of man? You will see things that are even more detestable than this." 16 He then brought me into the inner court of the house of the LORD, and there at the entrance to the temple, between the portico and the altar, were about twenty-five men. With their backs toward the temple of the LORD and their faces toward the east, they were bowing down to the sun in the east.*

- In the vision of Ezek 9.3ff, the women are equally judged by God:

*Now the glory of the God of Israel went up from above the cherubim, where it had been, and moved to the threshold of the temple. Then the LORD called to the man clothed in linen who had the writing kit at his side 4 and said to him, "Go throughout the city of Jerusalem and put a mark on the foreheads of those who grieve and lament over all the detestable things that are done in it." 5 As I listened, he said to the others, "Follow him through the city and kill, without showing pity or compassion. 6 Slaughter old men, young men and **maidens, women** and children, but do not touch anyone who has the mark. Begin at my sanctuary." So they began with the elders who were in front of the temple.*

- Both young men and women felt the brunt of the enemy: *"Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and maidens have fallen by the sword. --Lam 2.21.*

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### 3. Indications of status and value in the culture

- Daughters and wives were considered worth fighting for! (*After I looked*

*things over, I stood up and said to the nobles, the officials and the rest of the people, "Don't be afraid of them. Remember the Lord, who is great and awesome, and fight for your brothers, your sons and your daughters, your wives and your homes."--Neh 4.14).*

- Daughters were important enough to cry out against the government about. (*Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their Jewish brothers. 2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." 4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our countrymen and though our sons are as good as theirs, yet we have to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."--Neh 5.1ff)*
- At least one orphan daughter was considered important to adopt and provide for! (*Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.--Esther 2.7)*
- One of the main grief's of the exile was the loss of 'maidens' from the land. (*Listen, all you peoples; look upon my suffering. My young men and maidens have gone into exile.--Lam 1.18)*
- The young women are paired with the elders, in describing the grief. (*The elders of the Daughter of Zion sit on the ground in silence; they have sprinkled dust on their heads and put on sackcloth. The young women of Jerusalem have bowed their heads to the ground.--Lam 2.10).*
- We have the usual value-pairings of "sons and daughters" and "fathers and mothers"--Ezek 14:16, 18, 20, 22; 16.20, 21; 22.7; 23.25, 47; 24.21.
- We also have the increasing emphasis on morality in male sexual conduct (no double standard):
  1. The standards of righteousness given by God in Ezek 18 included sexual fidelity:

*"Suppose there is a righteous man who does what is just and right. 6 He does not eat at the mountain shrines or look to the idols of the house of Israel. **He does not defile his neighbor's wife or lie with a woman during her period.** 7 He does not oppress anyone, but returns what he took in pledge for a loan. He does not commit robbery but gives his food to the hungry and provides clothing for the naked. 8 He does not lend at usury or take excessive interest. He withholds his hand from doing wrong and judges fairly between man and man. 9 He follows my decrees and faithfully keeps my laws. (and twice again later in the chapter.)*

2. The urgent confrontation between YHWH and the 'princes' contains a litany of sexual sins committed by the rulers--cast in such a way as to indicate that they were obviously males:

*"See how each of the princes of Israel who are in you uses his power to shed blood. 7 In you they have treated father and mother with contempt; in you they have oppressed the alien and mistreated the fatherless and the widow. 8 You have despised my holy things and desecrated my Sabbaths. 9 In you are slanderous men bent on shedding blood; in you are those who eat at the mountain shrines and commit lewd acts. 10 In you are those who **dishonor their fathers' bed; in you are those who violate women during their period, when they are ceremonially unclean.** 11 In you one man commits a detestable offense with his neighbor's wife, another shamefully defiles his daughter-in-law, and another violates his sister, his own father's daughter. 12 In you men accept bribes to shed blood; you take usury and excessive interest and make unjust gain from your neighbors by extortion. And you have forgotten me, declares the Sovereign LORD. Ezek 22.6-12.*

3. Indeed, male promiscuity was a major cause of judgment on the nation!--cf. Ezek 33.26: *You rely on your sword, you do detestable things, and **each of you defiles his neighbor's wife.** Should you then possess the land?'*
4. Adulterers are ranked up there with sorcerers and crimes of social

violence! ("*So I will come near to you for judgment. I will be quick to testify against sorcerers, adulterers and perjurers, against those who defraud laborers of their wages, who oppress the widows and the fatherless, and deprive aliens of justice, but do not fear me,*" says the LORD Almighty.--Mal 3.5)

- We noted in the Mosaic period that a priest could defile himself for females in his immediate family, and the same rule is re-stated here (Ezek 44.25)

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#### 4. Indications of God's care and heart for women

- We have the continuing theme of YHWH trying to get the leaders to protect the widows (e.g Ezek 22.7; Zech 7.10; Mal 3.5)
- In a passage that 'feels' like a father's heart--Ezek 16.20ff--God cries to Israel about how they have sacrificed HIS daughters (and sons)!

*"And you took your sons and daughters whom you bore to me and sacrificed them as food to the idols. Was your prostitution not enough? 21 You slaughtered **my children** and sacrificed them to the idols.*

Note that God's relationship to Israel is pictured here as Father/daughter (no obvious slur on being a daughter!)

- God slams Israel with an ""*You adulterous wife! You prefer strangers to your own husband!*" in Ezek 16.32. But in so doing, He pictures the relationship between them as Husband/Wife (no obvious slur on being a wife--as long as one is a faithful one).
- In a new development in this period, we get God involved in the issue of divorce. He takes a strong stand against capricious divorce in Malachi 2.13ff:

*Another thing you do: You flood the LORD's altar with tears. You weep and wail because he no longer pays attention to your offerings or accepts them with pleasure from your hands. 14 You ask, "Why?" It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. 15 Has not the LORD made them*

*one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. 16 "I hate divorce," says the LORD God of Israel, "and I hate a man's covering himself with violence as well as with his garment," says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.*

Notice that God withholds blessing from the people because they break faith with their wives. He hates divorce, and likens it to a type of violence (v16). The 'break faith' issue is mentioned THREE times in this short passage. The wife is an older woman (v.14), and is called a 'partner' and 'covenant' party. (v.14). God is obviously trying to protect His daughters from capricious divorce.

[It is important to note that not all divorce in the OT WAS capricious. In Ezra 9, YHWH Himself orders several hundred divorces--some even involving children. These 'hated and reluctant orders' are only done by God under the most extreme of circumstances (these marriages to foreign women threatened the nation's future). In another situation, God is said to have written a bill of divorce for unfaithful Israel--Jer 3.8: *8 I gave faithless Israel her certificate of divorce and sent her away because of all her adulteries.*, apparently along the line of Jesus' words in Matt 5.31, and the "righteous" intentions of Joseph in Matt 1.19 . These situations would hardly be called a 'breach of faith' and so do not incur the 'hated event' status of capricious divorce. See also YHWH in Is 50.1f.]

- God's promises for the future again single His daughters out!
  1. Both men and women, boys and girls are mentioned in the promise of prosperity: *This is what the LORD Almighty says: "Once again men and women of ripe old age will sit in the streets of Jerusalem, each with cane in hand because of his age. 5 The city streets will be filled with boys and girls playing there."* (Zech 8.4)
  2. God will cause His children to grow beautifully: *The LORD their God will save them on that day as the flock of his people. They will sparkle in his land like jewels in a crown. 17 How attractive and beautiful they will be! Grain will make the young men thrive, and new wine the young women.* (Zech 9.16f)
  3. The deeply moving experience of Israel, at the 2nd coming of Yeshua, as she realizes who her savior really is, extends to the

women--as a group by themselves: *"And I will pour out on the house of David and the inhabitants of Jerusalem a spirit of grace and supplication. They will look on me, the one they have pierced, and they will mourn for him as one mourns for an only child, and grieve bitterly for him as one grieves for a firstborn son. 11 On that day the weeping in Jerusalem will be great, like the weeping of Hadad Rimmon in the plain of Megiddo. 12 The land will mourn, each clan by itself, with their wives by themselves: the clan of the house of David and their wives, the clan of the house of Nathan and their wives, 13 the clan of the house of Levi and their wives, the clan of Shimei and their wives, 14 and all the rest of the clans and their wives. (Zech 12.10ff)*

4. Mothers will play an equal role with fathers in judging false prophets--even in difficult domestic settings: *"On that day, I will banish the names of the idols from the land, and they will be remembered no more," declares the LORD Almighty. "I will remove both the prophets and the spirit of impurity from the land. 3 And if anyone still prophesies, his father and mother, to whom he was born, will say to him, 'You must die, because you have told lies in the LORD's name.' When he prophesies, his own parents will stab him. (Zech 13.3--in obedience to Deut 13.6-11)*
5. These promises clearly show that women are integral parts of the future drama of God's salvation history.

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There are two passages that COULD BE seen as being 'slurs' on women, from this period's literature.

The **first** is Ezek 36.17: *Again the word of the LORD came to me: 17 "Son of man, when the people of Israel were living in their own land, they defiled it by their conduct and their actions. Their conduct was like a woman's monthly uncleanness in my sight. 18 So I poured out my wrath on them because they had shed blood in the land and because they had defiled it with their idols.*

The issue of menstrual blood was sometimes used in extra-biblical antiquity to indicate women's inferiority to men. If that viewpoint were present in this verse, it would be an absolutely UNIQUE case in the bible of this position!

But this passage probably doesn't elevate female uncleanness beyond that of male uncleanness (i.e. emission of semen) at all. Men were unclean by both intentional

emission (Lev 15.18 ) and unintentional emissions (Deut 23.10). The woman's blood-related case is probably used here simply because of its (1) predictability--"monthly"-- (tied in with the predictability of Israel's sin) and (2) its blood-base (tied in with the bloodshed by the people mentioned in vs. 18).

The **second** is Ezek 44.22: *They (the priests) must not marry widows or divorced women; they may marry only virgins of Israelite descent or widows of priests..*

This is sometimes thought to imply that sexual intercourse 'defiles' a women (but not a man). But it is so obvious that this CANNOT be the meaning here since the priest CAN marry the widow of another priest! (And, of course, intercourse DID defile BOTH man and woman--temporarily--Lev 15.)

Instead, I would understand the prohibition against divorcees of priests to be in light of the possibility of re-union with the ex-spouse. (It apparently happened back then, since some very specific cases were singled out by God as inappropriate--Jer 3.1 and Deut 24.4)

The (possible) preference for virgins in the passage is probably related to the overall "model" character of the law. Everything was to be in its 'original' and 'unused' condition--without spot or blemish. It was simply a picture of how the perfection of the future will look like--in which "all things become new" (Rev 21.5!).

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**Summary:**

1. Women show up in official lists.
2. Many women functioned in professional singer roles.
3. Many women functioned in prophetic ministries.
4. Women participated in all public functions, esp. cultic.
5. Women were taught the Law by Levities.
6. Women were part of the dedication of the temple event.
7. Women were covenant partners in the renewal of the covenant.
8. Women were highly visible in the society.
9. Women took part in highly visible projects of the rebuilding of Jerusalem (and were publicly recognized for their role)
10. Queen Esther (of Persia) was the main hero of the entire period, and in saving the entire nation from destruction, probably overshadowed the contributions of other male leaders of the time (e.g. Daniel, Nehemiah)
11. Their roles are used as figures/symbols in prophecy.
12. Powerful (although oppressive) women were apparently easy to find!
13. Women bear equal guilt and equal judgment before YHWH.

14. Daughters and wives were valued highly in the community.
15. Male sexual standards were consistently re-enforced, without a 'double standard', in the prophecies of the period.
16. God still tries to get the rulers to care for His widows.
17. God calls the females His "children" and Israel His "wife".
18. God intervenes on behalf of His daughters, in taking a stand against capricious divorce.
19. God's gracious promises of future blessing SPECIFICALLY single out the benefits to His daughters! He seems intent on them knowing that they are individually special to Him.
20. One precious woman was used as a symbol for the beloved Temple of God!
21. We have no indications of any negative views of women by God in the text.

**Once again, the data of the text reveals a very meaningful contribution/involvement by women in the public sphere. The roles of prophet, foreign queen, powerful women, cultic singers, builders, and mothers(!) were major players in the shaping of the events of this period. The new stand taken by YHWH on divorce--protecting His daughters from men--is new data, revealing something about God's heart for His daughters. And, God still constantly reminds them that He has a wonderful "present" for them--at the end of time.**



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# Women in the Heart of God (6)

## The Data From the Life and Ministry of Jesus

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[updated 12/14/96]

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This period of time stretches from the birth of Jesus until the close of the NT revelation (probably Revelation).

The data of this period comes from the words and deeds of Jesus, as recorded in the Gospels, 1st chapter of Acts, and any subsequent post-resurrection appearances or disclosures.

We will have to treat the material in isolated passages (generally), and reserve our comments on the [literary](#) selection and arrangement of those units until our treatment of the apostolic circle.

There is a great deal of overlapping material from the Synoptic gospels, so I intend to treat the incidents as they occur in the standard NT arrangement (i.e. Mt, Mrk, Lk, and then John). Any differences between the parallel accounts, that might indicate special emphasis on aspects of our subject, will be noted in the section on the literary data.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. The Roles women played in the ministry and teachings of Jesus.
2. Their equal Responsibilities before God.
3. His ministry to women.

Then we will briefly examine the question of how revolutionary this might have been in the context of first-century Judaism. ....

### 1. The Roles women played in the ministry and teachings of Jesus.

- He consistently used them as examples, and used illustrations from women's lives.
  - Mt 13.33: *He told them still another parable: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed into a large amount of flour until it worked all through the dough."*

- Mt 15.21ff: Jesus only commended two people before His resurrection for their faith--a Centurian, and the Canaanite woman:  
*Then Jesus answered, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted."*
- Mt 24.40: *That is how it will be at the coming of the Son of Man. 40 Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left. 41 Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.*
- Mt 25--the Parable of the Virgins--sex did not matter; wisdom DID!:  
*"At that time the kingdom of heaven will be like ten virgins who took their lamps and went out to meet the bridegroom. 2 Five of them were foolish and five were wise. 3 The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them. 4 The wise, however, took oil in jars along with their lamps. ...*
- Jesus holds up the The Forever-Remembered Anointing as a model of something 'beautiful'--Mt 26.6ff:

*6 While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, 7 a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table. 8 When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. 9 "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor." 10 Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. 11 The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me. 12 When she poured this perfume on my body, she did it to prepare me for burial. 13 I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world, what she has done will also be told, in memory of her."*

Notice that (1) this is the ONLY physical anointing of Jesus noted in the gospels; (2) Jesus defends this woman; (3) Jesus applauds her act as 'beautiful'; and (4) He sets up an everlasting memorial in her honor! In the Lukan parallel, her act is described as being the result of 'loving much' and being 'forgiven much'.(7.36-50)

- The story of the Widow's Mite is commonly understood as an

example of sacrificial giving (although it is understood by others as an example of the oppressive hegemony)--Mark 12.41f: *Jesus sat down opposite the place where the offerings were put and watched the crowd putting their money into the temple treasury. Many rich people threw in large amounts. 42 But a poor widow came and put in two very small copper coins, worth only a fraction of a penny. 43 Calling his disciples to him, Jesus said, "I tell you the truth, this poor widow has put more into the treasury than all the others. 44 They all gave out of their wealth; but she, out of her poverty, put in everything -- all she had to live on."*

- In Luke 13.16, the healed woman is called a "daughter of Abraham"--an exemplary term denoting Abraham-like faith: *Then should not this woman, a daughter of Abraham, whom Satan has kept bound for eighteen long years, be set free on the Sabbath day from what bound her?"*
- In Luke 15.8ff, Jesus uses an illustration from a woman's life: *"Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' [We will return to this passage later.]*
- In Luke 18.1ff, the disciples are instructed to pray like the Persistent Widow did--*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. 2 He said: "In a certain town there was a judge who neither feared God nor cared about men. 3 And there was a widow in that town who kept coming to him with the plea, 'Grant me justice against my adversary.' 4 "For some time he refused. But finally he said to himself, 'Even though I don't fear God or care about men, 5 yet because this widow keeps bothering me, I will see that she gets justice, so that she won't eventually wear me out with her coming!'" 6 And the Lord said, "Listen to what the unjust judge says. 7 And will not God bring about justice for his chosen ones, who cry out to him day and night? Will he keep putting them off? 8 I tell you, he will see that they get justice, and quickly.*
- They functioned as "patrons" of His ministry, traveling with the group and supporting them financially.
  - Luke 8.1-3: *After this, Jesus traveled about from one town and*

*village to another, proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God. The Twelve were with him, 2 and also some women who had been cured of evil spirits and diseases: Mary (called Magdalene) from whom seven demons had come out; 3 Joanna the wife of Cuza, the manager of Herod's household; Susanna; and many others. **These women were helping to support them out of their own means.***

- Mt 27.55: *Many women were there, watching from a distance. **They had followed Jesus from Galilee to care for his needs.** 56 Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee's sons.*
- Mark 15.40-41: *Some women were watching from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. 41 In Galilee these women had followed him and cared for his needs. **Many other women** who had come up with him to Jerusalem were also there.*
- They were active in evangelism!
  - Anna, a prophetess was the first "Jesus" evangelist! (Luke 2.36ff): *There was also a prophetess, Anna, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was very old; she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then was a widow until she was eighty-four. She never left the temple but worshiped night and day, fasting and praying. 38 Coming up to them at that very moment, she gave thanks to God and **spoke about the child** to all who were looking forward to the redemption of Jerusalem.*
  - They were the first witnesses to the resurrection! Luke 24.9-11: *When they came back from the tomb, **they told all these things to the Eleven and to all the others.** 10 It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and the others with them who told this to the apostles. 11 But they did not believe the women, because their words seemed to them like nonsense.*
  - The Samaritan woman was a very effective witness for Christ--John 4.28-30, 39-42 :*Then, leaving her water jar, the woman went back to the town and **said to the people, 29 "Come, see a man** who told me everything I ever did. Could this be the Christ?" 30 They came out of the town and made their way toward him.....Many of the Samaritans from that town **believed in him because of the woman's testimony,** "He told me everything I ever did." 40 So when the Samaritans came*

*to him, they urged him to stay with them, and he stayed two days. 41 And because of his words many more became believers. 42 They said to the woman, "We no longer believe just because of what you said; now we have heard for ourselves, and we know that this man really is the Savior of the world."*

- Even Pilate's wife "witnessed" to her husband, of Jesus uniqueness and innocence (Mt 27.19): *While Pilate was sitting on the judge's seat, his wife sent him this message: "Don't have anything to do with that innocent man, for I have suffered a great deal today in a dream because of him."*
- Women are involved throughout the life of Jesus.
  - Mary, Elizabeth, and Anna are key figures in the infancy narratives.
  - Jesus' single pre-ministry incident that is recorded in scripture involves BOTH his mother and father, with more emphasis on His mother.
  - Of the 30-plus recorded miracles, over 10 had major focus on women participants.
  - They travel with Him (above)--even out into the wildernesses (cf. Origen, *Adv. Cel.* 3.10), and would have thereby participated in most of the events of the ministry.
  - They were present at the Cross (Mt 27.55-56) and first to the tomb (Mt 28.1)
  - They were spoken to by the angels at the tomb (Mt 28.5)
- Jesus actually used a woman as an example of God the Father!

In Luke 15.1-10, two parables are used to symbolize God in His redemptive 'search and rescue' mission--a shepherd (1-7) and a woman (8-10).

*Now the tax collectors and "sinners" were all gathering around to hear him. 2 But the Pharisees and the teachers of the law muttered, "This man welcomes sinners and eats with them." 3 Then Jesus told them this parable: 4 "Suppose one of you has a hundred sheep and loses one of them. Does he not leave the ninety-nine in the open country and go after the lost sheep until he finds it? 5 And when he finds it, he joyfully puts it on his shoulders 6 and goes home. Then he calls his friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found*

*my lost sheep.' 7 I tell you that in the same way there will be more rejoicing in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous persons who do not need to repent. 8 "Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, 'Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.' 10 In the same way, I tell you, there is rejoicing in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents."*

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## **2. Their equal Responsibilities before God.**

- They were obviously expected to be "aggressive" disciples of the Lord. ( *35 For I have come to turn "a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law -- 36 a man's enemies will be the members of his own household.' 37 "Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; 38 and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. 39 Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. Mt 10.34ff)*
- "Jesus never stereotyped women. A woman's value is not determined by her domestic, maternal, or sexual functions, but by her relationship to God. On one occasion as Jesus was going through a crowd a woman shouted out, 'Blessed is the mother who gave you birth and nursed you.' Jesus replied, 'Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.' (Lk. 11.27-28). Jesus refused to sentimentalize motherhood. The most important fact about any woman is her response to the gospel." ([WS:ATW:151](#)).
- Notice that in Mark 10.10ff, Jesus assumes that a woman could initiate divorce--and was equally guilty when done without the 'exception clause'--*When they were in the house again, the disciples asked Jesus about this. 11 He answered, "Anyone who divorces his wife and marries another woman commits adultery against her. 12 And if she divorces her husband and marries another man, she commits adultery."*
- The Samaritan woman in John 4 was obviously held responsible for her response to Jesus, as are Mary/Martha in John 11.
- Women are given instructions by the angels at the tomb, and expected to

obey. (Mt 28:5ff): *5 The angel said to the women, "Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. 6 He is not here; he has risen, just as he said. Come and see the place where he lay. 7 Then go quickly and tell his disciples: 'He has risen from the dead and is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him.' Now I have told you."*

- The vast majority of Jesus' teachings would have been to mixed-sex crowds (e.g. Mt 14.21:*The number of those who ate was about five thousand men, besides women and children.*, also 15.38), or the mixed-sex group of the disciples (above). This would have made most of His teachings equally binding on the women.

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### 3. **His ministry to women.**

- There were a number of situations in which He cared for women.
  - In Mt 9, he heals both a woman and a daughter. Notice Jesus' word choice in 9.20-22:*Just then a woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years came up behind him and touched the edge of his cloak. 21 She said to herself, "If I only touch his cloak, I will be healed." 22 Jesus turned and saw her. "Take heart, daughter," he said, "your faith has healed you." And the woman was healed from that moment.--He calls the woman "daughter"! He only uses such a term of related-endearament one other time--He calls the paralytic "son" in Mt 9:2 and Mk 2.5.*
  - In Mark 1, He heals Peter's mother-in-law.
  - We have already seen the healing of the Canaanite woman's daughter (Mt 15.22ff).
  - He healed the Widow of Nain's son (Lk 7.11f)
  - He healed the "daughter of Abraham" (Lk 13.16)
- His frequent use of illustrations from women's lives (noted above) indicate that women were in His 'target audience'.

- He consistently treats women as significant theology dialogue partners.
  - The exchange with the woman of Samaria, resulting in many confessions of faith in the town, is one of the longer dialogues in all the NT. (John 4)
  - The exchange with the Canaanite woman (in Mt 15.22f), resulting in His praise for her faith, is also a very detailed account.
  - His exchange with Martha of Bethany (Luke 10.38ff) not only is significant, but his approval of the 'choice' of Mary as a student of His borders on being ground-breaking in Israel of the time.

*As Jesus and his disciples were on their way, he came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to him. 39 She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what he said. 40 But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to him and asked, "Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!" 41 "Martha, Martha," the Lord answered, "you are worried and upset about many things, 42 but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better, and it will not be taken away from her."*

- He later has another significant dialogue with Martha in John 11.17-27, culminating in Martha's confession of faith in verse 27: *"Yes, Lord," she told him, "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world."* This is one of the clearest expressions of faith in the NT, on a par with Peter's confession in Mt 16:16 (*Simon Peter answered, "You are the Christ, the Son of the living God."*).
- Closely related to the above is the fact that Jesus accepted women as disciples/students (after the rabbinical model)
  - As we have noted above, women traveled with the group, were the recipients of teaching from Jesus, and freely moved about among the disciples (after the rabbinical model).
  - In Luke 10:39, we have a woman "sitting at Jesus feet"--the

traditional description of rabbinic students (cf. Act 22.3: *3 I am a Jew, born in Tarsus of Cilicia, but brought up in this city, at the feet of Gamaliel, instructed according to the strict manner of the law of our fathers, (ASV)*)

- In John 20.16, Mary calls the Risen Lord "Teacher" (Rabboni). Although this does not necessarily mean that she was a 'student' of His after the rabbinical model, it may be significant that, with the exception of Mary/Martha, only men call Jesus "rabbi" or "teacher" in the Gospels. Women call Him "Lord" or "Son of David" or "sir". This MAY indicate an awareness of a more 'formal' relationship between Jesus and Mary--that of the student role, illustrated in Luke 10.39 (above).
- It should also be noted in this connection, that the amount of disclosure given to the women dialogue partners, as well as the style of the interaction, approximates the rabbinical teaching methods of the day (cf. [WWRJ:57-79](#)).

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### ***How revolutionary was this in first-century Judaism?***

Many of the more evangelical works on the subject of Jesus' treatment of women (e.g. WS:ATW, WS:WIB), describe His actions and attitudes as 'revolutionary' and posit so based upon a certain view of first-century Judaism. That is, IF we posit that the Rabbinic Judaism of the Talmud/Mishnah/etc. was the 'prevailing' Judaism that Jesus encountered, THEN His treatment of women WOULD HAVE BEEN appropriately labeled as 'revolutionary'. If, on the other hand, the later Rabbinic Judaism was only ONE SEGMENT of Judaism (to use Neusner's terms "formative" rather than "normative"), then His actions may have been less counter-culture than is often claimed.

We will assume in our discussion below that some proto-Rabbinic Judaism was present and probably dominant among at least the adversaries that Jesus developed during the course of His earthly ministry. [For a dissenting view of this, see Allan Black's chapter in WS:EWEC]. The presence of factions of Jewry, such as Essenes, Pharisees, etc., however, does NOT imply that there was a wide range of attitudes towards females. We know, for example, that women were generally isolated from the rituals in the Qumran

community: "Nevertheless, we do have clear evidence, both in the case of the Essenes and those at Qumran, that they were sects whose views of the position of women were even more rigid than that of Judaism in general." ([WS:WIB:37](#)).

So, what did Jesus do re: women that was 'revolutionary' in His day and setting?

1. He disagreed with the Rabbi's that association with women led inevitably to lust. The logic that led to segregation within Rabbinitis found no place in Jesus' teaching. Jesus does not warn his followers against looking at women, but rather against doing so in lust. Women's association and traveling with the apostolic band was NOT to be restricted due to the "natural desires of men"! ([WS:WIB:45-46](#)).
2. Jesus asserted that a woman could divorce her husband; the Rabbi's said only a MAN could initiate divorce ([WS:JWGRP:143](#): "Thus far it should be clear that divorce was always the right and responsibility of the husband to initiate. Jewish law was asymmetrical in this respect, as opposed to Roman law, which grants the wife the right to divorce her husband.")
3. Jesus touched "unclean women" (e.g. the woman with the flow of blood in Mt 9.18ff); Rabbi's would not do so.
4. "Jesus not only spoke freely with women, healed them, allowed them to touch him and to bring their children to see him, he also allowed them to serve him. This was not, of course, unusual in a family situation, but it was unusual for a Rabbi, as the Rabbis strongly disapproved of women even serving them at tables." ([WS:WIB:48](#))
5. "Rabbinic parables pointedly avoided mentioning women, but Jesus often told stories relating to the life of women." ([WS:WIB:48](#))
6. Jesus often spoke to women in public; Jewish men shunned this (*Aboth* 1:5)
7. Jesus conversed at length with the Samaritan woman (surprising even his disciples!); Rabbi's would not do so--Samaritan women were considered "perpetual menstruants"! (*Niddah* 4.1).
8. Women were used as witnesses in the resurrection accounts; they were not allowed as witnesses (generally) under Rabbinic law [[WS:JWGRP:163f](#)].
9. He allowed women to follow Him in His travels and ministry. "Jesus, too,

knowingly overthrew custom when he allowed women to follow him." (Jeremias, cited in [WS:ATW:138](#))

10. Jesus taught women freely, and sometimes in standard Rabbinical "style" (e.g. Luke 10.38-42). Brown summarizes this contrast well:

Jesus' attitude contrasts with the sentiments of the rabbis. In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer declared, 'There is no wisdom in a woman except with the distaff.' One version adds, 'It is better that the words of the Law should be burned, than that they should be given to a woman.' In the Mishnah the same rabbi made a similarly strong statement when he said 'If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery.' Jesus broke with rabbinical tradition when he taught women and included them among his followers ([WS:ATW:143](#))

11. "He never used women as negative examples, as was so common in rabbinical teaching. He referred to women positively and used illustrations from their everyday lives to teach spiritual truths." ([WS:ATW:150](#)).
12. Jesus accepted and valued women highly; the famous prayer of Rabbi Judah would not have been found on His lips: "Blessed be Thou for not having made me a Gentile, a woman, or an ignoramus." (*Tosephta Berakoth* 7, 18.)

It must be remembered that what Jesus is being contrasted with here is the inter-testamental social structure and not that of the Old Testament. There was a decided degeneration of OT ideals throughout this period, and Evans summarizes this:

As far as first century Judaism in general is concerned there is no doubt at all that the place of the woman was not equal to that of the man. Women were subordinate and inferior to men in religion, in the society in general and also in the home and family. There were exceptions, the practice did not always follow the theory, the country was rather more free than the town and the lot of women in Judaism was still somewhat happier than that of women elsewhere in the Orient. But, nevertheless, it is possible to see a dramatic decline in the position and status of women in every sphere as compared to the situation as described in the Old Testament. ([WS:WIB:36-37](#)).

The rabbinical standards, as expounded in their documents, are decidedly non-Jesus-like ([WS:WIB:33](#)):

There are occasions where women are described as hardworking,

compassionate or intelligent (note A), but they are more often seen as lazy, stupid, garrulous, vain, having a tendency to the occult (note B), and in many ways, frivolous and unteachable (note C). Jeremias points out that disdainful opinions far outweigh those of high esteem (note D), and the picture is well summed up by Josephus, when he says, 'The woman...is in all things inferior to a man.' (note E)

[Notes from above:

- Note A: Ket 30a; Meg. 14b; Nidd.45b
- Note B: Sanh. 7a; Shab. 33b; Kidd. 49b; Ket. 59b, 65a.
- Note C: Shab. 33b.
- Note D: J. Jeremias, *Jerusalem in the Times of Jesus*, p.375.
- Note E: *Contra Apionem* 24.201.]

These contrasts are between Jesus and the later Rabbinical writings, but as mentioned above would only be relevant IF the situation in which Jesus ministered was similar/identical to the attitudes expressed in those writings.

There does exist a body of contrary data, that supports a 'higher' view of women in this period--in regards to religion, legal status, and even literary efforts. For the interested reader, I refer you to WS:EWEC, WS:WLT, WS:WWWP. There is even some 'relief' in the rabbinical writings-cf. [WS:WWR:196-200](#).

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**Summary:**

1. Jesus consistently uses women as examples of virtue.
2. Jesus consistently uses illustrations from women's lives in His teachings.
3. Jesus accepts women as full-fledged members of the Abrahamic community.
4. Women functioned as patrons of Jesus and the apostolic band.
5. This patronage was not the "at arms length" type of patronage; but involved travel, discipleship, service, and learning.
6. Women were active and effective in evangelism.
7. Women were the first at the tomb, and the last at the Cross.
8. Women were chosen by God to be the first witnesses of the Resurrection.
9. Jesus uses a woman as an example of God the Father.
10. Women were expected to be aggressive disciples.
11. Jesus focuses first on a woman's relationship to God.
12. Women were equal in responsibility and guilt before God.
13. Women are expected to obey revelation.
14. Jesus devoted a lot of his healing ministry to women.

15. Jesus' use of illustrations from women's lives indicates that He was preaching to them.
16. His discussion exchanges with Mary/Martha/the Samaritan Woman/the Canaanite Women indicate that He considered women as significant dialogue partners, as able to understand his message, as worth the time and effort!
17. Jesus accepted women as disciples, in the rabbinical model.
18. Jesus' attitudes and actions toward women were revolutionary in comparison with Rabbinic teachings.

**One can scarcely review this data and not notice how radical was Jesus' approach to the women He encountered. He neither romanticized them nor denigrated them. He neither doted on them, nor ignored them. Rather, He accepted them as 'real people' with real needs, and real talents/resources of use to His ministry. His attitudes of full acceptance of women as useful and responsible disciples was in marked contrast to those of the rabbis of His (or a later) day.**

**He did not make sex an issue, or allow it as an excuse--He focused on obedience, honesty, and loyalty to the covenant of God. He expected His daughters to shoulder His "easy yoke" as well, and in so doing, to find the rest their hearts sought (Mt 11.28-30).**



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# Women in the Heart of God (7)

## The Data From the Historical Literature of the Apostolic Circle

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[updated 12/21/96]

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This period of time stretches from the writing of the first gospel to the finishing of the book of Acts.

The data of this period comes from the literary data, present in Matthew, Mark, Luke-Acts, and the Gospel of John. The historical writings of these members (or deputies) of the apostolic circle will reveal features of their authors' views on women in the church, by HOW female characters are used in the narratives. For example, are they portrayed as enemies, or evil, or examples of anti-virtue? What purposes do women's words and actions play in the text--and what might the level of detail (or lack thereof) reveal about how the early church understood them?

Even though most of the events we will use as 'raw materials' come from the pre-Church period (i.e. the earthly life of Christ), since it is being written down LATER THAN that period, it will be used to illustrate the perspectives of at least early church leadership (i.e. the apostolic circle). In the book of Acts we will have some "purely" historical elements to work with as well.

The gospels are primarily concerned with the life and mission of Jesus, of course, and so we should not expect a ton of data. But Matthew and Luke are especially striking in their use of female characters and 'mentions' in the text. We will largely concentrate on that data.

We can arrange this material under the following categories:

1. Historical data from the Book of Acts.
2. Literary data from the Gospel of Matthew.
3. Literary data from the Writings of Luke (the Gospel of Luke and Acts).
4. John's portrayal of Mary and Martha.

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## 1. Historical data from the Book of Acts.

Here we can look at how women **responded to the message of Christ and their roles/status in the Church once they became believers.**

- How women responded to the message of Christ in the Book of Acts.

They consistently responded favorably to it, and they were obviously preached to by the early leaders.

*Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number. (Acts 5.14--Jerusalem)*

*But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women. (Acts 8.12--Samaritan)*

*13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message. 15 When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us. (Acts 16.13ff--Gentile)*

*Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men. (Acts 17.12)*

What is also clear in the book of Acts is that the apostolic band felt NO QUALMS about witnessing to women. The [restrictions observed by the Rabbi's about not teaching the Torah to women, or not talking to them for too long or in public](#), were NOT honored by the early church!

The passages above involve Peter and Paul (at least)--with them deliberately evangelizing women.

- Women's roles/status in the Church once they became believers.
  1. They obviously were not segregated out at times of prayer or excluded from baptism (Acts 1.14: *They all joined together*

*constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. and Acts 16.15: When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. and Acts 21.5: All the disciples and their wives and children accompanied us out of the city, and there on the beach we knelt to pray.)*

2. They were considered "**believers**" (Acts 16.15: *When she and the members of her household were baptized, she invited us to her home. "If you consider me a believer in the Lord," she said, "come and stay at my house." And she persuaded us.*), "**disciples**" (Acts 9.36: *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor.*), and "**followers of Paul**" (Acts 17.34: *34 A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*).
3. Priscilla, the wife of Aquilla and "fellow-worker" of Paul's (Rom 16.3), was especially active in discipling people, including the gifted and learned Apollos.

*Meanwhile a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. 25 He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26 He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (Acts 18.24ff)*

[Note that the man and the woman were BOTH in synagogue, and BOTH taught Apollos.]

Deen speaks of her prominence ([WS:AWB:227](#)):

Her prominence is evidenced by many facts. She became the teacher of the eloquent and learned Apollos. The church assembled in her home, both at Ephesus and at Rome, and she was known throughout Christendom in her day. Though she and her husband "labored together," in three out of five places her name appears

first--evidence enough that she played the more important part in the early Christian Church.

4. There are many aspects of their experience that indicate a basic 'equality'--

- They were blessed EQUALLY in the promise of the Spirit on Pentecost--as indicated by Peter's quote from Joel (Acts 2.14ff):

*Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd: "Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. 15 These men are not drunk, as you suppose. It's only nine in the morning! 16 No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: 17 "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. 18 Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*

- Correspondingly, they had EQUAL responsibility to share this revelation with the men!
- They had EQUAL guilt with the men (Acts 5.9: *Peter said to her, "How could you agree to test the Spirit of the Lord? Look! The feet of the men who buried your husband are at the door, and they will carry you out also."*)
- They were persecuted EQUALLY by the anti-Christians.

*But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison. (Acts 8.3)*

*Meanwhile, Saul was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men*

*or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. (Acts 9.1-2)*

5. There were two specific ministries ascribed to them that were of major significance (and authority) to the early church: **prophetess** and **patron/benefactor/leader of house churches**.

We have already encountered both of these roles earlier: the patrons of Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, and the prophetesses Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, Anna.

1. **Prophetesses** (Acts 21.8-9):

*Leaving the next day, we reached Caesarea and stayed at the house of Philip the evangelist, one of the Seven. 9 He had four unmarried daughters who prophesied.*

It is instructive to note that ALL mentions of Christian prophetesses in the NT are in Luke (Paul's traveling companion) or by Paul (e.g. I Cor 11.5:*And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head*).

2. **patron/benefactor/leader of house churches** .

These roles blur somewhat, but become very important in the NT period, for the women typically end up hosting (and managing in many cases) churches that meet in their homes.

Let's look at some scholarly assessments of the historical data...

"In the Greek East, the honorary inscriptions praised women benefactors for both their munificence and their virtues as wives and mothers. In Roman Italy, inscriptions concentrate more on the former. The importance of these inscriptions is that they demonstrate the presence of women who controlled significant sums of money and who used those funds for public purposes--a role previously restricted to men. In

the NT, Luke-Acts repeatedly presents women in the role of benefactors to the Christian community: the women who supported Jesus in his ministry (Luke 8:2-3; 23:55-56), Mary who opened her home to the Jerusalem community (Acts 12:12), Lydia who was the patron for the church at Philippi (Acts 16:14-15, 40), and Priskilla who with her husband was a significant figure in Corinth and Ephesus (Acts 18:2-3, 26). The author made it a point to note women of substance. The same pattern is present in the Pauline corpus. Paul called Phoebe a "benefactor" of the church in Cenchreae (Rom. 16:2). Similarly, Paul or one of his disciples urged the Colossians to greet "Nympha and the church in her house." ([WS:EWEC:70-71](#)).

"Wherever Christianity spread, women were leaders of house churches. Mary, the mother of John Mark, presided over a house church of Hellenistic Jews in Jerusalem. It was on her door that the astonished Peter knocked to announce to the Christians assembled there that he had been liberated from prison by an angel (Acts 12:12-17). Apphia presided with two others as leaders of a house church in Colossae (Philem. 2). Nympha in Laodicea, Lydia in Thyatira, and Phoebe at Cenchreae supervised the congregations that met in their homes (Col. 4:15; Acts 16:15; Rom. 16:1)" ([WS:WWWP:33](#))

This patronage/leadership role was a critical function in the church of the first 2-3 centuries, and is duly noted in the NT.

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## 2. **Literary data from the Gospel of Matthew.**

Matthew's use of women characters is instructive, for it contrasts with many female images of the ancient world:

The portrayal of women as positive models of religious virtue was rare in the ancient world. While the Gospels assume the patriarchal structure of Jewish culture, they do portray women in a remarkably positive and exemplary role....In fact, with only a few exceptions, women are used consistently in Matthew's story to educate the reader in fundamental values and insights that are to govern a life of discipleship. ([WS:EWEC:432](#))

This value on the role and contribution of women can be seen in several aspects of Matthew's work:

1. The genealogy.

The main thing to look for in a genealogy are the 'break-points'--those phrases that indicate some kind of discontinuity or change in the flow. These breakpoints are clues to the author's intentions.

In Matthew's genealogy, there are several such breakpoints. The most obvious ones are the famous leaders that form the pivots for the 15-generation segments of the passage. [Matthew used a rounded-off version of the genealogies to facilitate memorization and learning. The 15-15-15 structure would have been easier to remember for early catechumens.)

But other breaks occur in the mention of four women's names: Tamar (1.3), Rahab (1.5), Ruth (1.5), the wife of Uriah (1.6). Although there are perhaps more exemplary characters that could have been used, and even though Jewish sources spoke favorably about these women, it should be noted that "each of these women take initiative to overcome their powerless state and questionable circumstances to participate in the plan of God." ([WS:EWEC:435](#)). In other words, they each demonstrate that character of discipleship that is so important--"be faithful with little, and I will give you more". These women were singled out for their independent action (sage-like?) in difficult situations; requirements for a young church in a difficult period.

2. Matthew either creates (or preserves) general 'pairings' of men-women in Jesus' teachings.

For example, in chapter 13, Jesus' use of a man sowing a mustard seed (31-32) is paired with that of a woman making dough (33).

And, in the Olivet Discourse, the warning that *Two men will be in the field; one will be taken and the other left.* (24.40) is immediately followed with *Two women will be grinding with a hand mill; one will be taken and the other left.*(v.41)

3. But it is in the area of characterization of women, and their narrative uses by Matthew that are the most instructive.

"It is generally recognized that there are five principal character groups in Matthew's story: Jesus, the disciples, the religious leaders, the crowds, and the minor characters...Minor characters are those who appear sparingly throughout the story and are depicted with varying degrees of insight into their person. Although in some scenes they seem merely to function as "props" to establish a setting, on certain other occasions, they serve as positive 'foils' against which to view the deficiencies of major characters. Thus minor characters often exemplify values endorsed and commended by Jesus and the narrator. Although they usually remain nameless and appear in only one scene, their importance for the overall story is not to be slighted because of the brevity of their appearances."  
([WS:EWEC:430,431](#))

So, in the case of Matthew, we will see him using women to (1) portray attitudes of true discipleship; and (2) do this AS A CONTRAST to those of the disciples(!).

Let's look at a few passages in which these elements can be seen.

1. In chapter 9, we have a "Pairing": the story of the Woman with the Hemorrhage juxtaposed to that of the Raising of Jairus' Daughter. Jairus is the socially-acceptable ruler, approaching publicly. The Woman is a social outcast, due to her long-standing disease, and approaches privately. But notice that they BOTH receive the desired healing, but ONLY the woman is commended publicly by Jesus, and ONLY the woman's inner thought patterns are revealed to the reader. Jesus' public commendation establishes her as a role model alongside other examples of active faith (e.g. 8.10; 9.2).
2. The story of the Canaanite woman--a social and cultic 'outsider'--is also set up as a foil. This foreign woman calls Jesus "Son of

David"--an acknowledgment of His messianic authority. But, Chouinard points out:

Such an insight in the context of Matthew 15 is clearly intended as a foil against which are heightened the "blindness of Israel's leaders" (15:14, 24; see 2:1-4), and the lack of perception among the disciples (15:16ff). ([WS:EWEC:440](#))

3. In the all-important Passion Narratives, women again play a decisive role in modeling the elements of true discipleship.
  - The woman who anoints Jesus for His coming burial (26.6-13), is contrasted with the disciples: "While the disciples struggle with the reality of Jesus' imminent passion, this women is portrayed as understanding the necessity of the passion and responding accordingly." ([WS:EWEC:441](#)).
  - In the final scenes of the story, women assume a role that should have been played by the disciples. They were present at the Cross (27.55, vs. The fled-disciples), present at the burial (27.61), and the first to learn of the resurrection (28.1-7).

Indeed,

Certainly, the prior actions of the women ("follow" and "serve him") and their presence at such critical junctures in the story (i.e., crucifixion, burial, and resurrection) establishes that these women should be viewed as authentic disciples, though they were not counted among the twelve. ([WS:EWEC:442](#)).

4. The details in the resurrection account show the women as foils, contrasting with both the soldiers and with the disciples.

In the first case, both the women and the soldiers are hit with 'fear', but whereas the soldiers are incapacitated (28.4), the women are prompted to action by the words of the angel. And, both the women and the soldiers are witnesses at first, but the soldiers are reduced to silence by bribes (28.15).

In the second case, the women respond later to the Risen Christ with worship, but the disciples, when confronted by the same Risen Lord,

respond ALSO with 'confusion' (28.17: *When they saw him, they worshipped him; but some doubted.*).

Clearly, the women followers of Jesus function as post-resurrection models of discipleship.

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**3. Literary data from the Writings of Luke.**

Luke has an altogether different purpose in mind as he places women characters and their scenes into his combined Luke-Acts history. Whereas Matthew used women primarily as foils against the various other characters--with a special emphasis on their exemplification of the traits of true discipleship, Luke will use the mentions of women as demonstration of their integral part of the Kingdom of God. In other words, his use of women characters and situations will be 'natural'--an obvious main component in the plan of God.

This will show up in a number of ways: in the frequency of 'mentions', in the use of men-women pairings, on the legitimacy of focusing on their 'inner life', his recounting of their contributions to the early church, and his linking them up with the Apostle Paul.

Once we have looked at this data, we will ask the oft-asked question--"why?" Why such a significant attention on women--WITHOUT 'drawing attention' to that fact?

- The frequency of 'mentions' in Luke-Acts.

First, let's look at the data from the Gospel of Luke:

1. Elizabeth (1.5-25, 36, 39-60) [paired with Zechariah, her husband]
2. Mary (1.26-56; 2.1-52) [paired with Zech, as parallel]
3. Anna (2.36-38) [paired with Simeon]
4. Herodias (3.19) [paired with husband Herod]
5. Widow of Zarephath (4.25-26) [paired with Naaman]
6. Peter's Mother-in-Law (4.38-39) [paired with Possessed Man]
7. Widow of Nain's Son (7.11-17) [paired with Centurian's Servant]
8. Those Born of Women (7.28) [no pairing]
9. Sinful Woman (7.36-50) [paired with Simon the Pharisee]
10. Women with Jesus (8.1-3) [paired with the Twelve]
11. Jesus' Mother and Bros. (8.19-21) [no pairing]
12. Jairus' Daughter and Woman with Hemorrhage (8.40-56) [Gerasene Demoniac?]

13. Mary and Martha (10.38-42) [no pairing]
14. Woman praises Jesus' mother (11.27-28) [no pairing]
15. Queen of the South (11.31) [paired with Ninevites]
16. Mother vs. Daughter (12.53) [paired with Father vs. Son]
17. Crippled Woman (13.10-17) [paired with Many with Dropsy]
18. The Leaven (13.20-21) [paired with Mustard Seed]
19. Discipleship and Family (14.26) [paired with Father and Brothers]
20. The Lost Coin (15.8-10) [paired with the Lost Sheep]
21. The Divorce Saying (16.18) [no pairing]
22. Lot's Wife (17.32) [paired with Lot]
23. Women Grinding (17.35) [paired with men(?) sleeping]
24. Widow and Judge (18.1-8) [paired with Pharisee and the Tax Collector]
25. Leaving House, Wife, Etc. (18.29) [no pairing]
26. Woman with 7 Husbands (20.27-40) [no pairing]
27. Devouring Widows' Houses (20.47) [no pairing]
28. Widow's Offering (21.1-4) [paired with Scribes, see 20.47]
29. "Those with child" (21.23) [no pairing]
30. Maid accuses Peter (22.56) [paired with Man Accuses Peter]
31. Women who Wail (23.27-31) [no pairing]
32. Women at Crucifixion (23.49) [paired with Other Acquaintances]
33. Women Witnesses (24.1-11, 22-24) [paired with Two on Road to Emmaus]

To these mentions in Luke, should be added these verses in Acts:

1. 1.14: *They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.*
2. 2.18: *Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy.*
3. 5.14: *Nevertheless, more and more men and women believed in the Lord and were added to their number.*
4. 8.3: *Godly men buried Stephen and mourned deeply for him. 3 But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison.*
5. 8.12: *But when they believed Philip as he preached the good news of the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.*
6. 9.2: *and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus, so that if he found any there who belonged to the Way, whether men or women, he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem.*

7. 9.36: *In Joppa there was a disciple named Tabitha (which, when translated, is Dorcas), who was always doing good and helping the poor. 37 About that time she became sick and died, and her body was washed and placed in an upstairs room.*
8. 13.50: *But the Jews incited the God-fearing women of high standing and the leading men of the city.*
9. 16.13: *13 On the Sabbath we went outside the city gate to the river, where we expected to find a place of prayer. We sat down and began to speak to the women who had gathered there. 14 One of those listening was a woman named Lydia, a dealer in purple cloth from the city of Thyatira, who was a worshiper of God. The Lord opened her heart to respond to Paul's message.*
10. 17.4: *Some of the Jews were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a large number of God-fearing Greeks and not a few prominent women.*
11. 17.12: *Many of the Jews believed, as did also a number of prominent Greek women and many Greek men.*
12. 17.34: *A few men became followers of Paul and believed. Among them was Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus, also a woman named Damaris, and a number of others.*

This a very surprising frequency, and one noted by almost all commentators.

○ Luke's use of pairings

As can be seen from the first list above, 23 of the 33 mentions include a woman-man pairing in the literature. Luke is careful to make it clear that the gospel and discipleship call equally to women as it does to men--and that obedience is just as demanding.

Pairings also occur in the book of Acts, although differently. He mentions 4 married couples: Ananias/Sapphira (Acts 5), Timothy's parents (Acts 16.1), Priscilla/Aquila (Acts 18.2-3), Drusilla/Felix (Acts 24.24), and a pair of siblings (25.13). And the majority of the mentions (above) are in the form of 'men and women.'

Luke DOES use a few pairings in which women demonstrate the good, over against men who demonstrate the bad, but this is NOT a major motif of his (as it was in Matthew):

1. Mary illustrates faith; Zechariah demonstrates unbelief (Lk 1.26-56;

2.1-52)

2. The sinful woman illustrates being forgiven and loving; Simon the Pharisee is the opposite (Lk 7.36-50)
3. The Crippled Woman is cast against her Objectors in Luke 13.10-17.
4. The Widow is righteous, over against the Unjust Judge in 18.1-8.

[The main differences between the pairings in Luke's Gospel and the pairings in Acts can be easily seen. In the gospel, the pairings are literary--the story-pairs function almost as Hebrew parallelisms. In Acts, the pairings are in the characters themselves. We shall consider one possible explanation for this 'change' at the end of this section.]

- Luke's focusing on women's 'inner life'

We have already noted above how Luke lets us get inside the thoughts of the Woman with the Hemorrhage. But Luke has given us, at the very beginning of his works, an extended view of women's thoughts and responses. The Infancy Narratives are replete with the thinking/worship of Women. From Elizabeth's words, to her dialog with Mary; from Mary's Song to the references to her 'pondering these things in her heart' (1.29; 2.19; 2.51), Luke is deliberate in sharing with his readers the 'inside view' of these events--as understood by the women characters.

- Like's recounting of their contributions to the birth and growth of the church

Luke consistently points out the leadership contributions of women in his writings.

- In Luke 1-2, he has three women prophesy: Anna, Elizabeth, Mary.
- We have already seen the passages in the Gospels where the women are portrayed as 'traveling disciples' (e.g. 8.1-4).
- He records the resurrection of Tabitha, a woman praised for her good works (9.36-42)
- Mary, mother of John Mark, hosts a church at her house (12.12-17)
- Lydia is the first convert in Macedonia, and Paul establishes his base of operations in her home (16.11-15)
- Priscilla, along with her husband, disciples the prominent Apollos (18.26)
- Luke points out that Philip has four daughters who were prophets (21.9).

Note as well that Luke is the writer that has reminded us of women's **patronage** roles in the early church.

- Luke consistently links women up with the ministry of the Apostle Paul.

Luke is a traveling companion of Paul, on some of his missionary journeys (cf. The "we" sections in Acts--e.g. 16.10-18, and Col 4.14; 2 Tim 4.11; Philem 24). His portrait of Paul in the book of Acts is carefully structured to 'equal' the ministry of Peter. With this in mind, there are several passages which link prominent women disciples with Paul's ministry.

- The first convert in Philippi was Lydia, who was apparently a leader of a prayer-place outside the city (16.13ff). Paul preaches to the women there, and Lydia responds. She then leads her household to the Lord (16.15), and persuades Paul and his group to stay in her home (v.15).
- Paul used Lydia's house as the first house-church for meeting there. Cf. 16.40: *After Paul and Silas came out of the prison, they went to Lydia's house, where they met with the brothers and encouraged them.*
- Paul's ministry in Thessalonica results in the conversion of 'not a few prominent women' (17.4)
- Paul's ministry in Berea results in the conversion of 'a number of prominent Greek women' (17.12)
- Paul's ministry in Athens results in the conversion of a woman named Damaris, called a "follower of Paul" (17.34).
- At Corinth, Paul stayed with Aquila and Priscilla (18.3). They--as a couple--traveled with him (18.18), and then discipled Apollos in Ephesus (18.24ff).
- Paul stayed at the home of Philip the Evangelist, who had the four daughters who prophesied. (21.8-9).

In so linking Paul and women, Luke demonstrates to his readers that women were an essential part of the work of God in the Church.

But.... "WHY?" ...Why did Luke make such a point of including women so extensively in his writings?

There are three elements to understanding this--one is very widely accepted, one has only recently been articulated in the scholarly community, and one is my OWN 'pet heresy' (smile)...

1. Luke wrote his works with an obvious women readership in mind.  
(commonly accepted view)

There is a simple solution to the problem of why Luke's gospel contains more stories about women than the others: Luke was writing for an audience wherein women were numerous...The evangelist seeks to capture the attention of the female portion of the audience. (Davies, in [WS:WLT:190](#))

What is interesting to me about this position is that Luke's works are addressed to a man named "Theophilus". In the Graeco-Roman culture of the day, Theophilus would probably be expected to 'publish' Luke's writings (see [BREC:102](#)). When this fact is combined with the historical and sociological insights into the makeup of the early church--largely female ([ROC](#), chapter 5)--we can understand this clearly.

In the earliest days of the expansion of the Church, women were more likely to become Christians than men--which is true in modern religious movements as well--([ROC:100](#)), and that the early church attracted an "unusual number of high-status women" ([ROC:107](#)). Many of the extra-biblical records indicated that there were many, many mixed marriages, in which generally it was the woman who was a believer and the husband, not. Secondary conversions (in which one spouse influences the other to accept the faith) were common in the young church, and women had a much higher status in the Christian subculture than in the pagan culture of the day ([ROC:107-111](#)).

If women were as prevalent and important to the early church as the sociologist Stark argues ([ROC](#)), then it makes perfect sense for Luke to make sure that the readers of his work (to be circulated by Theophilus, perhaps himself a secondary convert?) understand that men and women are both integral to the life of the church.

2. The second possible reason for Luke's high usage of women--esp. without

drawing attention to that fact--is that he sees it as a fulfillment motif of Is 40-66. Recent literature on Lukan writings (as reviewed by Allen Black in [WS:EWEC:463ff](#)), draws attention to Luke's immersion in Isaiah 40-66. Black argues that the programmatic usage of Joel 2 in Acts 2 gives us the key. The references to 'sons and daughters' in the prophecy of Joel, echoes the SIMILAR PAIRINGS in Is 43.6-7; 49.22, and 60.4!

What this would mean for us is that Luke's use of men-women pairings were designed to show his readers that the fulfillment of the ages had come. In other words, the promise of men-women working together in the kingdom of God had been inaugurated in history--in the apostolic church.

3. The third possible reason for Luke's high usage of women--esp. the pairings in the Gospel--is my own sorta 'twist.' I think it possible and maybe even likely that the Gospel of Luke (and not Acts) was basically authored by Mary herself, and incorporated into Luke's two-volume work without radical re-write.

My support for this is thin, but not non-existent.

We DO have one reference in history--the strange work entitled *Debate between a Montanist and an Orthodox* (see discussion in [WS:WLT:238-239](#)). In this work the "Orthodox" explicitly says that Mary wrote the Gospel of Luke but had it published under his name! This document is a 4th century document, with links to Asia Minor--very early and very close to sources(!).

The contents of Luke would obviously accord well with this:

1. Much of the material of the Infancy Narratives would have had to come from Mary ANYWAY!
2. The amount of detail accorded to those events would fit well.
3. The emphasis on Mary's "inner states" would fit.
4. Even the difference in the pairing-styles between the Gospel and Acts would be explained.

Mary, the author of the Magnificat, was thoroughly Hebrew, and shows this in the parallelisms in her Song. If she had constructed a narrative of events, it would likely have had a basic parallel structure (i.e. a 'pairing' in the case of men/women) as well. Luke, on the other

hand, as a Gentile, would not have written such a structure when the material was largely HIS contribution (i.e. Acts). He would have kept her piece largely intact (save for redactional needs), and the pairings in HIS piece would have been historical versus literary.

It is important to note that there is NO commonly accepted view of why the pairings are different between the Gospel and Acts--so my proposal is not at least AGAINST some mainstream position (smile).

- 5. Even the non-sentimentalizing of motherhood in 8.19-21 would make MORE sense if written by the mother herself. Once she had become a believer in Jesus, the traditional mother/son relationship would have paled in significance compared to the one she envisioned in Luke 1.47--"Redeemed/Savior"! Written by others, this might have appeared as a 'put-down' of an admittedly important person in the early church (Acts 1.14).

So, if Mary were a 'first-draft' author of significant parts of the Gospel of Luke (researched by him, remember, cf. Luke 1.1-4!), frequent mentions of women and the style of pairings would all make sense.

In any event, we can infer that Luke was both REFLECTING a significant female involvement in the early church, and EXPECTING a significant female readership in his intended audience.

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**4. John's portrayal of Mary and Martha.**

We have noticed elsewhere that the Jesus of John's gospel had significant interaction with women. Here I want to simply to note the functions of the passages about Mary and Martha in the narrative. To do this, I want to quote a non-Christian JEWISH scholar, who has analyzed these passages.

In discussing the John 11.1-44 passage, Adele Reinhartz says ([WS:WLT:179](#)):

The passage depicts Mary and Martha as Jewish women who live independently with their brother in Bethany. Fully integrated into the Jewish community, they nevertheless have a close enough relationship with Jesus to call on him in time of trouble. Furthermore, at least one of them, Martha, has a rather sophisticated understanding of his identity and his significance for those who believe in him. But the evangelist apparently writes not only to record an important event

in the life of Jesus but also to speak directly to his audience. In using Martha to represent a true disciple who attains the profound understanding of resurrection that he wishes his community to share, the evangelist also is creating a strong role model for the women members of the church. Such a model authenticates both their membership as women and their right--like Martha's--to "ask whatever you will, and it shall be done for you".

And, after analyzing the other passages in which Mary and Martha play, she summarizes ([WS:WLT:181](#)):

It is consequently not only the particular roles ascribed to Martha and Mary in the fourth gospel but also the crucial juncture at which they appear that compels us to take them seriously both as characters and as vehicles for Johannine theology. In portraying Mary and Martha in acts of serving and anointing, Jn 12:1-7, like the other pericopes we have explored, presents the sisters as disciples. That they hosted a dinner for Jesus, at which others of his inner circle were present, implies that the sisters or women like them were also part of, or close to, this inner circle.

.....  
**Summary:**

**The book of Acts yielded important historical data about women in the early church--they responded favorably and widely to the Gospel message. And, once they became a part of the Christian community, they were considered believers, disciples, followers of Paul. They played important roles as prophets and as church leaders, with a special emphasis on their patronage of the young church.**

**This young church did nothing to suppress women in the literature--rather, they incorporated women characters into the earliest of the writings. Matthew and John used women characters as examples of the virtues required in true discipleship (often as foils against the male disciples), and Luke consistently highlights their basic membership in, acceptance by, contribution to, and leadership among--the young Church.**



[Abbreviations](#)

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(for Print Formatting)

# Women in the Heart of God (8)

## Women's Roles in the Early Church

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[updated Feb/2004—added material on Junia/Joanna, the Apostle; Mar 04 – added the pushback to the section on women apostles]

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This period of time stretches from the birth of the Church in Acts 2, until the end of the 5th century or so.

The data of this period comes from three sources: the NT writings, extra-biblical literature, and archeological data (largely inscriptional).

We have a lot of data here, so I plan to "cut it" three ways--by title, by geography, by role.

So, first I will go through the various titles used of church workers (esp. 'official titles') and see what data we have on female workers in those 'titles'. Then I will look at data by church location. Finally, I will group some of the roles together and look at representatives of those functions in church history.

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### *The "title" data*

- **Apostle**

We have one woman in scripture that is actually called an "apostle"--Junia in Rom 16.7: *Greet Andronicus and Junias, my relatives who have been in prison with me. They are outstanding among the apostles....*

Now, one can see that "Junias" (rendered by the NIV above) *appears* masculine and *not* feminine. But the male and female forms of the word do not differ in the spelling--but only in the presence of an apostrophe-like character above one of the letters (which typically did not show up in the mss.).

So, why do I think the word is feminine?

1.

One of the earliest commentators on the passage, John Chrysostom, took the name as feminine: **"how great the wisdom of this woman must have**

**been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle."** (cited in [WS:EWEC:185](#)).

2. So did Origen.
3. So did every church father until the 1200's! ([WS:EWEC:186](#), n.56)
4. One of the earliest minuscule mss (which DO preserve the accents, unlike the unicials) has it so.

Lampe in Anchor Bible Dictionary can summarize the data/implications thus:

"JUNIAS (PERSON) [Gk Iounia]. The only woman who is called an "apostle" in the NT (Rom 16:7). She was born a Jew, and is closely associated to Andronicus. Her name was the Lat name of the *gens Junia*. Women were often called by the name of their *gens* without cognomen (similar examples are Mary [Rom 16:6] and Julia [Rom 16:15]). Two groups carried the name of the *gens Junia*: the noble members of the famous *gens*, and the freed(wo)men of the *gens* with their descendants. The second group outnumbered the first. The chances therefore are that the Christian Junia was a freed slave of the gens. Either way, she probably had Roman citizenship: slave masters with famous *gens* names like "Junius/ia" possessed Roman citizenship and in most cases passed it on to their slaves on the occasion of their emancipation; the freed slaves bequeathed the *gens* name and the citizenship to their freeborn children. **Without exception, the Church Fathers in late antiquity identified Andronicus' partner in Rom 16:7 as a woman**, as did minuscule 33 in the 9th century which records *iounia* with an acute accent. **Only later medieval copyists of Rom 16:7 could not imagine a woman being an apostle and wrote the masculine name "Junias."** This latter name did not exist in antiquity; its explanation as a Greek abbreviation of the Latin name "Junianus" is unlikely."

- The earliest commentators all took this form as feminine:

"It was not always this way. John Chrysostom was not alone in the ancient church in taking the name to be feminine. The earliest commentator on Romans 16:7, Origen of Alexandria (e. 185-253/54), took the name to be feminine (Junta or Julia, which is a textual variant), as did Jerome (340/50-419/20), Hatto of Vercelli (924-961), Theophylact (c.1050-c.1108), and Peter Abelard (1079-1142). In fact, to the best of my knowledge, no commentator on the text until Aegidius of Rome (1245-1316) took the

name to be masculine. Without commenting on his departure from previous commentators, Aegidius simply referred to the two persons mentioned in Romans 16:7 as “these honorable men” (viri). Aegidius noted that there were two variant readings for the second name: Juniam and Juliam (accusative in the verse). He preferred the reading Juliam and took it to be masculine. Thus we see that even Juliam, which modern scholars would take to be clearly feminine, has been considered masculine in the context of the title “apostle.” ” [from <http://www.womenpriests.org/classic/brooten.htm>]

To these early commentators who understood it to refer to a woman, we can add Ambrosiaster, Theodoret, pseudo-Primasius, and John of Damascus [Fitzmeyer, referred to by Bauckham in [WS:GW:166]].

[Some have argued that Origen's reference is a masculine form, but that is due to the *emendation* made by Migne--the mss *themselves* have either the feminine Junia or Julia.]

Some try to make the form into a contraction of a *masculine* word, but there is simply no data to support this:

"*Iounivan* has usually been taken in the modern period as *Iounia`n* = Junias, a contraction of *Junianus* (so rsv, neb, niv, njb). **But the simple fact is that the masculine form has been found nowhere else**, and the name is more naturally taken as *Iounivan* = Junia (Lampe 139–40, 147 indicates **over 250 examples of “Junia,” none of Junias**), as was taken for granted by the patristic commentators, and indeed up to the Middle Ages. The assumption that it must be male is a striking indictment of male presumption regarding the character and structure of earliest Christianity...We may **firmly** conclude, however, that **one of the foundation apostles of Christianity was a woman and wife.**" [James G.D. Dunn, WBC, in loc.]

And BBC(NT) summarizes it the same way, arguing that Junia was part of a husband-wife team:

"Against attempts to make “Junia” a contraction of the masculine “Junianus,” this form is not attested in Rome; ancient Christian readers recognized that Junia was a woman. Because she and Andronicus traveled together without scandal, and singleness was unusual, they were undoubtedly a husband-wife team; husband-wife teams were known in some professions, like doctors and lower-class merchants. **The most**

**natural way to read the Greek phrase is that both were apostles;** some modern interpreters have rejected this reading mainly because they presuppose that women could never fill this office."

[Tanknote: Epiphanius (4-5th centuries), in his list of bishops, either (a) seemed to understand the term as masculine; or (b) *wanted* to understand the term as masculine; but the extremely anti-women bias in Epi (and his polemic against women leadership) makes his testimony very, very unreliable as evidence IMO. (Discussions of his reliability on his bishop lists are beyond the scope of this article.) E.g., "Who are there that teach such things apart from women? In very truth, women are a feeble race, untrustworthy and of mediocre intelligence.", *Panarion* 79]

Bauckham [WS:GW:166] notes that:

“The case for reading the female name Junia rather than the male name Junias in Romans 16:7 has been made adequately in scholarship since the 1970's and **has been widely accepted**, while the REB and NRSV are, I believe, the first English translations to place 'Junia' in the text and to relegate 'Junias' to a footnote. The history of the matter is a sad story of prejudice making bad translation.”

Recent argumentation by Bauckham [WS:GW, p.109ff] makes a strong case that not only is this word-noun-name *feminine*, but also that it is the Latin-ized version of **Joanna** (one of Jesus' traveling companions/disciples—cf Luke 8.3 and 24.10)! Joanna was the wife of Herod's steward, and would have had a Latin/Roman name for purposes of administration. This identification would make the most sense of the name, her relation to Rome, her being 'in Christ' before Paul, and of her apostolic status (as a witness of Jesus' deeds and resurrection—Acts 1).

The majority of the 'hard' data supports a feminine reading of the word--and hence, a female 'apostle' (in the wider sense of apostle--not the Eleven, of course.)...But still the HIGHEST term available.

.....

***Pushback:*** “*I enjoy reading your ideas on the topics. However, I read your article on the role of women in the church and was a bit surprised. Being a protestant ( I go to a Vineyard Church) I enjoy church history and find it interesting, however, I do not establish doctrine based on simply historical text outside of scripture. But your idea of women as apostles was based primarily on Church history. Yes, I read the article, and I*

*am aware of your argument of the feminine form of the name, but I find it difficult to establish doctrine on the ambiguity of the gender reference. Don't get me wrong; I wanted you to be right, but I found your argument a bit problematic. Sorry, I hope I don't sound too negative; I have enjoyed many of your articles, but to create a gender doctrine based on what doesn't seem to me to be a scripture addressing that issue is somewhat sketchy. I still am a frequent visitor and will continue to be. “*

(Boy, I wish all pushbacks were worded as sweetly as this one...sigh)

Couple of things here:

**First**, strictly speaking, my argument is NOT really from Church History, but from Historical data *about the biblical text*. (If it were a *real* argument from Church History, there would be no discussion of the form of this work/phrase in Romans—it would be about Historical tradition, without any basis in the biblical text per se.). Using (a) the lexical data from the ancient world about a word, its forms, and its distribution in history/usage; and (b) the history of interpretation *of that biblical phrase* by those closer in time/mindset than us is **standard praxis in biblical exegesis**. We use the Church Fathers to help us with textual criticism, biblical background, and lexical issues *constantly*, and these are used to **clarify the biblical text itself**—and **not** to establish some doctrine *separately/independently* from the text. Big, important difference there. I am using the **lexical** (non-Christian usage) data and the **literary** (Christian interpretation) data to help remove the ambiguity of the specific phrase (much as we do for phrases/concepts of 'headship', 'sacrifice', 'reconciliation', or even 'became a curse for us'. This is still an argument about the text, and NOT an argument about 'church history'.

**Secondly**, I am not sure that I am really trying to establish a 'doctrine' with this. I am examining all the data *about the text* to see **which side** of the issue is BEST SUPPORTED by the LARGER amount of data. In the *historical* (not *doctrinal*) question of “was there a woman apostle?”, the data is significantly heavier in favor of “YES” (as also seen from the many commentator assessments cited above—this is not just MY opinion on the subject). The *doctrinal* question of “Could a woman be an apostle, as recognized by other apostles?” could be established by either an overt rule-type statement to that effect (“apostles can be female or male”) or by an overt biblical reference to such a case (“Female X (is) an apostle”). Of course, we don't have

ANY statement about gender/sex relative to apostles (i.e., there is no statement that apostles have to be male or female—only the requirement that they had seen the Risen Lord), so we are limited to the latter cases—of which the Romans passage is our text. To see this another way, there are no instructions that prophets have to be male (or that they can be female), but we *know* of women legitimately prophesying in the New Testament (e.g., Stephen's daughters, and 1 Cor 11). So the issue is a historical one—does the Romans passage refer to a woman apostle, and EVERY SCRAP OF DATA we have indicates that the answer to this is “YES”.

**Thirdly**, the very fact that the biblical texts present women as legitimate *prophets* creates a *prima facie* argument that they were *as important as* apostles (and therefore “*superior*” in the church to elders/pastors]. The scriptures which illustrate this linkage and priority are:

- Luke 11.49: “I will send them **prophets and apostles...**”
- Eph 2.20: “...God's household, built upon **the foundation of the apostles and the prophets**, which Jesus Christ being the cornerstone.”
- Eph 3.25: “...which in other generations was not made known to the children of men, as it is now been revealed to His holy **apostles and prophets...**”
- 1 Cor 12.28: “And God has appointed in the church, first apostles, *second prophets*, **third** teachers...”

So, given these three points, I still believe that

(a) my argument is from the biblical text *itself* (as illuminated by secular and ecclesiastical history) and **not** from just the position of the sub-apostolic leaders on the question “should women be allowed to be apostles?” and;

(b) the biblical data is still strongly in favor of the historical position that woman were accorded apostolic status since:

1. they are accorded the equal, closely-related, and superior-to-pastors position of *prophets*;
  2. there are no qualifications for an apostle involving gender at all
- .....

- **bishop/elder**

This word renders the Greek words *episkopos* or *presbyteros*.

We have no examples of women in the NT being titled by these; however, we have no MEN labeled that either, except Peter and the self-designation of the author of 2 & 3rd John!

But the archeological data is significant here.

1. An early mosaic in a Roman basilica portrays a living figure titled "Bishop Theodora" ([WS:WWWP:9-10](#)) [Latin: *episcopa*]
2. At a burial site on the Greek island of Thera there is an epitaph for a women Epiktas, named as an *presbytis* in the 3rd or 4th century. [[WS:WWWP:10](#)]
3. A Christian inscription from 2nd or 3rd century Egypt reads: "Artemidoras...fell asleep in the Lord, her mother Paniskianes being an elder [*presbytera*]" ([WS:WWWP:20](#))
4. The bishop Diogenes in the 3rd century set up a memorial for Ammion the elder (*presbytera*, feminine form). ([WS:WWWP:20](#))
5. A 4th or 5th century epitaph in Sicily refers to Kale the elder (*presbytis*,

also feminine). ([WS:WWWP:20](#)).

- **deacon/deaconess**

Although this word (lit. "servant") has a wide range of meaning in NT times, there is some data that can be used for our study.

1. In Rom 16.1-2, the female Phoebe is called by the MASCULINE form of 'deacon'--strongly suggesting that it is the technical term of the office of deacon. [[WS:WIC:88f](#)]
2. Clement of Alexandria wrote about women deacons (*Misc.*, 3.6.53)
3. The Council of Chalcedon specified that "henceforth a deaconess must be at least forty and unmarried" ([ROC:108](#))
4. Pliny the Younger, in his correspondence to Trajan, reported that he had tortured two young Christian women "who were called deacons" (*Epistle* 10.96.8).
5. Origen argued on the basis of Rom 16 that the EXISTING institution of women deacons should be continued. (commentary on Romans).

- **Paul's "co-workers" and "hard-workers"**

These terms are semi-official titles among the Pauline work-force. His terms are *synergos* ("co-worker") and *kopion* ("hard worker"). The functions ascribed to these terms in the NT is summarized in [WS:WIC:84](#):

They assisted in composing letters (Rom 16:22; I Thess 1:1), carried apostolic messages to local churches (1 Cor 4.17; 16:10-11), sought to encourage the believers on Paul's behalf (1 Thess 3:2), reported to Paul the status of congregations under his care (1 Thess 3:6) and even occasionally hosted house churches (1 Cor 16:19)...In view of this wide range of ministry, it would be ludicrous to deny that Paul's coworkers possessed authority in the churches (1 Cor 16:17-18)...a role which included the task of admonition (1 Thess 5:12)...Paul spoke readily of women, as well as men, as his coworkers.

(See also I Cor 16.16: "submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work (*synergounti*), and labors (*kopionti*) at it.")

These semi-titles are used of:

1. Euodia (Phil 4.3)
2. Syntyche (Phil 4.3)
3. Priscilla (Rom 16.3)
4. Mary (Rom 16.6)
5. Tryphena (Rom 16.12)
6. Tryphosa (Rom 16.12)
7. Persis (Rom 16.12)

It should be noted that there is not a single title of leadership mentioned in the NT that is not ascribed to a female sometime within the first 3 centuries of the Church's life--as evidenced by literary and/or archeological data.

.....  
***The Geographical Data***

Here we want to simply note the location of the female workers/leaders.

- The Jerusalem Church--Mary, mother of John Mark, hosted a Hellenistic church at her home (Acts 12.12f)
- The Church at Rome--of the 28 people addressed by Paul in the letter, some 10 of them are women, and several are called by official and semi-official titles! Plus, this all-important letter was officially carried by the women Phoebe.
- The Philippian church was obviously founded by Lydia (Acts 16), and two of the main leaders were the women (and Paul's "co-workers") Euodia and Syntyche.
- The Church at Corinth obviously had authoritative women prophets (I Cor 11.4), as well as start-up assistance from the wife-husband pair Priscilla/Aquila (Acts 18.1-3).
- The Church at Caesarea was ministered to by the 4 prophetess daughters of Philip (Acts 21.8-9).

- The Church at Laodicea was apparently a house-church run by Nympha (Col 4.15).
- The Church at Cenchrea enjoyed Phoebe as a deacon (Rom 16.1-2).
- The Church at Ephesus was ministered to by the wife-husband pair Priscilla/Aquilla (Acts 18.19).

This is interesting data, especially since it indicates female 'leadership roles' in most of the major cities of the early church!

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*A Listing of Some of the Roles/Functions Women Provided*

- Women as Martyrs

1. Perpetua (d. 202)

Perpetua, a newly married woman from a prominent family, was among the catechumens arrested and imprisoned for being a Christian in Carthage, North Africa, in 202. In prison, Perpetua had powerful dreams and visions in which she fought the power of evil and won. Perpetua described her dream-vision of triumph over the Devil in the following passage:

The day before we were to fight with the beast I saw the following vision. Pomponius, the deacon, came to the prison gates and began to knock violently. I went out and opened the gate for him. He was dressed in an unbelted white tunic, wearing elaborate sandals. And he said to me: Perpetua, come; we are waiting for you. Then he took my hand and we began to walk through rough and broken country. At last we came to the amphitheater out of breath, and he led me into the centre of the arena. Then he told me: "Do not be afraid. I am here struggling with you."

Then he left. I looked at the enormous crowd who watched in astonishment. I was surprised that no beasts were let loose on me; for I knew that I was condemned to die by the beasts. Then out came an Egyptian against me, of vicious appearance, together with his seconds, to fight with me. There also came up to me some handsome young men to be my seconds and assistants.... We drew close to one another and began to let our fists fly. My opponent tried to get hold of my feet. Then I was raised up into the air and I began to pummel him without as it were touching the ground. Then when I noticed there was a lull, I put my two hands together linking the fingers of one hand with those of the other and thus I got hold of his head. He fell flat on his face and I stepped on his head. The crowd began to shout and my assistants started to sing psalms. Then I walked up to the trainer and took the branch. He kissed me and said to me: "Peace be with you, my daughter!" I began to walk in triumph towards the Gate of Life. Then I awoke. I realized that it was not with wild animals that I would fight but with the Devil, but I knew that I would win the victory.

Perpetua demonstrated remarkable courage throughout her imprisonment and up to the day of her martyrdom, when she was killed by the sword. (ws:ppw:25)

## 2. Irene (d. April 1, 304)

Irene and her companions Agape and Chione were from Thessalonica. Attempting to flee the persecution of Diocletian and Maximian, they were captured and condemned to die. One of Irene's crimes was concealing Christian books (probably the

Scriptures) in defiance of the emperor's order to turn them over for burning. Scholars believe that this may indicate that she held a position of leadership in the church. When the persecution was raging under the Emperor Maximian, these women, who had adorned themselves with virtue, following the precepts of the gospel, abandoned their native city, their family, property, and possessions because of their love of God and their expectation of heavenly things, performing deeds worthy of their father Abraham. They fled the persecutors, according to the commandment, and took refuge on a high mountain. There they gave themselves to prayer; though their bodies resided on a mountain top, their souls lived in heaven. Irene was questioned by authorities and was sentenced to be placed naked in a brothel. After those who were put in charge had taken the girl off to the public brothel in accordance with the prefect's order, by the grace of the Holy Spirit which preserved and guarded her pure and inviolate for the God who is the lord of all things, no man dared to approach her or so much as tried to insult her in her speech. Hence the prefect Dulcitus called back this most saintly girl, had her stand before the tribunal, and said to her, "Do you still persist in the same folly?" But Irene said to him, "It is not folly, but piety." He then asked for a sheet of papyrus and wrote the sentence against her as follows, "Whereas Irene has refused to obey the command of the emperors and to offer sacrifice, and still adheres to a sect called Christians, I therefore sentence her to be burned alive, as I did her two sisters before her." After this sentence had been pronounced by the prefect, the soldiers took the girl and brought her to a high place, where her sisters had been martyred before her. They ignited a huge pyre and ordered her to climb up on it. And the holy woman Irene, singing and praising God, threw her self upon it and so died. It was in the ninth consulship of Diocletian Augustus, in the eighth of Maximian Augustus [304 C.E.], on the first day of April, in the reign of our Lord Christ Jesus, who reigns forever, with whom there is glory to God with the Holy Spirit for ever. Amen.

Irene's courageous testimony reflects the independent spirit of the Christian women martyrs of the early church, their strong resistance to political oppression, and their willingness to embrace martyrdom for the sake of the gospel. (ws:ppw:30)

3. AGAPE (c. 272-304), one of three sisters martyred for her Christian stand. All three sisters lived in Thessalonica. They were instructed in the Christian faith and doctrines but were warned to remain unknown and to live in seclusion and prayer. Agape, along with her sisters, were discovered and examined before the governor, Dulcatius. During the questioning her Christian testimony was firm, indicating that she could not comply with laws that enforced the worship of idols and devils. This angered the governor, and he condemned her to death. She was martyred on March 25, 304. ([WS:DWCH:2](#))
4. AGATHA (c. 225-251), a Christian woman of Sicily with unusual beauty. Quintain, the pagan governor of Sicily, was greatly attracted to her and attempted to seduce her. She tried to relocate so as not to be seen by him, but she was discovered and brought to Catana. Realizing her circumstances, she prayed for death. In a further attempt to gratify his desires, the governor assigned Agatha to a licentious woman, Aphrodica, who tried to persuade Agatha to give in to prostitution. All such efforts were wasted, and Agatha's Christian testimony remained firm. This caused Quintain great resentment, especially when Agatha spoke so clearly of her Christian faith. The governor was determined to have his revenge and had Agatha scourged, burned with red-hot irons, torn with sharp hooks, and finally laid naked on live coals intermingled with glass. She died as a result of that torture on February 5, 251. ([WS:DWCH:2](#))
5. AGNES (Fourth Century), considered a Christian martyr of Rome; especially recognized for her defense of chastity. The daughter of the Emperor Constantine is said to have built a basilica over her grave near Via Nomentana. Exact dates and details of her life are uncertain. ([WS:DWCH:2](#))
6. ANASTASIA (c. 25-c. 70), believed to have become a Christian after hearing one of Christ's disciples preach. She was martyred for her faith, probably about 70 A.D., during Emperor Nero's persecution. Although details of her life are obscure, her name has come down in history as a martyr because of her testimony and witness. ([WS:DWCH:5](#))
7. ANASTASIA (c. 230-c. 259), believed to have been the daughter of Constantius Chlorus. Her Christian influence in the home was accredited as a major contribution to Constantine. Details of her life are obscure. ([WS:DWCH:5](#))
8. ANASTASIA (c. 279-c. 304), born into a Roman family and under the

teaching of Chrysogonus. Her father opposed her acceptance of Christianity, and her husband, Publius, betrayed her faith to authorities. She was martyred by the request of Florus, an official in Illyricum, because of her Christian faith. ([WS:DWCH:5](#))

9. BARBARA (c. 259-c. 306), became a Christian without her parents' knowledge. Her testimony became evident in her living habits, and she was criticized by her father. It is believed that he even turned against her for her faith and contributed to her martyrdom. She was killed for her faith in Christ likely at either of two locations: Heliopolis in Egypt or at Nicomedia. Details about her life are lacking. ([WS:DWCH:11](#))
10. BLANDINA (d. 177), a slave girl of Lyons martyred for her Christian faith and testimony. Little is known about her except that she was greatly tortured for publicly proclaiming her faith and then martyred. ([WS:DWCH:18](#))
11. CECILIA (c. 141-177), a Christian martyr honored by musicians and artists. Incomplete records refer to her as a virgin who resisted marriage, but her parents planned to force her to marry a Roman of high birth. Only hours before the marriage, the groom, Valerianus, and his brother, Tibertius, were converted to Christianity. Both were beheaded for their profession of Christ, and Cecilia's life was threatened. She was martyred later in Sicily, and these three Christian martyrs were buried in the catacombs of St. Callister. About 821 Pope Paschal had her remains taken to the church of St. Cecilia at Trastevere at Rome. A church in Rome was dedicated to her, and artists have portrayed her as a patron of music. She is portrayed in "The Second Nun's Tale" of Canterbury Tales. Raphael painted her sitting at an organ. ([WS:DWCH:33](#))
12. Domitilla, Flavia (First Century) Christian niece of Domitian (Titus Flavius Domitianus Augustus), Roman emperor between A.D. 81 and 91. She and members of her household, including her husband, Titus Flavius Clemens, fled because they refused to worship the emperor. She went to Pandateria in the Tyrrhenian Sea area. Her husband was beheaded for refusing to persecute Christians. Her life was spared for a time, but she was forced to live a martyrdom kind of existence on an island. She witnessed of her Christian faith, read her Bible, helped others, and assisted in burying martyrs. It is believed she was buried among the catacombs near Terracina, on the Via Ardeatine, where a cemetery bears her name. ([WS:DWCH:48](#))
13. FELICITAS (c. 107-164), a brave martyr, described as an illustrious but

devout Christian Roman woman of great virtues. She had seven sons, all of whom upheld their mother and their own personal Christian testimony. She was interrogated by Publius, then threatened, but she and all her family stood firm in their Christian faith and thus were all martyred.

[\(WS:DWCH:57\)](#)

- 14. FELICITAS (d. 203), a Christian martyr from Carthage, North Africa. She was a slave girl martyred along with Perpetua. They were both arrested and imprisoned because Septimus Severus had forbidden conversions to Christianity. She had a child born in prison and placed in care of a Christian relative. Felicitas and Perpetua were tried and then taken to be martyred for refusing to denounce their Christian faith. They were led into an arena, gored by a mad cow, and later put to death by the sword. [\(WS:DWCH:57\)](#)
- 15. SERAPHIA (?-125), a slave girl of Antioch and servant in the household of Sambine, to whom she witnessed. Later Sambine was converted to Christianity. Both she and Sambine were martyred for their faith. [\(WS:DWCH:132\)](#)
- 16. ZOE (c. 255-286), a Christian martyr of Rome. Her husband was the jailer who had charge of the Christians facing death because of their faith. Details of her early life and even her full name are lacking, but it is recorded that she became a Christian after observing and hearing discussions by Christians facing martyrdom. She had a physical disability that would not permit her to express herself except in gestures. The Christians instructed her in the faith and when she responded in belief, they told her to pray for freedom from her disability. She did so and was healed and able to speak. Her husband witnessed this miracle and accepted the Lord as his Savior. This situation enraged the enemy, and she was greatly tortured and then killed for her faith [\(WS:DWCH:164\)](#)

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• Women as monastics and ascetics.

- 1. "Second-century apologists in contrasting Christian sexual morality with paganism took note of the number of Christians, male and female, who chose to live continent lives. The phenomenon was noted by the pagan Galen." [\(WS:EWEC:502\)](#)
- 2. "Communities of celibate women did apparently precede those of men."

[\(WS:EWEC:502\)](#).

### 3. Desert Mother Sarah (Fifth Century)

Amma (Mother) Sarah was one of the desert mothers who probably lived in the fifth century. She may have been a member of one of the new communities of ascetics that emerged at this time. It is not possible to assign dates to the sayings of Sarah or the other desert mothers because they began as oral tradition, were then carefully preserved by disciples, and later put into collections that became known in the West through the scholarship of John Cassian, Jerome, and Palladius (ws:ppw:35)

### 4. Desert Mother Theodora (Fifth Century)

Amma (Mother) Theodora was one of the hermits or nuns presumed to have lived in the fifth-century Egyptian desert. Little is known of her life. All we have are sayings that were preserved by her disciples and eventually became part of the collections of sayings from the desert. Desert mother Theodora's sayings reflect a keen insight into the process of spiritual development. ... the person is addressed in his or her wholeness of body, mind, and spirit. For the Christian, prayer and discipline involve a life-long journey toward growth in holiness and wholeness. (ws:ppw:38)

### 5. Desert Mother Syncletica (Fifth Century)

Amma (Mother) Syncletica was a desert monastic woman who lived in fifth-century Egypt. Since many of her sayings employ nautical images, scholars believed that Syncletica may have come from the seaport of Alexandria. The desert mothers are believed to have lived in the fifth century, at which time the eremitical life was developing into new, small ascetical communities. However, there were some women who lived alone in the desert before this time. Amma Syncletica's sayings use images that are provocative and clear, emphasizing the importance of balance and stability in the spiritual life: "Just as one cannot build a ship unless one has nails, so it is impossible to be saved without humility"; "You were iron, but fire has the rust off you"; "If you find yourself in a monastery do not go to

another place, for that will harm you a great deal. Just as the bird who abandons the eggs she was sitting on prevents them from hatching so the monk or the nun grows cold and their faith dies, when they go from one place to another."  
(ws:ppw:41)

6. MACRINA (327-379), founder of one of the earliest religious communities of women in the East. Macrina was born in Neocaesarea, Cappadocia, and reared in Pontus, the area to which Paul addressed his first letter. Her family was Christian; her grandmother was Macrina, the elder; her father a distinguished attorney and professor; her mother, Emmelia, a godly woman; and her brothers were Basil the Great, Gregory (Bishop of Nyssa), a younger brother, Peter, who became Bishop of Sebaste; and an older brother who became a jurist. Her family traveled to Pontus to escape the persecutions of Christians by Galerius and Maximianus. It was on their family estate that she founded two religious communities; one for women and one for men. She taught the Scriptures and devoted much time to prayer and meditation. She established a large hospital where healings and miracles were recorded. These communities, were at Tabennisi, on the bank of the Nile River. Basil especially praised his sister for the progress of her religious communities, which she founded and administered. He and Macrina decided to establish monasteries using a similar plan to the brother-sister community. ([WS:DWCH:110](#))

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- Women as Missionaries

1. Clement of Alexandria (*Misc*, 3.6.53) refers to the wives of the apostles assisting in missionary work as the means through which the gospel reached the women's quarters of households. ([WS:EWEC:506](#))
2. Thecla (First Century), visited by Paul and Barnabas on their first missionary journey. She was a native of Iconium in Asia Minor and became a Christian. Details of her life are obscure, but she is mentioned in the writings of Augustine and other church fathers. Two churches were dedicated to her, and some believe she may have founded a convent near Seleucia. There is some indication that she was the first martyr in Greece. It is known that she taught the teachings of Paul and was a devout Christian of her day. ([WS:DWCH:145](#); [WS:EWEC:506-507](#)).

3. "The most successful woman missionary of the ancient church was Nino, "the apostle of Georgia." She was a slave from Cappadocia whose miraculous healing abilities brought her to the attention of the queen of Georgia. Nino healed her in the name of Christ. Eventually the king was converted and built a church. Nino's influence brought about the conversion of the country of Georgia to Orthodox Christianity from the top down." ([WS:EWEC:507](#)).

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- Women in benevolence/retreat ministry

1. **FABIOLA** (c. 143-199), a Christian mentioned in the writings of Jerome as being a student of the Bible and believed to have founded the first hospital in Europe. She was from a prominent family, and her compassion for the sick along with her personal care for some of them left an impression on the Christians and pagans of Rome. ([WS:DWCH:56](#))
  
2. **MARCELLA** (325-410), a Christian widow of a Roman family of nobility. She turned her palace into a place of retreat for Bible study, teaching, and Christian activities. She used her wealth and energies for benevolent work, ascetic practices, including prayer and teaching the Scriptures to other women of nobility in Rome. Jerome stayed in her palace three years, taught and translated Hebrew and Greek texts into Latin, for Pope Damasus had commissioned him to do a revision of the Latin gospels in 382. Jerome referred to Marcella's palace as an "Ecclesia Domestica," or church of the household, for not only were Bible classes held there, but it was a house of meditation, prayer, and worship. It was here that Paula and her daughter decided to help Jerome in his translation work and where Fabiola was inspired to establish the first hospital in Rome. Many other projects resulted from the fellowship and seclusion of Marcella's palace. When Rome was besieged by the Goths in 410, Marcella was treated harshly, resulting in her death at age eighty-five. ([WS:DWCH:97](#))
  
3. [All of the above references to "deacons" included this care-giving work.]

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- Women as mentors/scholars

1. Paula (347-404)

Paula was born into an old Roman aristocratic family on May 5, 347. Her mother, Blaesilla, was descended from the Scipio and Gracchi families. Her father, Rogatus, was said to be a descendant of Agamemnon. Paula married Toxotius, a relative of the renowned noble family Aeneas and Julii. Jerome, in the *Life of Paula*, 3, described Paula's marriage, children, and widowhood:

Thus nobly born, Paula through her fruitfulness and her chastity won approval from all, from her husband first, then from her relatives, and lastly from the whole city. She bore five children; Blaesilla, for whose death I consoled her while at Rome; Paulina, who has left the reverend and admirable Pammachius to inherit both her vows and property, to whom also I addressed a little book on her death; Eustochium, who is now in the holy places, a precious necklace of virginity and of the church; Rufina, whose untimely end overcame the affectionate heart of her mother; and Toxotius, after whom she had no more children.

According to Jerome's memories of her life, when Toxotius died, Paula's grief over her husband's death was so deep that she nearly died herself. Then, as soon as her mourning ended, she chose to dedicate her life fully to the service of God. Paula, one of the richest women of her day, was known for her simplicity, poverty, and humility. She gave all her earthly goods to the poor and, according to Jerome's account of her life, died leaving nothing behind but a debt, which "Eustochium still owes and indeed cannot hope to pay off by her own exertions; only the mercy of Christ can free her from it."

A close companion to Jerome for twenty years, Paula shared his devotion to the Scriptures, often challenging him with questions and providing insights into the meaning of different verses. Recalling Paula's intelligence and clarity, Jerome

recalled, "When ever I stuck fast and honestly confessed myself at fault, she would by no means rest content but would force me by fresh questions to point out to her which of many different solutions seemed to me the most probable."

After mastering the Hebrew language, Paula would chant the psalms in Hebrew without a hint of Latin pronunciation. Jerome tells us that Paula loved her family dearly: "I must not pass over in silence the joy which Paula felt when she heard her little granddaughter and namesake, the child of Laeta and Toxotius, in her cradle sing 'alleluia' and falter out the words 'grandmother' and 'aunt.' Likewise, Paula and her daughter shared a very close relationship. Jerome describes Eustochium's compassionate care of her mother when Paula was ill: "She sat by Paula's bedside, she fanned her, she supported her head, she arranged her pillows, she chafed her feet, she rubbed her stomach, she smoothed down the bedclothes, she heated hot water, she brought towels." Jerome's words reveal the intense grief he felt when his dear friend Paula died on January 26, 404: "Who could tell the tale of Paula's dying with dry eyes?" She fell into a most serious illness and thus gained what she most desired, power to leave us and to be joined more fully to the Lord.... If we mourn, it is for ourselves and not for her; yet even so, if we persist in weeping for one who reigns with Christ, we shall seem to envy her her glory." (ws:ppw:44-45)

Jerome's account of her death is most moving (*Life of Paula*, 28-29):

Paula's intelligence showed her that her death was near. Her body and limbs grew cold and only in her holy breast did the warm beat of the living soul continue. Yet, as though she were leaving strangers to go home to her own people, she whispered the verses of the psalmist, "Lord, I have loved the habitation of your house and the place where your honour dwells" (Ps 25.8), and "How amiable are your tabernacles, O Lord of Hosts! My soul longs and faints for the courts of the Lord" (Ps 84.2-3), and "I had rather be an outcast in the house of my God than to dwell in the tents of wickedness" (Ps 84.11). When I asked her why she remained silent, refusing to answer my call, and whether she was in pain, she replied in Greek that she had no suffering and that all things were to her eyes calm and tranquil.

After this she said no more but closed her eyes and kept repeating the verses just quoted, down to the moment in which she breathed out her soul, but in a tone so low that we could scarcely hear what she said. Raising her finger also to her mouth, she made the sign of the cross upon her lips. Then her breath failed her, and she gasped for death; yet even when her soul was eager to break free, she turned the death-rattle (which comes at last to all) into the praise of the Lord. The bishop of Jerusalem and some from other cities were present, also a great number of the lower clergy, both priests and levites. The entire monastery was filled with virgins and monks. As soon as Paula heard the bridegroom saying, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, my dove, and come away: for lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone," she answered joyfully, "The flowers appear on the earth; the time to cut them has come" (Song 2.10-12) and "I believe that I shall see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living" (Ps 27.13).

2. EUDOCIA (c. 401-460), wife of Theodosius and daughter of Leontius, a philosopher in Athens. Her name was Athenais, but when she became a Christian she changed it to Eudocia. Pulcheria, the sister of Theodosius, had arranged for their marriage, but they differed in views on religious matters. She is credited with having paraphrased in poetry the first eight books of the Old Testament, prophecies of Daniel, and other Old Testament books. She wrote *The Life of Christ*, believed to be taken from Homer's writings and translated into Latin. ([WS:DWCH:54](#))
3. MARCELLINA (c. 330-c. 398), born in to the Christian family of Aurelius Ambrosius in Rome, and the sister of Satyrus and Ambrose of Milan. After her mother was left a widow, Marcellina helped her with Ambrose's education. Pope Liberius consecrated her in 353. In later years she lived with Ambrose at Milan. He dedicated his *De Virgibus* to her, for her influence of prayer was significant. ([WS:DWCH:97](#))
4. Gorgonia, sister of Gregory of Nazianzus ([WS:EWEC:512](#)).

At her funeral, Gregory said this about his sister (*Oration 8 11,13*):

What could be keener than the intellect of her who was recognized as a common advisor not only by those of her

family...but even by all men round about, who treated her counsels and advice as a law not to be broken? What more sagacious than her words? What more prudent than her silence?...Who had a fuller knowledge of the things of God, both from the Divine oracles, and from her own understanding?

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- Women as important witnesses and influencers

1. HELENA (c. 250-c.330), mother of Constantine. She was born at Drepanum in Bithynia, Asia Minor. Details of her early life are obscure, but records show that she was converted to Christianity in 313. She married Constantius Chlorus, who later divorced her for political reasons. After Constantine came into power, he recalled his mother to court in 306 and honored her, including giving her the title of Augusta. Her Christian influence was very evident in her son, the first Christian emperor of Rome. She visited the Holy Land in her later years ([WS:DWCH:72](#))
2. MONICA (c. 331-387), the devout Christian mother of Augustine. She was born in a Christian family at Tagaste, North Africa. Her faith, prayers, and Christlike life influenced her entire family to become Christians. She married Patricius, a man of limited means and known for his difficult temperament before he became a Christian, shortly before his death. Although she had other children, Augustine was the best known because he became Bishop of Hippo and was considered the greatest of the Latin Fathers. He was converted in Milan in 384 at age thirty, only three years before Monica died. They were moving to Rome when Monica died on the way, at Ostia. Her life has inspired many works of literature and art; a painting of her and Augustine hangs in the National Gallery of Art in London. ([WS:DWCH:103](#))
3. NONNA (c. 329-374), devout Christian teacher and mother of Gregory of Nazianzus. Reared in a Christian home, she was largely responsible for the conversion of her husband, Gregory the Elder. He had been in a sect but was converted and consecrated as the bishop of Nazianzus, a position he held for many years. Details of her early life are not available. She had two grandsons who became bishops, and she is remembered largely for her testimony and Christian influence. ([WS:DWCH:113](#))

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**One can see from this wide survey of data that women played powerful, pervasive, and precious roles in the life of the early church. From their fortitude and beauty in the face of horrible martyrdom, to their power and thoroughness in scholarship and teaching, they honored the Lord.**

**They did it all--led the church, served the church, birthed the church, fed the church. The truly played their part in proclaiming the gospel to all nations.**

**And their Father wrote all their labor, all their tears, and every drop of their blood, down in His private books...and one day, He will visit them with His reward...**



[The Christian ThinkTank...](http://www.christian-thinktank.com) [http://www.christian-thinktank.com] ([Reference Abbreviations](#))

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# Women in the Heart of God (9)

## Paul and Women

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[updated 01/25/96]

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In this section I intend to survey Paul's teachings and praxis about women.

I will organize this material under the following categories:

1. Snapshot--Paul compared to the Praxis of Jesus
2. A Recent feminist assessment of Paul
3. Paul's working relationships with women in the Church
4. Controversial Pauline Passages

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### 1. Snapshot--Paul compared to the Praxis of Jesus

What I want to do here is to repeat the material we studied in [In the life and ministry of Jesus](#), where we compared Jesus versus Rabbinical attitudes--and add a comment per topic to see if Paul was "more like a Jesus or more like a Rabbi"...

*Jesus vs. The Rabbi's--with a Glance at Paul*

1. Jesus disagreed with the Rabbi's that association with women led inevitably to lust. The logic that led to segregation within Rabbinitis found no place in Jesus' teaching. Jesus does not warn his followers against looking at women, but rather against doing so in lust. Women's association and traveling with the apostolic band was NOT to be restricted due to the "natural desires of men"! ([WS:WIB:45-46](#)).

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Paul never segregated women at all. He actively sought them out and set up operations in their homes (Lydia, Acts 16). Women and men were supposed to worship together (I Cor 11-14), and women were to pray and prophesy in church (e.g. I Cor 11.4). He actually warns the young church against 'forced celibacy' in I Tim 4.3!]

2. Jesus asserted that a woman could divorce her husband; the Rabbi's said only a MAN could initiate divorce ([WS:JWGRP:143](#): "Thus far it should be clear that divorce was always the right and responsibility of the husband to initiate. Jewish law was asymmetrical in this respect, as opposed to Roman law, which grants the wife the right to divorce her husband.")

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Paul apparently asserts the same standard in I Cor 7.13: *And if a woman has a husband who is not a believer and he is willing to live with her, she must not divorce him..*]

3. Jesus touched "unclean women" (e.g. the woman with the flow of blood in Mt 9.18ff); Rabbi's would not do so.

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Actually, we don't have a similar situation in the historical narrative. We simply don't have any data on this one. Although, given Paul's general position and praxis toward the ritual of the Law, I would expect this to be a non-issue for him, as per Romans 14.1-18 and Galatians 2.11ff.]

4. "Jesus not only spoke freely with women, healed them, allowed them to touch him and to bring their children to see him, he also allowed them to serve him. This was not, of course, unusual in a family situation, but it was unusual for a Rabbi, as the Rabbis strongly disapproved of women even serving them at tables." ([WS:WIB:48](#))

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Paul consistently let women help him! He refers often to women as 'fellow-laborers' and helpers--cf. Phil 4.3; Rom 16.1-2, 6, 12, et.al. Phoebe in Rom 16.1-2 is specially called a "deaconess"--a server, and he obviously stayed at Lydia's home (Acts 16).]

5. "Rabbinic parables pointedly avoided mentioning women, but Jesus often told stories relating to the life of women." ([WS:WIB:48](#))

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Although Paul doesn't use a lot of stories, he doesn't shy away from stories or comparisons centered around women--cf. The comparison of Sarah and Hagar in Gal 4.21ff , or of HIMSELF and a mother--I Thess 2.7. He uses the same household 'yeast' metaphors as Jesus--I Cor 5; Gal 5. ]

6. Jesus often spoke to women in public; Jewish men shunned this (*Aboth* 1:5)

[GLANCE AT PAUL: This is fairly obvious, for Paul preaches to women in public consistently, speaks directly to them in cultic settings (Lydia),

works with them in private homes (Priscilla), addresses them in his correspondence (Phil 4.2; Philemon 2). There seems to be no setting in which Paul does NOT address a woman!]

7. Jesus conversed at length with the Samaritan woman (surprising even his disciples!); Rabbi's would not do so--Samaritan women were considered "perpetual mensttuants"! (*Niddah* 4.1).

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Although Paul obviously traveled THROUGH Samaria (Acts 15.3), it does not give us any data one way or another on this matter.]

8. Women were used as witnesses in the resurrection accounts; they were not allowed as witnesses (generally) under Rabbinic law [[WS:JWGRP:163f](#)].

[GLANCE AT PAUL: The closest data we have to this type of situation is two-fold: (1) that Paul entrusted the 'official' letter-carrying task to a women (Phoebe, Rom 16.1-2; cf. The 'official' status of this role in Acts 15.22f ); and (2) the fact that he admitted women prophets! (I Cor 11.4). They were also called his 'co-workers'-- [WS:WIC:84](#):

They assisted in composing letters (Rom 16:22; I Thess 1:1), carried apostolic messages to local churches (1 Cor 4.17; 16:10-11), sought to encourage the believers on Paul's behalf (1 Thess 3:2), reported to Paul the status of congregations under his care (1 Thess 3:6) and even occasionally hosted house churches (1 Cor 16:19)...In view of this wide range of ministry, it would be ludicrous to deny that Paul's coworkers possessed authority in the churches (1 Cor 16:17-18)...a role which included the task of admonition (1 Thess 5:12)...Paul spoke readily of women, as well as men, as his coworkers.]

9. He allowed women to follow Him in His travels and ministry. "Jesus, too, knowingly overthrew custom when he allowed women to follow him." (Jeremias, cited in [WS:ATW:138](#))

[GLANCE AT PAUL: We don't know a lot about Paul's traveling companions, but we do know that Priscilla and Aquilla accompanied him on at least one journey, and that he recognized that he could have taken a wife along with him (I Cor 9.5). Obviously Phoebe was with Paul when he dispatched her to Rome (Rom 16.1-2).]

10. Jesus taught women freely, and sometimes in standard Rabbinical "style"

(e.g. Luke 10.38-42). Brown summarizes this contrast well:

Jesus' attitude contrasts with the sentiments of the rabbis. In the Talmud, Rabbi Eliezer declared, 'There is no wisdom in a woman except with the distaff.' One version adds, 'It is better that the words of the Law should be burned, than that they should be given to a women.' In the Mishnah the same rabbi made a similarly strong statement when he said 'If a man gives his daughter a knowledge of the Law it is as though he taught her lechery.' Jesus broke with rabbinical tradition when he taught women and included them among his followers ([WS:ATW:143](#))

[GLANCE AT PAUL: It is clear that teaching women was NOT a problem to Paul. The account in Acts 16 shows that he publicly taught women and baptized them.]

- 11. "He never used women as negative examples, as was so common in rabbinical teaching. He referred to women positively and used illustrations from their everyday lives to teach spiritual truths." ([WS:ATW:150](#)).

[GLANCE AT PAUL: The women Paul uses as examples are his co-workers; all highly favorable! E.g. Euodia & Syntche --"fought by his side" (Phil 4.3); Tryphena and Tryphosa (Rom 16.12). What negative examples he DOES have are exactly paired with men--Rom 1.]

- 12. Jesus accepted and valued women highly; the famous prayer of Rabbi Judah would not have been found on His lips: "Blessed be Thou for not having made me a Gentile, a woman, or an ignoramus." (*Tosephta Berakoth* 7, 18.)

[GLANCE AT PAUL: Paul shatters the Rabbinic distinction in Gal 3.28: *There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus..* "Paul's statement in Galatians 3.28 is extraordinary for an ex-rabbi; it is very radical. The sexes are equal in salvation. Women have the same spiritual status before God as men. They are one in Christ." ([WS:ATW:161](#)).]

This quick overview sets up an expectation that we will still see the positive values of Jesus toward women, reflected in the actions and attitudes of Paul.

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## 2. A Recent feminist assessment of Paul

Let me quote from Rosemary Reuther (a very outspoken feminist theologian) who is drawing upon Elizabeth Fiorenza (a very outspoken feminist theologian). Neither of these could REMOTELY be called 'apologetically inclined' toward Paul(!):

"It is generally assumed that Paul is the author of a Christianity of female subordination. But more recent studies have shown that the historical Paul in fact continued most of the assumptions and practices of early charismatic, inclusive Christianity. Indeed, most of the New Testament evidence that women functioned as local leaders, as well as traveling evangelists, is to be found in the Pauline letters. Paul addresses almost an equal number of women along with men (sixteen women and eighteen men) in his greetings to Church leaders in Romans 16. He mentions two women, Euodia and Syntche, as having preached the gospel "with Barnabas and me" in Philippians 4:2-3. He addresses a woman name Junia by the title of "apostle," and constantly refers to the husband and wife team, Priscilla and Aquila, as "Church leaders," usually naming Priscilla first. He also speaks of the prominent woman Phoebe by the title of both "deacon" and "*prostasis*" or leader, of her community.

Paul received from the early Church both a practice of thus including women in the ministries of catechesis, prophecy, local Church leadership, and traveling evangelism (the role Paul calls that of "apostle"), and also a baptismal theology of male-female equivalence in Christ as reflected in the Galatians 3:28 reference. This formula was not original with Paul; he cites it from early Christian tradition. The Galatians baptismal text expresses the early Christian vision of the new humanity in Christ. It was consciously moulded to contrast with the traditions of rabbinic piety, adapted from Hellenistic philosophy, in which the Jewish male thanks God for having been born male and not female, free and not slave, and Jew rather than Gentile. By declaring that in Christ these divisions had been overcome and all these groups made "one," the early Christian stated the essence of his or her new identity as one where the equivalence of all humans in the image of God had been restored."  
([WS:WWR:212-213](#))

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### 3. Paul's working relationships with women in the Church

Now, we have already seen in the section on [Women's roles in the NT](#) that Paul consistently utilized women as leaders in the early church, and called them by 'authoritative names' such as *apostle, deacon, co-laborer, patron, 'hard worker'*.

We did NOT examine I Tim 3.11, but, depending on how one understands the word there for *women*, Paul COULD be talking about female elders. If the term is understood as 'wives', then the passage is silent on the issue; if the term is understood as 'women', then Paul is indicating women elders. (Note: the 'husband of one wife' text is NOT an issue, since standard writing usage for brevity allows that to count for BOTH wife/husband cases...Similar to how we say "brothers" instead of "brothers and sisters" every time.)

Likewise, Titus 2.2-3 is sometimes understood as the qualifications for male/female elders (so RSV).

We also saw that congregations were told to "submit" to such as these (I Cor 16.16)--indicating positions with significant authority.

We also saw that he used Priscilla to play a major role in discipling/teaching the gifted Apollos.

In short, we have plenty of historical data that demonstrates his rather 'unrestricted' official usage of women as partners in the early church; we have NO narrative or historical data that even slightly suggests that he refused to 'allow' women to serve in ANY capacity.

We will need to keep this in mind when we look at the controversial passages.

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#### 4. **Controversial Pauline Passages**

There are three main passages that we need to examine here: I Cor 11.3-16, I Cor 14.33-40, and I Tim 2.11-15. And, although many, many books have been written about each of these--and the subject--they still remain three of the most obscure and disputed passages in the Pauline corpus. I will not be able to resolve these passages, but I can at least give the evidence that leads me to believe that they do NOT constitute a contradiction between Paul's approval of women teachers/leaders in practice, and his teaching about women in such roles in these passages. (Due to the intense nature of the current debate about this subject, this section will simply NOT be able to deal with the manifold objections to my view.)

[There is another string of passages that are sometimes used to support a view that

Paul restricted women from church leadership--the '**submit to your husband**' verses (Eph 5.22; Col 3.18; Tit 2.). This is not a strictly Pauline injunction, of course, since it is also repeated by Peter in I Peter 3.1-6. Since it is sometimes understood/appealed to in support of the broader view that women should not have authority over men IN ANY SPHERE, I want to make some summary observations about this issue, and why it cannot be applied to church leadership positions.

First, it obviously applies ONLY to married women--not widows, not the unmarried, not divorcees, not celibate. And correspondingly, any authority it imputes to males is ONLY TO MARRIED MEN. We have no reason to believe that marriage (and the survival of the spouse!) were qualifications of teaching positions (!!!). We DO have POSITIVE evidence that it was NOT required--Paul, Timothy, Lydia, etc.

Second, the word for 'submission' in those passages is VERY different than the words used for slaves and children. They are told specifically to 'obey'--the wife is told to 'be submissive to'. This is a subtle but real difference. For example, when Paul says in Ephesians 5.22 "Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord" and then RE-STATES it in 5.33 as "the wife must respect her husband.", the meaning seems clear--the issue is respect and civility. [You must remember that the liberating effect of the Christian freedom in Christ--Gal 3.28--occasionally created 'hyper-liberated' women who showed public contempt and mistreatment of their husbands.]

Third, the Ephesians and Col. Passages are in the literary form of a "household code", but with a twist (so [BBC](#):in loc): "Paul borrows this form of discussion straight from Greco-Roman moral writing. But unlike most ancient writers, Paul undermines the basic premise of these codes: the absolute authority of the male head of the house." And, at the summary verse .33, BBC adds "Although ancient moralists expected wives to respect their husbands (and Jewish teachers also expected the reverse), moralists usually also emphasized the wife's 'obedience'; Paul's exhortation to wives here would thus strike most ancient readers as quite weak."

Fourth, the "household code" is turned on its head by the intro in verse 21: "Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ." BBC notes: "But although it was customary to call on wives, children and slaves to submit in various ways, to call *all* members of a group (including the *paterfamilias*, the male head of the household) to submit to one another was unheard-of." Verse 2--the call to MUTUAL submission--(the verb is 'shared' between 21 and 22, so there is no difference in quality) radically changes the nature of the household code.

Fifth, the submission of wives to husbands was not on the basis of some gender-based authority; rather, it was a covenant-based relationship. So Wood, in [EBC](#): "'As to the Lord' differs slightly from 'as is fitting in the Lord' in Colossians 3.18. In obeying her husband, the Christian wife is obeying the Lord who has sanctioned the marriage contract...The subjection, moreover, is voluntary, not forced. The Christian wife who promises to obey does so because her vow is 'as to the Lord'." Most marriage contracts had 'obedience' or 'submission' clauses in them, so in the context of a Christian marriage it was contract-based authority (i.e. the Lord) rather than gender-based authority that mattered.

Sixth, the general tone of 'submission' verses for women is geared toward practical matters (and not more fundamental theological-authority issues). So, Titus 2.5: *to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.* and I Peter 3.1: *Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives.*. In such a way, they appeal to more culturally-oriented values of the non-Christians around the church. So, just as Paul would suppress personal 'rights' out of desire to further the work of Christ (e.g. I Cor 9.1ff; I Cor 9.22f), so took we should 'subject ourselves' to each other, to move the Kingdom farther.

You must remember that submission and servanthood go hand-in-hand. Christ said that He came "not to be served, but to serve." His submission to the needs of others was CERTAINLY not based on some 'superiority' or 'authority' they had over Him(!), but a submission based on love and other-centered behavior. The NT is replete with such passages that enjoin us to such mutual submission (e.g. Rom 12.10b; I Peter 5.5b; Phil 2.3; Gal 5.13).

Seventh, there are a couple of passages in which wives are either charged with authority over themselves, or men are explicitly stated as being in some form of subjection to wives. So, in I Cor 11.10, the Greek says "the woman ought to have authority over her own head." (The English versions add '*a sign of*' to this, without the slightest evidence!) and in I Cor 7.4f: *The wife's body does not belong to her alone but also to her husband. In the same way, the husband's body does not belong to him alone but also to his wife. 5 Do not deprive each other except by mutual consent and for a time.*. This is rather clear--the wife has 'authority' over the husband's body--mutually.

Eighth, in I Cor 6.3, Paul states that the "saints" will judge the world AND the angels! He makes no distinction between male and female in a FUTURE situation of overt authority. (NB: the word sometimes rendered 'men of little account' in verse. 4 is simply a participle--not a clause with the word 'men' in it. As a

participle it has to have linguistic "gender", and is "masculine" in accordance with standard praxis of the day. If an author wanted to draw attention to men, he would not 'hide it' in a humble participial ending, but rather he would use the deliberate words for "men", "husband", etc.)

Finally, 'submission within marriage' CANNOT be relevant to matters of church leadership, simply because (1) we KNOW of a husband-wife pair in which the woman was the dominant teacher (Priscilla); and (2) entire congregations were told to 'submit' to women leaders in I Cor 16.16: "submit to such as these and to everyone who joins in the work (*synergounti*), and labors (*kopionti*) at it." We have already seen that Paul refers to numerous women by these titles. In this latter case we have men OBVIOUSLY 'submitting' to women (not necessarily their wives). So whatever "submission" means (and it DOES imply obedience-under-God in certain passages--Rom 13. 5), it is mutual enough to apply in several different directions.

It must also be noted that Paul was very familiar with OT history, and accordingly he would have known that many of the main women leaders there were married (e.g. Deborah the Judge, Huldah the prophetess).

So, I personally have to conclude that although submission is a very, very real command to a wife, it would be false to restrict it to her or to impute the 'traditional' notions of 'obedience' or 'obey your husband, right or wrong' to that word. The very mutuality and grounding of the notion in the person of Christ, indicates that it is concerned with respect, putting other's needs first (cf. I cor 10.24: *Nobody should seek his own good, but the good of others.*), and generally 'fitting in' ENOUGH within the cultural context as to not hinder the work of Christ.]

Now, on to the **controversial passages**...

Remember, we are examining these passages to see how they relate SPECIFICALLY to church roles--especially LEADERSHIP/TEACHING roles...

### **First up is I Cor 11.3-13:**

*Now I want you to realize that the head of every man is Christ, and the head of the woman is man, and the head of Christ is God. 4 Every man who prays or prophesies with his head covered dishonors his head. 5 And every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head -- it is just as though her head were shaved. 6 If a woman does not cover her head, she should have her hair cut off; and if it is a disgrace for a woman to have her hair cut*

*or shaved off, she should cover her head. 7 A man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but the woman is the glory of man. 8 For man did not come from woman, but woman from man; 9 neither was man created for woman, but woman for man. 10 For this reason, and because of the angels, the woman ought to have a sign of authority on her head. 11 In the Lord, however, woman is not independent of man, nor is man independent of woman. 12 For as woman came from man, so also man is born of woman. But everything comes from God. 13 Judge for yourselves: Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered?*

#### Observations:

1. Women were obviously allowed to prophesy in church
2. Women were obviously allowed to pray audibly in church
3. "Prophet" was an official position and was "2nd in rank" in the church, behind apostles and before teachers (I cor 12.28-29)
4. The issue in the passage is some obscure point about head-coverings--NOT about women speaking in the church--and about people being contentious about it (v.16).
5. We have already noted above that v.10 says a women should have (exercise?) authority over her own head. ["Paul means that she should exercise wisely her right to decide whether to cover her head in a way that will honor her husband..." [BBC](#):in loc.]

Now, even though the passage SUPPORTS women's speaking roles and 'authoritative speaking' roles, some have seen in the reference to 'headship' a basic male-over-female hierarchical subordination structure, as being ordained of God. Let me be quick to point out that EVEN IF THIS WERE SO, it would IN NO WAY negate the obvious fact that women were allowed (indeed, encouraged, when done in proper fashion) to function in worship. That fact remains unchanged in our text.

But what about the 'head' thing? Perhaps another digression is warranted, given the controversy surrounding it.

Some of the basic points first:

1. "head" does NOT mean the same thing we mean by it in Western culture. From the standpoint of anatomical function, in Paul's day it was the 'heart' that made the decisions, guided life, etc. "Head" was much more the 'adornment department' of the body! In other words, when people wanted to make decisions, they used their *heart*; when they wanted to get all "gussied up" ["dressed up", for you colloquially-deprived readers ;> ), they used their *head* (e.g. hair, makeup, jewelry). So, in the literature, the word translated 'head' here often shows up as 'crown' or 'excellence'. [Hence, its usefulness in the passage of I Cor 11.]
2. The root notion was that of 'source', and from this usage it was applied to people--Zeus, Pharoah, the progenitors of the Twelve Tribes, Christ-with reference to the Church, man (Adam)--with reference to woman (Eve)....
3. If an author wanted to make a point about AUTHORITY, he would use two specific words--*exousia* ("authority"; Matt 28.18, Rom 13.1-3) and/or *archon* ("ruler"; Rom 13.3). He only used 'head' when dealing with issues of origination, completion, consummation.
4. In the passage under discussion, the only mention of the word 'authority' is in verse 10--and it is the women who possesses it!
5. NONE of the SCORES of published lexicographers of ancient Greek even LIST "authority, ruler" as a meaning for this word ([WS:WAB:97-110, 118-132](#)). It only begins to show up with those minor usages after Constantine!
6. Recent attempts to argue that the "source"-meanings PRESUPPOSE the "authority" meaning (a la Grundem) by restricting the locus of study to SPECIFIC persons, literally "exempt" this passage from the force of their arguments!

For example, when it is argued that in thousands of cases in Greek literature, when 'head' is applied to a person (as opposed to river or something inanimate), it is only applied to a ruler; then I Cor 11 disappears from consideration--because the term in question is the generic noun 'man'--NOT a specific man! (And, if we agree that the man is Adam--agreeing for sake of argument that he had some authority over Eve--then the passage ONLY extends to the First Couple, and becomes only an illustration for Paul).

A second problem is that, strictly speaking, it CANNOT mean 'authority' when applied to God and Christ in the passage--at the time Paul writes this. While that COULD have been a meaning during the Pre-Cross Incarnation, after the Exaltation Paul is clear that Christ has been given all authority, and that He will sometime in the future , 'give it back' to the Father (I Cor 15.24-28):

*Then the end will come, when he (Christ) hands over the kingdom to God the Father after he has destroyed all dominion, authority and power. 25 For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet. 26 The last enemy to be destroyed is death. 27 For he "has put everything under his feet." Now when it says that "everything" has been put under him, it is clear that this does not include God himself, who put everything under Christ. 28 When he has done this, then the Son himself will be made subject to him who put everything under him, so that God may be all in all.*

[Also, it is not clear from the I Cor 11 passage that God the Father is in view--the more inclusive term 'God' may indicate that a source relationship is VERY intentional here. In other words, a 'source' motif--similar to adam-eve--would be more correct if it ran like this: "Godhead was the source of an enfleshed-Godperson".]

Needless to say, the relationship between the Father's authority and the Son's authority is exceedingly complex(!), but we MUST proceed on the basis on the force of these passages.

7. Additionally, it should be noted that, linguistically, one simply cannot move from an author's intention (e.g. using a word with a central meaning of 'source of origin, source of completion' AS OPPOSED TO a word with a central meaning of 'authority, ruler'), to some theoretical 'conclusion' that the author was consciously intending BOTH MEANINGS at the same time. This is certainly counter-intuitive (without an indication of a play on meanings--like physical-head and source-head in I Cor 11), and one that would require a large number of passages that made that linkage of concepts EXPLICIT and PART OF THE SEMANTIC substructure of the language. That the majority of cases in which a author used 'source' to describe a person who ALSO had 'authority' is oblique at best and irrelevant at worst, to the issue. What must be shown is that the preponderance of authors used the word 'head' without using the word 'authority, ruler' and DREW DIRECT IMPLICATIONS in the 'authority' sphere--NOT the

spheres of honor, respect, similarity, continuity, homage, etc (spheres that would be implications of 'source or origin').

And, when you have a semantic distance as great as between "source" and "authority" you MUST show how the literal meaning 'stretches' to the metaphorical meaning. "Fork in the road" can be derived from a physical fork, as can most other metaphorical extensions. In some cases, we know we can 'lose' the literal in favor of the metaphorical, but in this case BOTH USAGES co-exist in the literary data. It is incumbent, then, for someone to show how 'authority' can be an extension (in such a vast array of situations!) of "source" or "one who completes". It is not enough to cite statistical correlation.

8. And finally, from a methodological standpoint, we could see this from the 'headship' passage in Ephesians. In linguistic studies, when you have a word which you do NOT know the meaning of, you try to decide from the invariable redundancy clues in the passage. If we didn't know what 'head' meant in Ephesians 5, and tried to figure out from the clues, we would decide that it meant something like 'servant'--one who saves, grooms, cleans, dresses, completes, protects, etc. We would NEVER come up with 'authority' from the actions and attributes of Christ in THAT passage! (He obviously has authority over His Bride, but it is not remotely in view in that passage.) But the literal notion of "that which completes" or "a major source of change" (i.e. "head"! ) makes quite a lot of sense here. Simple inductive Bible study--without starting with a loaded meaning of 'head'--would yield something much more akin to 'active change agent' than 'ordained authority'...

Thus, I have to conclude that 'head' does NOT entail authority, but rather is used to focus on organic union (e.g. Christ/Church, Husband/Wife) and source/completion (e.g Christ/New Creation) motifs. The lexical data is simply too overwhelming at this point AGAINST the equation of the two.

So, I may not know what I Cor 11 means--relative to women wearing headgear other than hair at church, but I can tell from the passage what it does NOT mean! Women were obviously allowed to pray and prophesy in church, and were not commanded to 'be silent' at all. There is absolutely no restriction on women's roles (in worship at least) in this passage.

**Now, let's consider I Cor 14.33-36:**

*For God is not a God of disorder but of peace. As in all the*

*congregations of the saints, 34 women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the Law says. 35 If they want to inquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church. 36 Did the word of God originate with you?*

On the surface this looks really, really clear--this is a 'sit down and shut up' passage if there ever was one! "Silent in the churches"--what could be clearer than that?

But let's look at this at little closer...

- The first thing we notice is that verse 33b ("as in all the congregations of the saints") probably goes with 33a, and NOT with 34 (so rendered in the NAS). The only other time this kind of argument occurs in Paul is in I Cor 11.16, where it is a CLOSING argument--there too about propriety in worship.
- Unless Paul changes the subject of this paragraph THREE TIMES(!)--from universal silence, to asking questions at home, and then back to universal silence--then the 'universal silence' clauses are rather severely restricted in scope, to that of simply disruptive questions by early-learners!
- If the passage DOES order universal silence of women in the church, then the verse simply PROVES TOO MUCH!

Notice that there is no restriction on the scope of silence in the passage to 'authoritative teaching' or 'leadership pronouncements'! This verse at face value would argue that women could not teach, sing, exhort, prophesy, pray audibly, greet people, say 'amen' at the giving of thanks, or encourage one another in church.

This would mean that ALL of the instructions for worship that Paul has given in chapters 11-14 (including the passage about women praying and prophesying!) would be only to the MALES--since ALL of the instructions were about 'audible' activities (e.g. prophesy, tongues, interpretation). This would be bizarre in the extreme--bordering on the non-sensical.

This would mean that I Cor 14.26: "*When you come together, everyone has a hymn, or a word of instruction, a revelation, a tongue or an interpretation*" and I Cor 14.31: "*For you can all prophesy in turn so that everyone may be instructed and encouraged*" and Col 3.16: "*Let the word*

*of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom*" and Eph 5.19: "*Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs*" would ONLY be addressed to men(!)--when there is not the slightest reason to do so, and indeed we have TONS of data that documents that women DID these things in churches (even 11.5!).

It should also be noted that Paul does NOT have separate 'spiritual gift lists' for men and women! There seems to be no restriction by gender on the Spirit's sovereign distribution (I Cor 12.11) of gifts (chuckle)...

So, logically--so far--we have two choices: (1) take a universal silence interpretation--and contradict the vast majority of Paul's other teachings--even in the same epistle(!); or (2) take a 'disruptive silence due to inappropriate questioning practices' view (based on 14.35) and simply be a little confused about the historical circumstances...how complicated a choice is that, eh?...

- But the reference to the Law in vs. 34 is "odd" as well. The "Law" never actually says that women are to be 'submissive'--it predicts in Gen 3-4 that they will be bludgeoned into submission by men over the course of history(!), but it certainly doesn't issue ANY imperative or order to women in that verse!

Paul knows the Law better than that, and actually quotes it in the epistle twice (9.9; 14.21), but he doesn't argue this ambiguously from the Law ever. What's going on? Is it possible that vss. 34-35 are not Paul's words AT ALL, but maybe a mistaken position of some of the Corinthians, and is here in the text as a quote BY Paul of a false position in the church? Does Paul ever do this?

There are four lines of evidence/argument that supports the view that *Paul is quoting mistaken opponents* here:

1. We do know that I Corinthians has this literary device in it. In I Cor 6, for example, Paul quotes his 'opponents' in verses 12 and 13, immediately followed by a qualification or refutation. (There are no quote marks in Greek, by the way.) He does this in many places in the epistles, actually.
2. In exegesis, one must pay attention to ALL the details in the text--and this text affords an excellent example of why this is important.

There is a tiny little particle in the Greek text--not even translated in

the NIV and NAS!--that provides some interesting evidence in favor of this view.

Immediately after verse 35, the first word in verse 36 is a single letter particle that is translated "What?!" in the KJV and ASV. This word in most contexts is translated as 'or' or 'rather', but these are always in series, like "either...or" or "this or that or that...".

But in this case, it is (1) in the front of the sentence; (2) introduces a completely different subject; and (3) has a complete change of tone--to that of irony and rebuke. Where else does this type of construction occur in Paul?

- Rom 2.3-4: *So when you, a mere man, pass judgment on them and yet do the same things, do you think you will escape God's judgment? 4 Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?*

Notice that in verse 3, Paul has stated a view (pernicious and/or erroneous). He uses the particle "What?!" (perhaps best translated at "NOT!" in the slang of today!) and issues a harsh rebuke of the position's content and tone.

- Rom 9.20-21: *But who are you, O man, to talk back to God? "Shall what is formed say to him who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'" 21 (particle is here, but untranslated in the NIV) Does not the potter have the right to make out of the same lump of clay some pottery for noble purposes and some for common use?*

Notice that in verse 20, Paul has stated a view (pernicious and erroneous). He uses the particle "WHAT?!" (remember, "NOT!") and issues a harsh response to the arrogance of the position.

- I Cor 6.8-9: *Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers. 9 (particle is here, but untranslated in the NIV) Do you not know that the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God?*

Notice that in verse 8, Paul has stated an erroneous practice. He uses the particle "WHAT?!" and issues a strong response to the

assumptions of the position.

What this amounts to is that the tiny particle (in this type of construction and flow) indicates **VIOLENT DISAGREEMENT** with the preceding verses. (See similar usage in Rom 6.3; 7.1; 11.2; I Cor 6.9, 16, 19; I Cor 10.22; 2 Cor 13.5.) The older commentator Findlay, in the *Expositor's Greek Testament*, used the phrase "indignant protest" to describe Paul's intent with the particle.

3. Finally, Paul consistently uses *irony* (e.g. I Cor 4.8) and *statement/refutation* (e.g. I Cor 6.12-13; 10.23) in this epistle to correct mistaken notions. Notice the semantic clues that this is occurring in the text:
  - Paul uses a gentle, instructional, nurturing tone in 14.26-33, with **VERY** 'universal speaking' words--"**everyone** has a hymn, teaching, revelation, tongue, interpretation" (26), "if **anyone** speaks..." (vs. 27), "for you can **ALL** prophesy in turn..." (vs. 31).
  - He switches to a legalistic, rabbinical-style, "disgrace"-oriented passage in 14.34-35, with 'universal silence' and 'universal restriction' words.
  - He then switches to a rebuking, ironic tone to demolish **SOME** false teaching in the immediate context! (vss. 36-38). [Notice that the only "teaching" that **COULD BE** the target of the rebuke in the near context is in verses 14.34-35. This is an important clue.]
  - He then switches **BACK** to the gentle, instructional, nurturing tone in verse 14.39-40.

This flow of argument **ALONE** would indicate that Paul was rebuking the position in 34-35.

But there is an obvious question here: if the women **WERE** already speaking in church (11.5)--indicating a 'non-rabbinical' church--**WHY** would this rabbinical-type argument show up as a view of someone in that church?

There is a fairly obvious answer--some of the members of the church, concerned about the "chaos" of the worship service, probably were

seeking to 'return to the good old Intertestamental days'. In other words, THEIR answer to the problem of church order was to cut the church in half! But Paul, on the other hand, explains that in every church (vs. 33) God ordains order WITHOUT restricting who does the speaking. This is affirmed both BEFORE the passage in question (vs. 31-33) and AFTER the passage in question (vs. 39-40). [That there would have been "rabbinic-leaning" contingents there that could have advanced this position is suggested from clues such as the "party of Cephas" (1.12), the dual reference to Jews/Gentiles in 1.23ff, and the Pauline Accommodation passage in 9.19-23. We KNOW there was a large Jewish population in the city--see historical background below.]

4. Finally, the actual *nature of the rebuke* in vs. 36-38 indicates that the position is that of some Corinthians, and not that of Paul.

This can be seen from the textual flow in the passage:

- Vss 26-32: Paul's solutions for orderly worship, with 'universal speaking' allowed.
- Vs 33: Concluding argument: God seeks order, and seeks it THIS way in ALL the churches (accepting the NAS rendering of the final clause).
- Vss 34-35: Someone ELSE's "solution" for orderly worship, with 'shut the women up' enjoined.
- Vss 36-38: Paul's argument: Why do you think you are SO MUCH MORE 'spiritual' than the other churches, to the extent that you can set up a DIFFERENT solution to the problem of orderly worship.

This contrast between 'what the OTHER churches do' and 'what the Corinthian church wants to do' is made in the context of orderly worship and universal speaking. In other words, the rebuke makes the most sense IF the text in 34-35 is THEIRS 'alone'--in distinction from the other churches' position.

So, where does this net out?

My personal conviction is that Paul is quoting/refuting a mistaken position. The language, tone, style, textual context, historical context, and known facts about Corinth and Paul's praxis indicates this to me.

But even if I am mistaken, the most likely OTHER alternative is that of "we do not have a clue what he meant"...It CANNOT mean 'universal silence in the churches'--for that contradicts MOST of the rest of the passage and the rest of the epistle (not to mention, known Pauline and early church practice). To turn it into a restriction on women from making any audible, articulate sounds in church is so against EVERY SCRAP of data we have--with the "exception" of I Tim 2, which we look at next(!). Exegetically, I just cannot see a strong and textually-consistent case for 'universal silence' from this passage.

Interestingly enough, if it is a Pauline REFUTATION of 'universal silence' (as my argument above attempts to show is the best understanding of the text), then it ALSO will function as strong data we can use in our analysis of I Tim 2(!)...In other words, our understanding of I Tim 2 will need to take into consideration that Paul *probably* DISAGREES with the position of women's silence--even from teaching and prophesying (e.g 14.26 and 11.5)--in the church!

### **Now, let's consider I Timothy 2.11-14:**

*A woman should learn in quietness and full submission. 12 I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she must be silent. 13 For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14 And Adam was not the one deceived; it was the woman who was deceived and became a sinner.*

Again, when we encounter this in English and with 20th-century Western-civil eyes, this looks relatively clear--but surely we have learned by now to pay attention to the textual and contextual details...

So, what facts do we have to note first?

1. Verse 11 is a non-issue, and actually provides limited evidence for preparation for a teaching ministry.

The women are to "learn in silence." Despite the negative connotations this phrase brings to our ears, in the first century "silence" (*hesychia*) was a positive attribute. It did not necessarily entail "not speaking," as is evident in Paul's use of the word earlier in the chapter (I Tim 2.2; compare 2 Thess 3.12). Rather, it implied respect or lack of disagreement (as in Acts 11.18; 21.14). As a result, the rabbis and the early church fathers deemed quietness appropriate for rabbinical students,

wise persons and even leaders." ([WS:WIC:128](#))

The phrase "in submission" is closely related to this notion, and together the two images call up the memory of Mary, "sitting at the feet of Jesus" in rabbinical student style (cf. Luke 10.39).

The interesting thing about this is that this was used of "future or current teachers"! Rabbinical students were generally preparing for a teaching ministry, 'wise men' and 'leaders' ALREADY were in teaching/authority roles. So, the very cast that this imperative is set in suggests a FUTURE teaching ministry for those women who learned in the proper fashion of students.

The "learning/teach others" cycle is 'standard' in Paul: *And the things you have heard me say in the presence of many witnesses entrust to reliable men who* (nb: generic 'anthropos') *will also be qualified to teach others.* (2 Tim 2.2).

This becomes a bit more obvious when we compare the 'life-style' teaching given women in more traditional roles (Titus 2.4-5: *Then they can train the younger women to love their husbands and children, 5 to be self-controlled and pure, to be busy at home, to be kind, and to be subject to their husbands, so that no one will malign the word of God.*). There seems to be a sort of 'teacher-track' in view in I Tim 2, and a 'lay person' track in the Titus passage.

2. When we look at verse 12, we run into a MAJOR exegetical uncertainty:

- The verb translated as "exercise authority over" (*authenteo*) is only used here in the NT, and its meaning is HOTLY contested.

TWO things that ARE sure about its meaning--it is NOT the normal word for "authority" (*exousia*), "exercising authority" (*exousiazō*), or "power" (*kyrieuo*); and it is NOT a 'good' thing (suitable for ANYONE to do--even males!)...so Scholer in [WS:WAB:204-205](#):

Another factor basic to the interpretation of 2.11-12 concerns Paul's use of the unusual word *authentēin* (translated "to have authority over" RSV) in the second injunction (2:12). This is the only occurrence of this word in Paul's writings and, indeed, in the entire New Testament. The word is not frequently used in ancient Greek literature. The precise meaning of *authentēin* and

its use in 2:12 cannot be completely resolved at this time; scholars are currently in an extended debate on the issue.

Traditionally, *authenthein* has been understood to connote a sense of "domineer" or "to usurp authority" and the term is even associated with murder. Although not all of the evidence and arguments have been fully assessed, two points seem relatively certain. First, the term is unusual. If Paul were referring to the normal exercise of authority, his otherwise constant *exousia/exousiazō* ("authority/to exercise authority") vocabulary would most likely have been used. The choice of such an unusual term itself indicates that Paul intended a different nuance or meaning. Second,...many uses of the term seem rather clearly to carry the negative sense of "domineer" or "usurp authority." Thus I see the injunctions of 2:11-12 as directed against women involved in false teaching who have abused proper exercise of authority in the church (not denied by Paul elsewhere to women) by usurpation and domination of the male leaders and teachers in the church at Ephesus.

***It is VERY important to point out here that it is PURE FOLLY to base an entire doctrine affecting half the human race (!)--'women should not have authority over men'--on the basis of ONE SINGLE VERSE, and even worse--a single verse where the most important verb is (1) unusual; (2) negative; and (3) not even understood clearly!***

Strictly speaking, given this cautionary note, we SHOULD BE able to rest the matter here, but I would like to at least probe a bit further to discover other dynamics in the passage that will either (1) illumine the argumentation somewhat or (2) circumscribe the application of the passage in keeping with the historical context.

- The word 'teach' in the verse ("neither teach nor *authenthein* a man") has a major issue associated with it, as well...

The verb is TOO 'big' to NOT be radically restricted in scope by whatever *authenthein* means.

The situation is this. "Teach" takes an object in the accusative case

and *authenthein* takes an object in the genitive case. "Man" is in the genitive case, and is therefore the object of *authenthein*. That means that 'teach' (unless it is 'connected' tightly to *authenthein*) is UNRESTRICTED in scope. Paul would be prohibiting women from teaching anybody at any time--in direct contradiction to his plentiful commands for believers to teach/instruct/train each other (e.g. Tit 2.4; 1 Cor 14.26; Col 3.16). So the scope of the application must be limited somewhat in the context.

We have two streams of data that indicate 'qualification' on this verb: (1) the "pairings" in I Timothy and (2) the conjunctions used.

(1) The "pairings" data concerns the fact that the verb 'teach' is ALWAYS matched with another verb in I Timothy, which qualifies, hones, circumscribes its range. The cases are in 1.3-4; 4.11; 6.2b. This would mean that the 'teach' is somehow narrowed to 'revolutionary' or 'out-of-order' or 'disruptive' or 'destructive' teaching.

(2) The "conjunction" data concerns the fact that there is a 'but' between verse 11 and 12. So, we have Paul saying something like "Let the women study/learn as proper students...BUT I am not (currently) letting them (the students, having been under the influence of the false teachers--cf. 1.4-7; 5.13; 2 Tim 3.6) teach nor letting them 'overthrow' their teachers (until they are ready--cf. 2 Tim 2.2)". [The fact that 'teach' is present, active, indicative is indecisive as to whether it is a short-term or long-term command--the data is very divided in the extant literature.]

We also have the conjunction *oude* ("nor") connecting 'teach' and *authenthein*. This conjunction often connects 'pairs' that mutually qualify one another. In this case, Kroeger ([WS:ISNW:84](#)) gives an illustration of how this would look: "I forbid a woman to teach or discuss differential calculus with a man"--the SUBJECT MATTER radically orients the range/scope of the 'teach' word.

Now, if we are dependent on *authenthein* to clarify the meaning/scope of 'teach', and if we do not know what *authenthein* means, then we sort of 'stuck'. The historical context suggests some limits, and the disruptive/destructive nature of *authenthein* suggests some limits, but we need to keep looking for clues.

- The word "man" in the *authenthein* clause seems suggestive in

context.

This appears to be a very gender-specific word (*andros*), suggesting that *authenthein* was ONLY DIRECTED (whatever it was) at MEN--not at WOMEN. And, since the passage is apparently ABOUT women, we have women *authenthein*-ing MEN only. Since there had been or were godly women teachers already in Ephesus (e.g. Priscilla and the deaconesses of 3.11), this would make a case that the immodest (3.9), gaudy (3.9), self-righteous (3.10b), unlearned (3.11), and disruptive (3.11) women under discussion in 2.9-15 (no doubt a subset of the women in Ephesus, 3.11; 5.2-9) were SPECIFICALLY teaching something about MEN that led them to seek to *authenthein* them.

3. When we look at the passage in a bigger context, do we have anything in the text/context/historical setting that might give us a clue as to either WHAT the anti-male teaching was, or WHY there was anti-male teaching/activity?

Maybe.

- **textual clues:**

First, the identical phrase "in quietness" BRACKETS the section on learning/teaching/*authenthein*. This creates a 'packet' that stands alone. This suggests that the following data in verses 13-15 is not a critical support for the argument inside the bracket, but might be illustrative. If *authenthein* is an obviously negative term, and if disruptive or out-of-order learning is commonly disapproved of as well, then Paul NEEDS NO SUPPORT for the 'packet'--his readership does not NEED any evidence or argument--they would ALREADY agree with him.

What they MIGHT need is some clarification of what SPECIFIC items of the teaching of these women would be objectionable to the Apostle Paul. And hence, perhaps 13-15 is an illustration of the false, anti-male teachings of these females who 'professed themselves to be godly'.

Second, the conjunction connecting vs. 13 and vs. 12 is a 'weak' one--*gar*. This conjunction CAN mean 'because' (as the traditional

interpretation of the verse understands it), but that is a less pervasive translation than the softer "for". (The 'normal' word for 'because'--in the sense of supporting argument--is *hoti*). *Gar* can easily be understood as illustrative or explanatory--cf. Rom 7.2, "for example"=*gar*.)

In this case, it could either be an example of (1) the teaching and the *authentein*-ing; or (2) of the consequences of women NOT BEING TAUGHT, and therefore, vulnerable to the false teaching of evil men. And, since only the "middle" part--about the deception of Eve--makes sense relative to (2), I think (1) makes considerably more sense in the context.

This would allow us to understand the contents of 13-15 as semi-rebuttals of the false teaching. Paul's points in verses 13-15 look something like this:

- Adam was created before Eve
- It was NOT Adam who was deceived, but Eve.
- Childbearing is important and good

IF, therefore, these are the rebuttals, what would the false teaching look like?

- Eve was created before Adam (or at the same time?)
- Adam was deceived; Eve was not.
- Childbearing is 'bad'

Another clue that Paul is only using the material in 13ff as ILLUSTRATIVE rather than DOCTRINALLY NORMATIVE comes from his use of the "Eve/Deception" motif.

That Paul is selective in his use of Eve in 1 Timothy 2:14 seems clear from at least three other Pauline texts. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Eve's deception is a negative model, warning all Corinthian believers--men and women--against false teaching. This shows that Paul did not limit Eve's deceivability to women. In both Romans 5:12-14 and 1 Corinthians 15:21-22, the apostle attributes sin and death to Adam, not Eve. ([WS:WAB:210](#); cf. also [BBC](#):in. loc.)

What is curious about this text, however, is that Paul does not draw any implication/message from it--he doesn't issue a command. It is like he is only stating the proposition ITSELF (as if the content itself is the issue).

■ **contextual clues:**

Our approach here is to find statements and descriptives about the false teaching that was apparently being taught by men, and held to/taught by certain women.

1. "It seems certain from 2:9-15, 5:11-15, and 2 Timothy 3:6-7 that these [false teachers] have had considerable influence among some women, especially some younger widows, who according to 2 Timothy 3:6-7 have opened their homes to these teachings, and according to 1 Timothy 5:13 have themselves become propagators of the new teachings" (Fee, cited in [WS:ISNW:62](#))
2. it involved speaking nonsense or babbling (5.13) perhaps magic (translated as 'busybodies' in the text)
3. I Tim 4.7 uses the phrases "myths" and "old women" as purveyors of them.
4. I Tim 1.4 uses the phrase "myth" and "endless genealogies"
5. I Tim 1.7 associates it with a strange view of the 'law'
6. I Tim 4.3 show that they were anti-marriage and 4.4 that they were anti-creation.
7. I Tim 5.14 suggests that the false teachers were both anti-marriage and anti-childbearing.
8. I Tim 2.5 points out that there is "ONE mediator between God and Man"
9. It also points out that there is only ONE God!

Knight (NIGTC, p. 11) summarizes the false teaching in the Pastorals:

The false teachers are characterized by an interest in myths (I Tim 1:4; 4:7; Tit. 1:14; 2 Tim. 4:4) and genealogies (I Tim. 1:4; Tit. 3:9), a concern with the law or a Jewish orientation (I Tim. 1:7; Tit. 1:10, 14; 3:9), an interest in "antitheses" that they identify as "knowledge" (1 Tim. 6:20), a tendency toward controversy, argumentation, and speculation (1 Tim. 1:4, 6: 6:4, 20; Tit. 1:10; 3:9; 2 Tim. 2:14, 16,23), deceptiveness (1 Tim. 4:1-3; Tit. 1:10-13; 2 Tim 3:6ff., especially v.13), immorality ( 1 Tim. 1:19, 20; Tit. 1:15, 16; 2 Ti. 2:16, 19; ch. 3), and desire to get material gain by means of their teaching (1 Tim. 6:5; Tit. 1:11; 2 Tim. 3:2, 4).

■ **The historical setting:**

1. Ephesus was legended to have been founded by the Amazons in the 12-13 centuries BC ([ISBE](#), s.v. "Ephesus"), and maintained one of the strongest goddess worship centers in history ([WS:ISNW:47-54](#)). This was worship of the Great Mother or maternal principle, who allegedly gave birth to both humans and the gods.
2. "By the mid-third century B.C.E. Ephesus and surrounding parts of Ionia were already inhabited by Jews; and in the first century BCE, a vigorous Jewish community was able to contend successfully for its civil rights. The Jewish population may have numbered as many as seventy-five thousand persons. Many lamps bearing an inscribed menorah have been recovered, and there is evidence of the involvement of Ephesian Jews in magic. The Jews of Asia Minor, especially those Phrygia, had assimilated much of the culture of their surroundings, so that there was a saying, "the baths and wines of Phrygia separated the Ten Tribes from their brethren." Certain elements of Judaism, especially the biblical stories, were adopted by the larger society. At Apameia, coins minted in the reigns of three successive rulers showed Noah's ark. The legend above the box-like ark says "Noah"; but the two persons standing outside the ark indicate that the biblical account has been embellished, perhaps from the Greek flood story of Deucalion and Pyrrha." ([WS:ISNW:54-55](#))
3. "From the earliest times in Anatolia, female religious officials

known as 'old women' kept alive the ancient myths."  
([WS:ISNW:64](#)).

4. "These Jewish myths or stories cannot be the traditional biblical sotires, for again and again the writer maintains that wrong teaching must be combatted with the use of Scripture...Ancient writers attest that distorted stories, including perversions of the Adam and Eve saga, were already circulating in the first century of the common era. Recent scholarship suggests that Gnostic-like myths opposed to traditional biblical values may have been afloat in Alexandria as early as the second or first century before Christ. Philo, who died in CE 45, utilizes the very theme which was to draw rebuttal by Paul; namely, mythologizing Eve as the one who brings knowledge and meaningful life to Adam"  
([WS:ISNW:65](#))
5. Full-blown Gnosticism will not emerge for another two centuries, but that a proto-Gnosticism, pre-Christian, perhaps Jewish in basis, circulated in the 1st century AD seems almost certain--the evidence we have "points not to the great Gnostic systems, but rather to a kind of Judaizing Gnosticism...as is found elsewhere" (Dibelius-Conzelmann, cited in NIGTC:28) and "there is no need...to look outside the first century, or indeed the span of Paul's life, for such an amalgam of Jewish and Gnostic traits in the Levant" (Hanson, cited in NIGTC:28).
6. The type of reverse-Bible story we have in the passage (that Eve was created first; and that Adam was the one deceived) is obviously a distortion of an OT teaching, in keeping with pre-Christian expansions/reversal stories of the time.
7. Expansions, embellishments, and even 'corrections' to the Biblical stories show up often in the Intertestamental literature--most notably the Pseudepigrapha. These do not necessarily represent "Gnostic-type" currents of thought, but they do demonstrate that people in various situations would 'change the biblical stories' for their purposes.  
([WS:EWEC:93-130](#); [WS:WLT:67-82](#); 107-126; 145ff)
8. The cult of Artemis, the main revenue-generator and "claim to fame" for the city, was particularly woman-centered and

immoral ([ZPEB](#), s.v. "Ephesus"):

When the son of Codrus, last king of Athens, founded the city, he placed his colonists near the shrine of an ancient Anatolian goddess whom the Greeks, following the religious syncretism common in the ancient worlds, called after their own goddess Artemis. This was perhaps in the 10th, 11th, or 12th cent. B.C., so uncertain are dates in this borderland of legend and history. The cult thus recognized was that of a nature-goddess, associated with carnal fertility rituals, orgiastic rites, and religious prostitution.

9. The success of Paul's ministry at Ephesus would no doubt have included some of the priestesses of Artemis (cf. the story of the burning of incantation scrolls by cult practitioners in Acts 19.19). Mickelsen (cited in WS: WIC: 126) shows how these might be in view in a number of the textual situations:

In Ephesus with its huge temple to the goddess Artemis were hundreds of sacred priestesses who probably also served as sacred prostitutes. There were also hundreds of *hetaerae*, the most educated of Greek women who were the regular companions and often the extramarital sexual partners of upper-class Greek men. Possibly some of these women had been converted and were wearing their suggestive and expensive clothing to church. Since *hetaerae* were often respected teachers of men in Greece (many are named in Greek literature), they would be more likely to become teachers after they became part of the church.

Paul, of course, had lectured in a Greek secular school for two years there (Acts 19.9), and if the pattern was anything like that in Athens (Acts 17.34), educated women were probably there and were converted under his teaching.

10. The earliest strands of proto-gnostic and proto-mystery religions we know of had the characteristics of the false

teaching in the Pastorals: nonsense syllables, ritual immorality, belief that the woman (variously Eve or other primal female figures) was the source of /origination of the man, belief that this primal Woman was NOT deceived but rather 'enlightened' by the Serpent--and subsequently 'enlightened' the deceived male; obsession with spiritual genealogies, and prohibition against marriage and childbirth.

[Cf. the childbearing issue, held up as 'good' in 1 tim 2.15 and elsewhere ([WS:WAB:243](#)): "If the passage is a reaction to a proto-Gnostic type of teaching, verse 15 becomes more comprehensible. Childbearing and marriage were forbidden by certain Gnostic groups because they pulled the soul-atoms back into material bodies instead of liberating them to ascend to their ultimate source."]

- Okay, so it LOOKS LIKE Paul is trying to stop a dangerous heresy, by (1) forbidding women from teaching/*authentēin*-ing "proto-something's" counter-biblical views relative to adam/eve/marriage/etc., and by (2) aggressive instruction for women, who could at some point help deal with the issue--esp. among the younger widows.

4. Now, given this overall pattern in the verse, do we have ANY LEXICAL DATA about *authentēin* that would make sense in this context?

Apparently so.

The lexical work of Kroeger ([WS:WAB:225-244](#)) and Kroeger/Kroeger (WS: ISNW:87-104), although complex, documents one important strand of meaning as being "to proclaim as the originator or source of something" (op.cit.). Liefeld summarizes Kroeger in [WS:WAB:246](#): "If Kroeger's understanding of *authentēo* is correct, the most straightforward translation of the verse would be, 'I do not permit a women to teach or to declare herself the originator of man.'"

WS:ISNW:103 states it thus: "If we were to read 1 Timothy 2:12 as 'I do not allow a women to teach nor to proclaim herself author of man,' we can understand the content of the forbidden teaching as being the notion that woman was somehow responsible for the creation of man."

And elsewhere: "I do not permit woman to teach nor to represent herself as originator of man but she is to be in [peaceful] conformity [with the Scriptures, as a respectful student]. For Adam was first formed, then Eve..."

This claim to origination was not just some genealogical quibble--the gnostics claimed that their origination gave them access to a 'purer' stream of revelation, truth, and 'knowledge' than the apostolic circles. This was not a trivial matter--but an issue that would radically affect how the church approached the issue of community truth.

Now, if we try to piece this together, certain things seem to emerge:

- There were false teachers, at least one of whom must have been a woman, that taught a reverse-bible story about adam/eve.
- These teachers argued for their position that women preceded men, and also did not suffer from 'deception'.
- They therefore would have claimed to be a source of 'purer' revelation than the apostolic circle and the OT scripture (a standard "Gnostic" claim).
- Paul deals with this situation (1) defensively first--TEACH the women the Word; and (2) offensively--Forbid these false women teachers (also characterized by immodesty, pomp, and bragging of godliness) to teach/proclaim this doctrine, and make sure they take their place in the 'classroom' with the other people being disciplined according to the Word.

What this would mean for our study, is that this passage does NOT restrict women's role in the early church, but only the roles of FALSE TEACHERS--in this case, with the special case of women heretics.

Remember also the I Cor 14 passage...If I was correct in my understanding of that, then Paul's scope of the 'not teaching' is ALREADY restricted to a VERY specific context confronting the Ephesians. He, accordingly, could not be issuing a 'gag order' without contradicting his earlier argumentation in I Corinthians (assuming that he had not changed his mind for some reason, of course, but we have no reason to assume that.).

[Now, in case I am wrong about this, the NEXT MOST LIKELY understanding of this verse keys off of another translation of *authenteo*, namely, "to domineer"

or to "violently wrest authority from". Under this alternative interpretation, the error was not the 'having authority' (remember, that would have normally used Paul's "standard" authority words) but for "overthrow" or creating imbalance. Men and women were supposed to be 'co-rulers'; to "push the man off the platform and take it alone" is just as bad an error as "not getting up there" when you should be there! It is much more difficult to make sense of the adam/eve verses that follow that instruction, in my opinion, and the childbearing verse is extremely difficult to understand.]

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[Note: these are complicated and difficult passages. I have indicated above 'where I came out' in my study of them. For the reader that would like to study the detailed arguments pro-and-con and all of the exegetical options, I suggest these books from my abbreviations list (all with the WS: prefix): ATW, EWEC, FAB, ISNW, WAB, WBC, WIB, WIC, WIM, WWWP. For the best (IMO) arguments AGAINST most of my views, the reader can check out the articles and book lists offered at [Council for Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.](#)]

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**Conclusion:**

**Paul is known as "the Apostle of Liberty." He was converted overnight from a legalistic, persecuting, pharisaic rabbi to a preacher of freedom in Christ, equality within the Body, of universal giftedness of the Spirit, to mutual submission after the model of the "meekness and gentleness of Christ."**

**His actions showed that his understanding of male and female alike was informed by the radical position we have in Christ. His practice and his words alike encourage ALL to accept the 'yoke' of service to the Master Servant of All...He consistently 'stays after women' to learn and grow and use their gifts for His precious Lord...He instructs his disciples to make sure that they are taught and utilized in the Body...He praises them in his letters for their faithfulness and hard work and 'co-laboring' with him...**

**This man's vision of women was re-created by the grace of God...would that we see what he saw, and live as consistently...**

glenn miller, 1/25/97



[The Christian ThinkTank...](http://www.christian-thinktank.com)[<http://www.christian-thinktank.com>] ([Reference](#))

## Abbreviations)

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