

# *PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL WOMEN (I)*

A STUDY OF SELECTED OLD TESTAMENT  
WOMEN AND THEIR MESSAGE FOR TODAY

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[KEY WORD] Biblical, Women, Faith

## **Preface:**

There are many ways to approach the study of the Bible and the Truth which it conveys. In the course of my research and writing, I have chosen to study this Truth from the perspective of its incarnation in the lives of selected women of the Old Testament: Eve, Sarah, Ruth, Esther, Hannah, Rahab, Deborah, Abigail, Jochebed and Lot's wife.

Furthermore, I have sought to understand the period in history and the specific place and culture in which they lived. All of these factors indubitably contributed to the shaping of their characters. Then, from within that context, I have attempted to accurately understand the portrayal of each of these women in the Bible, to understand her particular role within the context of the Bible message and the period of history in which she lived.

Finally, based on this research, I have attempted to elucidate the various truths which woman of today may glean from the lives and faith of these women which might help them in their daily lives.

## OVERVIEW OF OLD TESTAMENT WOMEN

Name	Nationality	Summary of Nature and Action
(I) Eve	Hebrew	Created in <u>God's image</u> equally with Adam. Role as <i>helper</i> . Created with free will so can chose good or evil; chose to obey or disobey. Chose to disobey and and then refused to take the responsibility for her own action.
(II) Sarah	Hebrew	Childless wife of Abraham who received God's promise of becoming His <i>chosen people</i> . Attempted to help God fulfill this plan. Her name is changed <i>from Sarai to Sarah (Princess)</i> to show God intends to use Sarah to fulfill His plan. When her child is born through God's power, she reaffirms her faith in Him. Her tomb is to be the first property in God's <i>promised land</i> .
(III) Ruth	Moabite	Following her husband's death, pledges to return with her mother-in-law, Naomi, a Hebrew, to her home country. Patterns love and faith in action, her obedience to Naomi gaining her a place in genealogy record of Jesus Christ.
(IV) Esther	Hebrew	Esther's courage, based on her faith in God, helps her to take positive action which saves not only her own life but the lives of her people. In an extremely difficult situation she risks her life, but with historical results.
(V) Hannah	Hebrew	A constantly taunted, childless women who trusts God for a son, then places her son in God's hand to be used for His work. Her faith, and prayer to God, who has answered her prayer, are exemplary and a model even in our modern age.

(VI) Rahab	Canaanite	Inn owner/prostitute who shelter's Hebrew spies spying out the heavily fortified city of Jericho. Her act of trust saves her and her family when the city is attacked and captured. God moves in the hearts of unlikely persons to fulfill His plan.
(VII) Deborah	Hebrew	Unlike many women in her age, she is a judge and leader of her people. God speaks to her and uses her to move the Hebrews into action against their enemies, giving them the assurance of victory. Her faith and action based on that faith are a model of the potential of such women.
(VIII) Abigail	Hebrew	Wife of a foolish man who works swiftly and wisely to save her husband's life as well as to save the integrity and conscience of the future king of Israel, David. God used this unselfish, faithful action to help her as well.
(IX) Jochebed	Hebrew	Mother of Moses. Despite the laws of an evil king, trusting in God's plan for her son, she takes unusual methods to save his life and in so doing makes a very important contribution to God's plan for the delivery of the Hebrew people after 400 years of slavery in Egypt.
(X) Lot's Wife	Hebrew	She was enamored with the life of Sodom, even though it was a life which could very well destroy her. She found it impossible to give up that life style and although God took direct action to save her and her family, she lost her life in refusing to make the choice of what was most important for her.

(I) - EVE

I. Scripture:

- Genesis 1: 26-28
- Genesis 2: 15-25
- Genesis 3: 1-20

II. God's Marvelous Creation-A World and Then Man and Woman to Inhabit It.

A. Genesis 1: 26-28-

- 1) "Let's make man in our image." ONLY humanity is made in the "image" of God. The plants, the birds, the animals, everything else in the world is *created* by God, but only humanity are created in God's *image*-
- 2) having the ability to reason;
- 3) having a spiritual as well as a physical nature;
- 4) having free will.
- 5) The writer of Genesis is very clear that the *male* and the *female*, BOTH are made in the "image of God." There is no distinction other than the difference in sex.....and both parts together make a whole, a complete humanity. Women is not inferior, but on the same level with man, created by God according to God's plan.<sup>1</sup>

B. Genesis 2: 15- 25

The woman was created as an equal to man, a "helper." (Verse 2:18). The "helper" is not an inferior, but one who will stand alongside, one who comforts one who shares the load, one who gets involved in the work and by so doing reduces the pressure by halving the work. A "helper" can be seen as a partner of a team,

- 1) This aspect of being a "partner" can be seen in the New Testament where Paul talks about a "yoke" to describe the marriage relationship (II. Cor. 6:14) Two oxen under the same yoke pull together. They share the pressure equally and the work as

well.

- 2) In I Samuel 7:12, God is referred to as "Ebenezer," "a stone of helps."<sup>2</sup>
- 3) In Psalms, 54:4: "Behold, God is my helper; the Lord is the upholder of my life."
- 4) Furthermore, in Romans 8:26 we are told "Likewise the Spirit helps us—", stressing that one of the roles of God's Spirit is as a helper.<sup>3</sup> So being a "helper" is a very important role, especially since the woman is created by God for that task! So Eve's role, and the role of each woman today, is to be that of a "helper," not only if they are married and help their husband, but to help those in need around them where they live, those who God brings into their life each day. It is these persons God has given them to strengthen and encourage them by your being with them.

### III. Created In God's Image To Help, But Created With Free Will

#### A. Genesis 3:1- 20:

Eve is created as a "helper," to live freely and with love, but she also has a free will and can choose HOW she will live! She can choose to obey God, to follow God's will or follow her own will. Each one of us has that same freedom.

- 1) Eve chose to listen to the serpent, she chose to talk to the serpent, she chose to take the fruit and eat it, and then she chose to share it with Adam!
- 2) At any place in this process she could have chosen to obey God and do what God commanded, but she chose to do what she wanted instead.
- 3) And when God came into the garden, and they hid from Him, He knew they had not obeyed Him....and after speaking to Adam, He then spoke to Eve, giving her a chance to ask for His forgiveness. (See vs. 13) But rather than repent and accept the blame for her own actions, she blamed the serpent for tempting her! How often we will not take the blame for our own actions, but put the blame on others! Eve was weak and in need of God's saving grace

- just as each one of us is. She had sinned, disobeying what God clearly directed her to do, and her sin brought severe consequences.
- 5) Eve had the possibility of not sinning, but she chose to sin. God came to her and did not punish her first, but first gave her a chance to ask for forgiveness. However, she passed up this opportunity because of her pride. She didn't want to admit her weakness. Adam did the same thing. Each one of us often does the very same thing, and for the very same reason.
- 6) Vs. 15- But even as Eve sinned, and even before He made her and her partner leave the wonderful Garden He had made for them, He promised a chance to find forgiveness, promising that through Eve's distant descendent a Savior would be born.<sup>4</sup> Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of that promise. God never stopped loving Eve, even though she didn't obey Him. He never stops loving us even when we make the wrong choices in how we should live our lives. He waits patiently for that day when each of us will realize our disobedience (sin), accept Him as the God of our lives and chose to invite Him into our hearts, into our lives.

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<sup>1</sup> Karssen, Her Name Is Woman, p. 26

<sup>2</sup> Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible( Samuel), p. 916

<sup>3</sup> Henry, A Commentary of the Whole Bible p. 422

<sup>4</sup> Buttrick, The Interpreter's Bible, p. 508-509.

## (II) - SARAH (SARAI)

## I. Scripture

- Genesis 11:29-31
- Genesis 12:1-5
- Genesis 16: 1-4, 15-16
- Genesis 17:1-6, 15-21
- Genesis 18:6-1
- Genesis 21:1-7
- Genesis 23:1-2, 19

## II. Introduction of "Sarai" - God's Continuing Plan For the World's Salvation Continues.

## A. Genesis 11:29-31.

- 1) Here we are introduced to Terah and his sons, Abram, Nahor, and Haran. Haran is the first married of the three sons, dies very early leaving a son, Lot. Both Abram and Nahor marry-Nahor marries a woman by the name Milcah, and Abram marries Sarai. (Gen. 11: -30)
- 2) From that point on we hear nothing more of Milcah. Even when Terah moves his two sons and wives, and grandson, Lot, from Ur to Haran, in the land of Canaan, Sarai is mentioned but Milcah is not. It's almost as though the writer of Genesis doesn't want us to forget Sarai, or to look at her merely as the wife of Abraham, for she is a vital part of God's plan just as is Abram. Sarai is not important merely as Abram's wife, but as a unique person before God who has a place which only she could fill in God's plan.
- 3) After mentioning Milcah, the writer of Genesis adds in verse 30, "Now, Sarai was barren; she had no children." In that generation for a women to have no children, no descendants to carry on the family name, was a painful thing as she was looked upon as an

incomplete woman, a "failure" in a way, not having fulfilled her "role."<sup>1</sup> But this is a social judgment, a judgment of human kind and not of God who loves and accepts us as we are. This is mentioned here because Sarai's not being able to bear children, being barren, will later reveal God's power and the mysterious and wonderful way God will work in her life.

B. Genesis 12:1-5.

- 1) God appears to Abram and promises to make him a great nation, which of course means that sometime Abram and Sarai will have a child. But even as God promises Abram, He is making a promise to his wife, Sarai, for they are partners in receiving God's promise and in being a part of His plan. It goes without saying that without Sarai Abram could not have the child God promised.
- 2) But the promise involves sacrifice, giving up friends, and the place they had called home for so long. Sarai could no doubt have refused to leave, or made it very difficult for Abram, but we can assume that Sarai herself believed what God had promised Abram and she went of her own free will, trusting like Abram that God would lead them.<sup>2</sup>
- 3) Their being willing to do that was a sign of their trust in God who was leading them out of a country where everyone worshipped idols and other gods, leading them apart so that God and God alone would be their God.
- 4) This was not any easy matter for them. Abram was already 75 and Sarai 65. And to believe that God would do such an amazing thing after so many years of not having any children must have been very hard to believe....and with the passing of time became even harder to believe!

C. Genesis 16:1-4, 15-16

- 1) It is hard to be patient when there is something that you really want, and it was difficult for Sarah to wait for a child, even though she believed God had promised.
- 2) So she decided to work out a plan "to help God" do what He had



promised by asking and allowing Abram to have a relationship with her maid. This was not an uncommon practice in that day.<sup>3</sup>

- 3) But even as her plan seems to take effect, the bitter consequences of her plan, her mistake, become evident. Her maid who had been her friend slowly becomes her enemy. Sarai's plan brings her sorrow rather than joy, as does the birth of the boy, Ishmael, to Abram and Hagar.

D. Genesis 17: 1-6, 15-21

- 1) Thirteen years have passed since Ishmael's birth: Abram is now 99 and Sarai 89. God once again appears to Abram to make a covenant with him.
- 2) To show the depth and truth of the covenant, God gives Abram the name of "Abraham" meaning "exalted father," "father of a multitude of nations,"<sup>4</sup> the promise of things not yet seen but that which is to be. It is an outward symbol of the promise which God has made and will fulfill, in His time.
- 3) Abraham laughs in disbelief, but God does not get angry with him. Instead He promises again the birth of a child whose name will be a constant reminder that he laughed. For the name they are to give their child is "Isaac," which means "he laughs."<sup>5</sup>
- 4) Although God does not speak directly at this time to Sarai, He gives her the name of "Sarah," "Princess,"<sup>6</sup> for she will be the mother of many nations. It is God's intention to bless her and use her as a part of His plan. He makes this very clear! She is a central part of His plan, not just someone who has come along with Abraham. Her new name will encourage her to continue to trust God and to fulfill His promise for her. God wants her to know she is special and without mistake that this is God's plan for her!
- 5) Despite the fact that Sarah tried to "help God" fulfill His plan, God's love and mercy towards her remained unchanged and He wants her to know that as well!

E. Genesis 18: 6-15.

- 1) God now appears to Abraham again, this time as a traveler, One of three.
- 2) Sarah makes the hurried arrangements for the meal. She remains in the tent rather than eat with the guests, which was the custom of the time<sup>7</sup> and a custom which once was strictly followed in Japan as well. When my wife and I and our family lived in Tottori, we often experienced this custom when we ate at the home of friends. And some persons expected the same thing when they came to our home as well.
- 3) But God will not allow Sarah to stay in the background as she is an important part in His plan in her own right and her faith and trust are necessary to fulfill that plan.
- 4) vs. 9- An unusual request is made with an accompanying promise. But Sarah laughs, much as Abraham did earlier, when she hears what the promise is. God knew her heart, and knew she had laughed, even though she denied it. But God made her face her doubt, even though she denied it and lied because otherwise it would have made her feel guilty later and interfere with her relationship with God.
- 5) Rather than punishing or condemning her because she laughed, God's love and mercy left her a promise.

F. Genesis 21: 1-7:

- 1) These are verses to memorize!! God fulfilled His promise and in "His own time." (Eccles.3:1)
- 2) Sarah's reaction was not only joy, but a strong witness to the fact that the child she had received was not merely the result of her relationship with Abraham. She saw this child as a miracle of God's grace and love to Her, a gift. Sarah's reaction, and her statement of faith here, should be an example to us as well. Do we see or children as miracles and gifts of God's love and grace? If we do, how should this affect our relationship with our child (children)?

3) Sarah's faith and trust in God may have waived earlier, but she has no doubt who is her Lord at this point!

G. Genesis 23: 1-2, 19:

- 1) Sarah's life on this earth comes to an end after 123 years. Although her death brought great sorrow to Abraham, her son and the many who loved her, this, too, worked as a part of God's plan.
- 2) Abraham bought a field in the land of Canaan as a tomb for Sarah, and it was there where he would go later, as well as many of his ancestors. This was the first piece of land which Abraham had bought since God began to lead him, and it is in the land of Canaan, the promised land! It was to this land that God lead the Israelites hundreds of years later and fulfilled God's promise to Abraham!
- 3) So Sarah's tomb here in Canaan rather than be a place of eternal sadness was the symbol of hope, a sign that God always fulfills His promises in the lives of those whom He loves and those who trust in Him.
- 4) So Sarah's death, too, was a part of the working out of God's plan! Even death cannot ultimately defeat His plan and is often a part of that plan as we can see so clearly in the death of Jesus Christ for the salvation of humanity. And it was Jesus Christ who would in time be born as a descendent of the family of Sarah and Abraham, partners in faith!

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 158.

<sup>3</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*, p. 34.

<sup>4</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible(A-D)*, p. 15.

<sup>5</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible(E-J)*, p. 728.

<sup>6</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible(R-Z)*, p. 219.

<sup>7</sup> Nowell, *Women of the Old Testament*, p. 9.

### (III) - RUTH

#### I. Scripture:

- Ruth 1:4, 14, 16, 22.
- Ruth 2:2, 8, 21,22
- Ruth 3: 1-13
- Ruth 4:1- 13

#### II. Introduction:

A. Among the books of the Old Testament, this Book of Ruth is very unusual:

- 1) Other than the Book of Esther, this is the only other book in the Bible named after a woman.
- 2) God never actually appears to Ruth, as He often does to persons in other books of the Old Testament, nor do we hear of God acting in the lives of the other persons in this story, although this is understood.<sup>1</sup>
- 3) More than a book *telling* about God, we see His love and spirit lived out, expressed in the life of a woman named Ruth, who sets an example of what real love and faith are.

#### III. A Famine and Worse: Naomi's Misfortune, and God's Provision!

A. The story of Ruth begins with a man who took his wife, Naomi, and his two sons to the foreign country of Moab due to a famine.<sup>2</sup>

- 1) There Naomi's husband dies only adding to her hardship. First she has to leave her home country, and then she loses her husband, and with his death she loses her source of income as well.
- 2) While living there, Naomi's two sons choose wives from among the women of the country to which they have come.
- 3) (Ruth 1:4) Orpah and Ruth become Naomi's daughters-in-law. They are Moabites, and the writer reminds us of this fact several times throughout the course of this book.

- a. The Moabite people are idol worshippers, and their gods were connected with the changing seasons and the worship of these gods had a sexual aspect to it. For this reason they were hated by the Israelites who worshipped only One God.
  - b. So Ruth from the beginning had a strike against her since she was a Moabite.
- B. A second calamity struck Naomi's family: both her sons died. As a result, she decided to return to her home country of Bethlehem by herself.
- 1) (Ruth 1:14) Naomi tells her daughters-in-law to return to their families and start a new life for themselves, but Ruth refuses to leave Naomi.
  - 2) (Ruth 1: 16 ) Here she pledges herself to Naomi, but not to Naomi alone, but to her God as well. These words are very strong and meaningful words! She does not know where she will go, or stay, or what life will hold for her, but she promises to go with Naomi no matter where she goes, no matter what happens, and to make Naomi's God her God. We can see two important things here:
    - a. Love in action-Ruth's concern for Naomi rather than herself;
    - c. Faith in action-Ruth didn't just say nice sounding, empty words. She backs up what she has said with action.(James 2:17)
  - 3) As I mentioned earlier, for a Gentile woman to enter Jewish society would be very difficult, but Naomi let nothing stand in her way.
  - 4) (Ruth 1: 22 ) When they arrived in Bethlehem without any money or food, it was the "time of harvest." You may see this as a coincidence, but it can also be seen as God continuing to care for Naomi. At the same time, God is providing for Ruth who has made a step of faith in going to Bethlehem.
- C. A New life begins in a new place.

- 1) (Ruth 2:2 ) Ruth does not know what she must do to support the two of them, but she does not sit around worrying. She takes concrete action to meet their needs.
- 2) (Ruth 2:1-Ruth 2:8 ) Boaz now comes to the forefront. A relative of Naomi, he is very touched by the hard work of this young foreign woman and the fact that she is doing it to help support her mother-in-law. So he tells her to stay in his fields, offering her his support and protection as well.
- 3) (Ruth 2: 21-22 ) Naomi realizes that God's hand is guiding Ruth and protecting her. Her evaluation of the situation reveals this clearly.
- 4) (Ruth 3:1-13 ) Naomi has a plan and Ruth is willing to listen and to obey her plan. As a result Boas takes a step towards making a closer relationship with Ruth.
- 5) (Ruth 4: 1-13) Ruth through her love and faithfulness to Naomi not only finds a way to provide for Naomi, but she also finds joy and peace for herself. The Lord gives her a son. Let's look at verses 14-17.
  - a. This child would be the grandfather of King David.
  - b. And David would be the distant relative of Jesus Christ.
- 6) Ruth gave up all she had to follow Naomi, but in so doing placed her name in the genealogy record of Jesus Christ found in Matthew 1:5. A Gentile in a Jewish genealogy, and all because she trusted the God of Naomi as her God. Her love and her faith opened a whole new life with rich possibilities for her and for many others as well for us, too, through Jesus Christ!

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<sup>1</sup> Owens, *Daughter of Eve: Women of the Bible Speak to Women of Today*, p. 41.

<sup>2</sup> Henry, *A Commentary of the Whole Bible*, p. 253.

## (IV) - ESTHER

### I. Scripture:

Esther 1:10-20

Esther 2:1-11, 16-17

Esther 3:1-11

Esther 4:1,5-16

Esther 5: 1-8

Esther 6:1-10

Esther 7: 1-6

Esther 8:15-17

### II. Introduction:

A. It is a very interesting fact that only this book and the Book of Ruth have the names of women.

1) The cultural and historical setting for this book is Persia, during the period when Xerxes II was king (475 BC).<sup>1</sup>

2) This book is unique among the books of the Old Testament because the Name of God does not appear even once in the entire book and for that reason some persons feel that this book should not be in the Bible.<sup>2</sup>

a. But even though this is the case, this book is historically important in the history of the Jewish people because it explains the origin of the Feast of Purim, which the Jews celebrate every year in March.<sup>3</sup>

b. Although God is not mentioned per se, a strong faith and trust in God, a desire to obey Him is very evident. By means of this text, we can also clearly see how God is working through Esther to save His people and this sheds light on God's plan and deep desire for the salvation of all human-kind.

B. This is the story of God at work to raise a humble, orphaned

young Jewish woman to a place of honor and significance, much as God did in the life of Mary, the mother of Jesus.

### III. Esther 1:1-20:

A. The story of Esther begins with misfortune, the removal of Vashti from the position of queen for not obeying her drunk husband. At a party he had given for nobility, he wanted to "show her beauty." What this might mean is not clear, but it was the national custom at that time for women to remain veiled at all times. So to have followed her husband's command would have broken with custom.<sup>4</sup> But irregardless of what the reason was for her disobedience to her husband's wishes, because of her disobedience possibly influencing the other women in the kingdom, she was removed from her position as queen.

B. This is a clear example of the male-centered and male dominated society of Esther's time and the prejudice towards women in that place and period of time in history.

### IV. Esther 2:1-11, 16-17:

A. At this point we are introduced to Mordecai who was a Jew in exile in Babylon and had raised a young women by the name of Esther, the Persian name, of a woman whose Hebrew name is Hadasah.<sup>5</sup> Esther's life had been touched with tragedy as well as early in her childhood she had lost her mother and father. It is for this reason that Mordecai had adopted her and raised her as his own child. She appears to have been a lovely young women in form and in nature.

B. The king of Persia began a campaign to find a replacement for Vashti. Esther, who was a young woman at this point, came under consideration for this position. So after 12 months of beauty treatments, Esther was taken before the king and won his favor. Although she could have made a request of the king, she asked for nothing and according to this Biblical account she was in favor with all who knew her. Her "beauty" was obviously not of an outward nature alone, but also of character and spirit, which was no doubt the result of her faith.



## V. Esther 3:1-11:

A. Here we are introduced to the treacherous, and very self-centered man, Haman. Haman has decided that Mordecai is his enemy, and not only Mordecai, but all the Jews as well, because Mordecai did not bow down to him when he passed in front on him. This is due to the fact that Mordecai's faith prohibited him from bowing down to anyone other than God, as bowing is a sign of the greatest honor.

B. (Vrs. 7) This is a very important section as it is from this casting of "Pur," "the lot," that the name for the Jewish festival "Purim" is taken.<sup>6</sup> Here Haman lays his evil plot which is very reminiscent of the diabolical plot of a German dictator many centuries later, the plot of Hitler to eradicate all Jews.

## VI. Esther 4:1, 5-16:

A. Mordecai hears of this plot and calls upon Esther in her position as queen to intervene and save her people.

1) But what Mordecai asks is not that simple a thing to do. (Vs. 11)

3) However, Mordecai will not let Esther escape the responsibility of her role in this important mission.(vrs. 14) Esther has been guided (called by God) for "a time such as this."

a. The same thing might be said for each one of us, and in this regard this story is not only regarding Esther alone.

b. God has placed each one of us in this place and time in history, as He did Esther, with a very special role and work which only we can do and no one else!

B. Esther hears, by faith, God's voice in the voice of Mordecai knowing that what he is saying is the truth, this is, indeed, what must be done. On the basis of this, Esther makes a very difficult decision which reveals her deep faith and strong character. She calls for all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray for three days and nights and then she would seek an audience with the king, concluding ".....and if I perish, I perish."

VII. Esther 5:1-8:

A. Esther takes action: prayer sets the stage but then she must take action. Good intentions are not enough! Esther is patient. She moves slowly in order to prepare the king's heart to hear her.

B. Haman's hatred grows and he prepares the gallows on which he plans to hang Mordecai, but in the end this will be his undoing. His own evil will be that which will destroy him.

VIII. Esther 6:1-10:

A. God is at work and causes the king to remember how Mordecai worked to save his life. On the basis of that, He plans to reward Mordecai. The timing of this event can only be God's timing.

B. The king's recollection of Mordecai's service to him will no doubt make it easier for the king to hear Esther's later request. Haman begins to suffer as a result of his own evil thinking and begins to walk the path to his own demise.

IX. Esther 7:1-6; 8:15-17:

A. The king knows that Esther wants something of him and discovers the evil plan which Haman has made. (vs. 10) As a result, he sends Haman to the very gallows that he had built to kill Mordecai.

B. The king gives Esther the right to issue a new order which will save the Jews through whom the Messiah was to come, Jesus Christ. Esther's faith put into action had wide ranging consequences for the Jews from whom the Savior, Jesus Christ, was to come and God's plan triumphed. (see Romans 8:28)

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<sup>1</sup> Dean, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 147

<sup>2</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book I)*, p. 114-115.

<sup>3</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 150.

<sup>4</sup> Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 126.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 52.

<sup>6</sup> Buttrick, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 968.

## (V) - HANNAH

**I. Scripture:**

- I Samuel 1:1-28
- I Samuel 2:1-11

**II. Introduction:**

A. This book of the Bible is not named after the women whom we will study but it is named for her son who was one of the outstanding prophets of Old Testament days.

- 1) Samuel was born in a time of transition in the history of Israel. Up to this time, the Israelite nation had not had a king. God was their king. But they wanted to have a human king like the nations around them. (1 Sam. 8:5) In response to that God chose a man by the name of Saul to be Israel's first human king.
- 2) God also chose a prophet by the name of Samuel, the son of Hannah, to be the one to proclaim Saul (and his successor, David) as king and to anoint Him. So the role of Samuel, and Hannah, his mother, are very important in the history of Israel, and ultimately, in the history of Christianity as well.
- 3) This story shows a woman in a culture where a woman's worth within her family and in society was determined by giving birth to and raising children.<sup>1</sup> Hannah was unable to have children, but instead of being bitter and angry about it, she turned to the God of Creation for help. This was a time in Jewish history when people had turned away from God, and few people prayed, so Hannah's example as an outstanding woman of faith is all the more remarkable.<sup>2</sup> The Israelites had wandered away from the very high standards of morality and spirituality which Moses had given them from God.

III. I Samuel 1:1-8:

A. The fact that Elkanah had two wives is indicative of the low moral standards to which Israel had fallen. He might have married Peninnah because Hannah had not given birth to any children; or, he might have married her after Peninnah. The Bible record does not tell us clearly what the circumstances were.

B. Shiloh, where the Jews went to worship once a year, was the center of the Jewish faith at that time<sup>3</sup>. The priests who came up to worship with the other believers took turns offering up sacrifices to God.

- 1) We can see in the Bible passage here the abuse that Hannah had to take from Peninnah because she did not have children. This may have been due to the fact that she was envious of Elkanah's love for Hannah, but regardless of the cause, it was very painful for Hannah and something she had to face again and again!
- 2) Although this deeply distressed her, there is no record in the Bible that she got angry at Peninnah or tried to get even with her for treating her so unkindly. We will see that her way of dealing with the unkindness of Peninnah was to open her heart before God in prayer.
- 3) Hannah no doubt knew about her ancestor Sarah and Abraham and how they had struggled, prayed and waited so many years before God gave them a child. Isaac and Rebecca, too, had prayed for the Lord to give them a child (Gen. 25:21). They, too, had had to wait for a child. Her pain and misfortune instead of being that which made her give up her faith in God, strengthened her. (See Romans 5: 1-5)

The God of Creation is a God Who is "able to work all things together for good for those who love Him" (Romans 8:28), so the pain of misfortune is **not necessarily** a negative thing.

IV. I Samuel 1:9-11:

A. Hannah returned to the tabernacle to pray, and the Bible tells us

she “was deeply distressed and prayed to the Lord, and wept bitterly.”

- 1) Hannah didn't hide her true feelings from God, but believed he would accept her as she was. (This is a very important thing to remember, and this kind of honest prayer can be seen frequently in the prayers of David in the Psalms.)
- 2) In her prayer she refers to herself humbly as God's “maid-servant.” Before the Almighty God, the Creator of the universe, she was aware of her mere humanity; yet at the same time she knew she could serve God even though she was an insignificant person. That spirit (stance) is very important in our relationship to God and one which pleases Him.(Isa.57:15)
- 3) She began her prayer, “O Lord of Hosts...” This reveals her faith in a God of greatness and might of the One who had done many miracles to save Israel.
- 4) Hannah asked for a miracle. Her prayer was specific, which is very important when we pray .
- 5) If we look at the promise Hannah makes here, we can see God working in her to pray the type of prayer that is most pleasing to Him. It is a prayer not only for Hannah herself, but in a deeper sense, a prayer for the whole nation of Israel for she asks for a child and promises to give him back to the Lord to serve Him.

#### V. I Samuel 1:12-20:

A. Eli the priest thinks Hannah is drunk as she prays fervently, but does not vocalize her prayer.

- 1) Eli's assumption again emphasizes the state of affairs of the Israelite society.<sup>4</sup>
- 2) But Hannah tells Eli the truth and he in turn gives her his blessing that God will answer her prayer.
- 3) Hannah returns to her husband in faith that her prayer will be answered. She had prayed from her heart trusting God to answer and found peace based on that faith. She put things in God's

Hands and knew He would act. (Hebrews 11:1)

- 4) And Hannah did conceive and she named her son "Samuel," which in Hebrew means "asked of God." She knew from where her child had come without a doubt!

#### VI. I Samuel 1: 21-28

A. How hard it must have been for Hannah to give up the child she had prayed so earnestly for and waited so long to hold.

- 1) But we see no hesitation in Hannah to fulfill her promise, nor any bitterness that she must do so.
- 2) Hannah gave back to God what God had given her. Hannah's thinking about the source of life, from Whom it is given and her attitude toward her child, is a noble model for us as well.

#### VII. I Samuel 2:1-12

A. Hannah's prayer is a magnificent prayer. She sees and understands God's greatness, His position as God of all the world, as Judge and as Savior.

B. Hannah's prayer is thought to be the model from which Mary, the mother of Jesus, gave her prayer when she went to visit Elizabeth.<sup>5</sup>

C. Hannah's model as a woman of prayer and faith is a pattern for all of us who seek God and desire to live lives according to God's will.

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<sup>1</sup> Daniel-Rops, *Daily Life in the Time of Jesus*, p. 118.

<sup>2</sup> Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 88.

<sup>3</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (R-Z)*, p. 329

<sup>4</sup> Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 119.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 66.

## (VI) - RAHAB

**I. Scripture:**

- Joshua 1:1-5
- Joshua 2:1-21
- Joshua 6:1-5; 15-25

**II. Introduction:**

(Joshua 1:1-5)

- 1) Following the death of Moses who lead the Israelites out of Egypt, Joshua became their leader and led them into "the Promised Land" under God's guidance.
- 2) The land to which God led Joshua was inhabited, so in order for the Israelites to live there they would have to drive out the inhabitants.
- 3) But God had promised His protection and He would give them the land. (vrs. 5) This means that God will intervene on their behalf and aid them in obtaining that land.

**III. Joshua 2:1-21:**

- 1) As the first step in "possessing" this land, Joshua commanded two of his men to go across the Jordan and check out the city of Jericho, as the first they would attack.
- 2) The city was about 7 acres in size, surrounded by two high walls with a space of about 4 to 5 meters space between them. Long beams were placed over the space between the walls and homes built on top of them.
- 3) The home of Rahab was built on top of these walls.<sup>1</sup>
  - a) Biblical scholars think that Rahab was the proprietor of an inn, one of the few inns, if not the only one, in Jericho.
  - b) During that time in history (14 BC), all inns were run by women, some of who were also called "harlots."<sup>2</sup> Why the men whom Joshua dispatched chose to stay at Rahab's inn we are

not told, but it would not be too unreasonable an assumption to assume that God led them there.

- 4) The men were only in the city a short time when the king was advised of their coming to "search out the land," so he quickly sent soldiers to attempt to capture them.
- 5) However, when the king's men went to Rahab's home, she told them that the men whom they were seeking had left the city before the gate closed at dark and that she didn't know where they were. Actually, she had hid them on the roof of her house.
- 6) When the searchers departed, she went quickly to the roof to inform them of what had transgressed.
- 7) She told them that she had already heard of how their God had rescued their people as they traveled. Rahab then makes a remarkable statement of faith. "The Lord your God is indeed God in heaven above and on earth below." (vs. 11)
- 8) Rahab then goes on to make a bargain with them, that when they capture the city she and her family might be saved. This might seem like a normal request to make, but it also shows a great deal of trust in the men she has hid as well as faith in their God. We might even conjecture that she sees this as a chance to start her life over again, in a new direction.<sup>3</sup>
- 9) Rahab let the Israelites down from a window in her home on the wall. They told her then to tie the *red* cord that she has used to lower them to safety to the window where she let them down. Then, when the Israelites came to capture the town, they would see the cord and the Israelite forces would spare all those in that home. (The fact of the cord being "red", and the function of the cord, is reminiscent of the blood painted on the portals of the Hebrew homes which saved the Hebrews at Passover (Ex. 12:21-23).
- 10) She did just that! (vs. 21). She *acted* in faith on what they had told her to do to save her family.

#### IV. Joshua 6:1-5:

A. The Lord, God, told Joshua ahead of time that the fall of Jericho



was imminent.

- 1) The city gates are closed and barred tightly so that it seems impossible to enter the city.
  - 2) God gives directions for all the warriors to march around the city once each day for six days, the priests carrying ram's horns and the ark of the covenant. On the seventh day, they are to go around the city seven times (seven is a Biblical number meaning "completion"<sup>4</sup>), the priests blowing their horns. After the seventh time around, the priests are to make a long blow on their horns and all the warriors were to make a great shout.
- B. God promised that the walls would fall down!

#### V. Joshua 6:15-25:

A. The Israelite forces did as God has instructed them, and their leader, Joshua, already seeing the victory in faith told them to take the city.

- 1) Joshua also tells them that they are to save the lives of Rahab and all those gathered in her house with her.
- 2) The walls fell, the Israelites entered the city and it was destroyed.

B. But the two men whom Rahab had hid went to her house and brought out all those who were with her and her possessions.

- 1) She and her family were spared. Not only that, but "Her family has lived in Israel ever since," the writer goes on to tell us.
- 2) The writer is here indicating a change that took place in the life of Rahab, for as a prostitute and a non-believer she would not be allowed to live among the Jews. So a dramatic change had taken place in her life. Her way of life and the orientation of her life had been transformed.<sup>5</sup>
- 3) (Matthew 1:1-2, 4-5) Here we have a remarkable record. If you look carefully at the genealogy given here, you will see that Salma, one of the Israelite spies whom Rahab saved, married her. She then gave birth to Boaz, the man who married Ruth, the central figure in the Book of Ruth. And you will notice that the

end of this genealogical line is Jesus Christ!

- 4) Rahab and Ruth are the only two women whose names are mentioned among the names of these illustrious men of Biblical history.
- 5) (Hebrews 11:31)-Rahab's faith is also listed among those of great faith in the Letter to the Hebrews.

## VI. Conclusion:

A. God is not deterred by "the darkness in a human heart."<sup>6</sup>

- 1) God's grace is not limited only to the "good" people. He can work in all kinds of persons to bring them to know him, despite their sin. If this were not the case, no one would be saved.
- 2) Rahab is a good example of God's saving grace, and what God did in her life shows that He can, and will, work in imperfect persons! His will to save and redeem persons is seen clearly here! (II Peter 3:9)

B. Furthermore, God does not wait for someone to become perfect before he uses them. God often uses "imperfect" persons to fulfill His will. The Bible testifies to this truth again and again.

- 1) Rahab's motives for her action were partly selfish: she wanted to save herself and her family, but she also believed in God and risked her life to save the Israelite spies.
- 2) God meets us where we are in life and works to help us develop into the persons He wants us to be fully human, loving, free persons. (Phil. 1:6)

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<sup>1</sup> Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Karssen, *Her Name is Woman (Book I)*, p. 73

<sup>3</sup> Velde, *Women of the Bible*, pg. 91.

<sup>4</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 295.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer, *Women of the Bible*, p. 134.

<sup>6</sup> Price, *God Speaks To Women Today*, p. 80.

## (VII) - DEBORAH

### I. Scripture:

-Judges 4:4-15

-Judges 5:1-15

### II. Introduction:

A. The previous study is about Rahab and her story is connected with that of Joshua who was the leader of the young Hebrew nation at that time.

B. Deborah's story is the continuation of that story. Following the death of Joshua, God then turned to Deborah to lead His people. Her leadership was not to be the same as that of Joshua who had lead them from one place to another. She was to lead the Hebrew nation to know God better, to lead the young nation into peace.

C. Judges 4:4-15

- 1) From this Bible account we can glean very little about Deborah's background.
- 2) We know nothing of her parents, but
- 3) we know she was the wife of a man by the name of Lappidoth, who assumed only a minor role in comparison to his wife.<sup>1</sup> Biblical scholars have also discovered that she was the keeper of the lamps in the local temple.<sup>2</sup>
- 4) We know where she lived.
- 5) We also know that she was a counselor to her people,
- 6) and that she judged in the disputes which persons brought to her from their families, work, etc.
- 7) This type of role was very unusual for a woman in that period who usually took a subordinate role.<sup>3</sup> The Bible does not tell us how she received that privilege, but there are some things we can assume from our text.

a. It would seem that God's grace working in her gave her the

wisdom and integrity which she needed for her work in dealing with the "status quo" of a male-dominated society.

- b. With this in mind, we can also assume that her faith, her trust in God, was the source of her strength. So we may also assume that it was God who gave her the wisdom she needed to do the increasing work which God led her to do.<sup>4</sup>

### III. The Situation of the Nation of Israel at that Time

A. God, under the leadership of Joshua, had led the Israelites into Canaan and given them victory here and there in various parts of the land.

B. But the well-fortified cities, and the Canaanite armies who were in the western part of the country, caused a constant threat to the Israelites in their new homes.

- 1) The Canaanite armies would suddenly appear and destroy the homes in the new Israelite villages.
- 2) The development of iron which could be used for tools and weapons by the Canaanites, too, was an important factor here.
- 3) However, one of the biggest threats to the Israelites was Jabin, the king of Canaan, and the leader of his troops, Sisera. Sisera, we are told, was a brave and fearless warrior who commanded troops which had as many as "nine hundred chariots of iron, and (had) suppressed the people of Israel cruelly for twenty years."
- 4) The reason God had allowed them to suffer so is found in vs. 1. And the reason that God raised up Deborah to help in relieving that suffering is found in the beginning of verse 3: "The people cried to the Lord for help..." God will not force himself upon us. He has given us free will and we must ask for His help before He can and will help us.

### IV. God calls on Deborah

A. Why did God call on Deborah?

She had been counseling and judging God's people and was used to seeking God for help. Most likely the majority of the Israelites had

stopped seeking God's guidance and help. So she was open to God and able to hear and respond to God's voice when he spoke to her. When she went to see Barak, she did not go to give him a good idea or a clever plan which she had devised.

- 1) The message Deborah had was from God.
- 2) God would "draw Sisera out" and "give him into your hand." God's promise went along with a command. We can see this pattern earlier in Genesis (i.e., Gen. 12: 1-2) and in other sections of the Bible as well. Some have compared Deborah to Joan of Arc of France<sup>5</sup>, but Deborah did not try to lead the warriors into battle: she expected Barak to do that, and merely conveyed God's message to him.

#### B. Barak's Response:

- 1) Barak was afraid to believe God, to do as God commanded him on his own, even though it was God who had commanded him.
- 2) Rather than trusting God, Barak trusted Deborah! This is an unusual thing in a male-centered society. He undoubtedly realized that Deborah had a faith that he himself did not possess.
- 3) Deborah's response was quick and unfaltering.(vs. 9) She had no fear for her own life not that God would not do what He had promised.

#### C. Sisera's response:

- 1) Sisera gathered all his forces together from throughout the area.
- 2) He also got all his 900 chariots together for battle!

#### IV. The battle begins!

A. Note that it is Deborah, and not Barak, who gives the cry to go out against Sisera.

B. Deborah "sees" the victory before the battle starts because she knows by faith that God is "going out before" them.

C. Barak finally takes action and goes into battle.

#### D. Judges 5:1-15:

- 1) (vs. 4-5) The Church historian Josephus' account of this battle<sup>6</sup>, and these verses, reveal that there were earthquakes and rain.

They were gathered on a plain by a river to do battle, but the river soon overflowed its banks and the once firm earth became mud.

- 2) The wheels of the chariots sank into the mud and became immovable and the Israelites who were on foot were at an advantage!
- 3) Sisera filled with fear left his chariot and went to hide in a tent where he was killed by a woman.
- 4) (5:31b) Peace came to Israel. But Deborah did not take credit for this victory. Instead, she praised the Lord God for it. Once the battle was over she kept a humble stature and praised(thanked) God for what He had done. In the joy and the emotion of the victory she did not forget Who had brought that victory. She immediately gave praise to the God of Creation.

#### V. Conclusion: Further Lessons Learned from Deborah

A. Deborah was faithful in the small tasks of life, so God gave her greater ones.

B. Deborah's role was not one which she sought, but one which God gave her.

C. Deborah's role was a supportive role, yet extremely important! She inspired others to do what they didn't think was possible, to believe through her what they couldn't believe on their own. She did not belittle Barak, but encouraged him to act.

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<sup>1</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Women (Book II)*, p. 90.

<sup>2</sup> Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 69.

<sup>3</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 41.

<sup>4</sup> Karssen, *Her Name is Woman (Book II)*, p. 90.

<sup>5</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 40.

<sup>6</sup> Henry, *A Commentary on the Bible*, p. 142.

## (VIII) - ABIGAIL

### I. Scripture:

-I Samuel 25: 2-42

### II. Introduction:

A. Saul had been chosen by God as the first king of the new nation of Israel, but Saul, in disobeying God, lost God's blessing on his rule of Israel. For that reason God chose David to be the next king of Israel, but Saul was still on the throne and made attempts to kill David again and again.

B. David fled into the hills to avoid Saul's anger, but his reputation had gone before him and men attached themselves to him and pledged their protection and service to him.

C. In his attempt to keep out of Saul's reach, David went down in the wilderness of Paran, which was on the southern border of Canaan.<sup>1</sup> It was there David had an experience that would be another lesson from God as to the kind of person God wanted him to be. There he met a woman who influenced his way of thinking. This is the story of another outstanding woman in the Old Testament, but also a story of how God cares for those He loves and keeps them from sinning.

### III. I Samuel 25: 1-8:

A. The area in which David is residing with his six hundred men is here described as a "wilderness," so it is not surprising that he and his men would be in need of food.

B. David sent some of his men to speak to a man named Nabal who had large flocks in an area called Carmel. This man was a descendent of Caleb, one of the young warriors of great faith who worked closely with Joshua who conquered the city of Jericho where the woman Rahab lived.<sup>2</sup>

1) He was very rich, so David knew that he would have the resources to be able to help him.

- 2) David was not begging, but in a way seeking for a small expression of gratitude because he and his men had been protecting Nabal's sheep from the many thieves who traveled around stealing sheep and goats for a living. David and his men could easily have come by force and killed the sheep and goats they wanted, and stolen the other food they needed. Instead they came to Nabal asking humbly for some food in payment for the help they had given Nabal's shepherds in protecting his flock.
- 3) It was shearing season, so their protection should have been greatly appreciated as the men were busy with the sheep and did not have the time to protect the flocks as they usually did. And, since it was shearing season, which was a time of celebration, Nabal would have food in abundance and should have been in a willing mood to share it, especially with someone like David and his men who had done so much to help him.

#### IV. I Samuel 25:9-13:

A. But Nabal, whose name means "churl(ill bred; niggardly),"<sup>3</sup> lived up to his name by refusing to acknowledge all that David had done for him;

- 1) Not only did he deny David and his men what they deserved, but he also chose to insult David by calling him a runaway slave.
- 2) He treated them with no respect and send them away empty handed.

B. When they told David what Nabal has said, David was intensely angry and immediately decided to take revenge for Nabal's rudeness and stinginess by taking four hundred of his men to kill Nabal and all his men.

- 1) His pride had been hurt, but his anger was partially due to the hunger he felt, and his concern for his men.
- 2) He had helped Nabal, but Nabal reacted with rudeness instead of gratefulness which David probably saw as sheer evil. So David prepared to destroy Nabal and all that was his.



### V. I Samuel 25: 14-22:

A. Nabal may have been a stubborn, insensitive person, but fortunately his servants were not. They knew immediately what was going to happen as a result of Nabal's words to David, and they knew what to do! They went straight to Nabal's wife, Abigail!

- 1) There are times when the Bible's accounts of Hebrew men and women, their cultural structure, and ways of acting remind me very much of Japanese culture. This is one such time. These men knew if they wanted to get something done, they needed to go to the woman of the house.
- 2) They explained to her how much David had done for them.
- 3) And also what was being planned by David regarding Nabal.

B. Abigail didn't dissolve into tears, or despair, but went to work at once to get food together to take to David and his men. She had the food loaded on donkey's and sent on ahead of her to prepare for her meeting with David.

- 1) She was cool-headed and it appears that she was used to dealing with emergencies.<sup>4</sup> Perhaps being married to a man like Nabal she had gotten used to sudden changes and the need to be prepared for anything!
- 2) And even as she approached David, he was planning revenge on Nabal as he talked with his warriors.

### V. I Samuel 25: 23-31:

A. Here we can see the real strength of Abigail, particularly her humility. Her husband was a very wealthy man, while David at this point was a soldier fleeing for his life from the king. Even so, she approached David with **genuine** regret for the way her husband had acted. In fact, she went so far as to take the blame upon herself!

- 1) She was honest. She didn't pretend that Nabal was anything but a fool, and yet she accepted him for that.<sup>5</sup>
- 2) But she also believed that God was with her, so she didn't feel sorry for herself because she had a husband like Nabal nor did she

condemn him. She accepted him as he was.

B. Abigail knew that God had great plans for David, and that taking Nabal's life and those in his household would be a real burden to him in the future and would weigh on his conscience. So instead of homicide, she asks for forgiveness.

- 1) In this period of history it was very rare for a women to go out of her house without the protection of her husband, particularly to confront an angry man and 400 angry followers! She knew God was protecting her.
- 2) She also knew that God was with David, that God was fighting with David and God would protect and keep him: David did not need to take revenge for God would take care of it for him.

#### **VI. I Samuel 25:32-43:**

A. David accepted Abigail's apology, received her gift and sent her home in peace.

B. She found her husband drunk and knew undoubtedly from experience it would be better to wait to tell him about the incident with David.

- 1) However, when she did tell him, and he realized how close he had come to being killed, his "heart died within him and he became as a stone."
- 2) We are told that "God smote him." The Bible writer saw all the events of our lives in God's hand, so Nabal's death was understood as an act of God.
- 3) When David heard of Nabal's death, David interpreted Nabal's death as well as God acting on his behalf to "avenge the insult" he had suffered.

C. David then asked Abigail to marry him and she again accepted very humbly.

- 1) Abigail may have been very unhappy in her life with Nabal, but she had a strong trust in God and knew that he would sustain her in that relationship.

- 2) She went to meet David little knowing that what she did was going to affect the rest of her life. She went only hoping somehow to protect her husband and keep David from doing something he would regret for many years to come.
- 3) She acted unselfishly. God used it for her good. (Romans 8:28)
- 3) By trusting in God, He was able to work in her life in a wonderful way, but her trust was the key that opened that possibility.

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<sup>1</sup> Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 102.

<sup>2</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*, p. 146.

<sup>3</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (K-Q)*, p. 491.

<sup>4</sup> Price, *God Speaks to Women Today*, p. 94.

<sup>5</sup> Price, *God Speaks to Women Today*, p. 96.

## (IX) - JOCHEBED

### I. Scripture:

- Exodus 1:1-22

2:1-10

### II. Introduction:

#### A. Exodus 1: 1-7:

The Book of Exodus begins where Genesis has ended: through the good auspices of Joseph, the son of the Israelite patriarch Jacob, Jacob and his entire family have come to Egypt. There is a great famine at the time and due to God's guidance through Joseph, all those in Egypt have been saved. And, thanks to Joseph, his family, too, may have the benefits of Egypt which has prepared for this emergency.

Joseph's family had been given choice land and wealth due to their relationship to Joseph, who is the prime minister at that time in Egypt.

1) First Jacob, then Joseph, died, but God had provided for His chosen people, the Israelites, by placing them in very good circumstances.

2) And as verse 7 tells us: "...the Israelites were fruitful and prolific: they multiplied and grew exceedingly strong, so that the land was filled with them."

#### B. Exodus 1:8-14:

The king who previously ruled Egypt, who had honored and raised Joseph to the position of Prime Minister of Egypt had died and the new king, "who did not know Joseph," came into power. Due to the numbers and the strength of the Hebrews, the new king feared that the Hebrews might attempt to take control of Egypt, so he ordered to have them made slaves. However, God blesses the Hebrews so that they become more and more of a threat to the Egyptians.

This condition of slavery then continues for several hundred years. But God has not forgotten His chosen people.

C. Exodus 1:15-22:

Pharaoh tried again and again to find ways to reduce the Israelite numbers. One of his plans involved having the mid-wives take all the newly born male children and kill them at birth. But the two women mentioned here, Shiphrah and Puah, were women of faith. It says they "feared God" and for that reason they obeyed God rather than Pharaoh. Their faith and actions are remarkable because they could have easily been killed if Pharaoh doubted them in the least. Because of their faith in God, God blessed them "and gave them families." Though these women are not the women whom we are studying especially now, their courage and faith cannot go overlooked and is an excellent example of the special strength God gives women who trust in Him and how He protects them.

## II. Jochebed: mother of Moses

A. The story of Jochebed, and of her famous son Moses, whom God would use to liberate the Israelites after their four hundred years of slavery, starts at this point and against this background. When Jochebed comes on the scene, the Pharaoh of Egypt is doing all that he can to keep the Israelites from multiplying and is ruthlessly hunting down newborn Hebrew children and having them thrown into the Nile River.

B. Jochebed is the daughter of Levi, who was born in Egypt, and the wife of Amram, a son of Jacob. It is from the descendants of Levi that God would later raise up a priesthood to lead and represent the Israelites in worship.<sup>1</sup>

- 1) We can see from this that her particular tribe of the Israelites had a very strong faith and close relationship to God and being a part of this family Jochebed would have been trained as a child in the worship of the God of Creation, as opposed to the many gods which the Egyptians worshipped.
- 2) The very name "Jochebed," means "glory of Jehovah," or "Jehovah is glory"<sup>2</sup> and reveals the depth of faith of her parents. Jochebed's name is one of the first names in the Old Testament

which shows this kind of relationship to the Creator God and has the Name of God in it. The fact that this name is carried by a woman is not a coincidence and should not be taken lightly. Jochebed's name in many ways reveals her trust and faith in the Living God.

C. When Jochebed gives birth to her son, Moses, she is already the mother of another male child, Aaron, born before Pharaoh's edict to kill all newly born male children. She also has a daughter, Miriam, who plays an important part in the plan to save the baby Moses' life. Both of these children, as well as Moses, play very important parts in the history of the Hebrew people and are a witness to the influence of the strong faith of their mother.

### III. God's Plan to save a nation

A. God had previously led the Israelites to Egypt to keep them alive during the severe famine in the land where they lived, to develop them into a large and powerful nation to serve Him. He had not forsaken them, but was waiting for the right moment in history to deliver His people and establish them as a nation dedicated entirely to Him, and Jochebed is an important part of that story and that history.

B. Jochebed's faith in God might well have weakened as she was daily confronted with the screams of discovered male babies taken from their mothers and killed. She might have easily given up any hope of saving her own child, but she believed God had a plan for her new born son and hid him until she couldn't hide him any longer.

1) Jochebed conceived a plan: she would weave a basket of papyrus reeds, plastering it with bitumen and pitch to keep it water tight. She then put her baby in that special basket and placed him in a growth of reeds near to the place where the Pharaoh's daughter took her bath.<sup>3</sup>

a. But even then, this seems like an insane idea. What faith must have been needed to trust God to protect this little baby. In a way, Jochebed was placing her son in God's hands, yet knowing

- and believing that was the only way to save his life.
- b. She put him in the same river where Pharaoh's soldiers were drowning other Hebrew children.
  - c. The baby Moses would go right into the heart of "enemy territory" and there he would be saved, named Moses, "drawn out of the water." God would use what we would think to be the most unlikely person, Pharaoh's own daughter, to save Moses.
- 2) Jochebed not only conceived this plan, but she took concrete action to work it out. Her action took immense courage and we can well assume that that courage was built on her trust, her faith in God.
- 3) Jochebed did her part and God did His! When we read the Bible narrative again and again we will realize that Jochebed had carefully (probably over many weeks) coached her daughter Miriam, who watched over Moses as he rested in the reeds along the Nile.<sup>4</sup>
- a. When Pharaoh's daughter saw the basket in the reeds, and had it brought to her and opened it, the Bible tells us "she took pity on him." And although she knew it was most likely a male Hebrew child, all of whom her father had ordered killed, she decided then and there to raise him as her child.
  - b. It was at that point that Miriam stepped forward and asked Pharaoh's daughter if she would like her to get a Hebrew woman to nurse the child. She immediately went to get her mother. (I often tell my Christian Ethics classes with tongue in cheek that this is a very forward looking Biblical instructive for societal policy: paying mothers for all the hard work they do to raise their children.)
  - c. Jochebed in faith had given her child up and he was returned to her. She nursed him, then raised him. And when he was weaned, she brought him back to Pharaoh's daughter who then raised him as her son, giving him some of the best education that the world could offer at that time. But the education as a Hebrew

which he received from Jochebed as she raised him in those early years would be that which in his manhood would give him pity and a deep bond with the Hebrew people. It would open his heart later when God would meet him to send him to Egypt to free the Israelites from bondage.

- d. Jochebed had to give up her child two times, once as a baby and then once as a child, but through doing so his life was saved and later her people would find freedom because of her act of faith. Through her one act, hundreds of thousands of persons would later find freedom.

#### IV. Conclusion

A. Jochebed probably did not know what God had planned for her son. But she did not wait until she knew everything before she acted.

- 1) She was willing to take a risk, to trust God with the life of her son. That is what faith is all about. It is trusting even though, and despite, our uncertainties. This is the kind of trust, faith in God which brings Him glory!
- 2) God needs women today, as well, who are willing to trust Him with the same devotion.

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<sup>1</sup> Price, *God Speaks to Women of Today*, p. 70.

<sup>2</sup> Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 925.

<sup>3</sup> Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 74.

<sup>4</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*, p. 83.



**(X) - Lot's Wife****I. Scripture:**

- Genesis 19:1-26
- Luke 17:32

**II. Introduction:****A. Background of the relationship of Lot and Abraham.**

The story that we read here of Lot, his wife, and his family actually began much earlier in the Book of Genesis. The condensed version of the story leading up to the Scripture which we just read is closely connected with Abraham and Sarah, the couple with whom the Creator God first made a covenant. Lot is Abraham's nephew by birth, and when Abraham left Ur of the Chaldees in response to God's command, Lot and his wife accompanied them. Like Abraham they left their homeland, not knowing where they were going, and set out to find a new life. (Gen. 12:1-5)

- 1) They gave up a great deal by going with Abraham, but they gained even more. For as God blessed Abraham, God blessed Lot's family as well.
- 2) Before very long Lot's herds have greatly increased and quarrels broke out between Abraham's shepherds and Lot's shepherds regarding an adequate place to pasture their flocks. To restore peace to the family, Abraham divided the land before him between him and Lot, giving Lot the first choice. He chose the more developed land, actually what "appeared" to be the better land, where the city of Sodom was located. This choice, some commentators add, reveals Lot's character, and probably that of his wife as well who was probably "offering suggestions" as to the best choice. We are warned even at this point of the evil of this city and begin to wonder what is ahead for Lot and his family. (Genesis 13:5)

**B.** In Chapter 18, Abraham is visited by three men (we learn as we

read that they are God and two of His angels). They are on their way to destroy the cities of Sodom and Gomorrah due to the extreme sin of the people in those cities. Abraham talks with God in an attempt to save any in these cities who are righteous, and God shows a willingness to do that, but in the end the only ones who can be saved are Lot and his family. The story of Lot and his wife and their last days in Sodom begin at this point.

### III. God's mercy in the midst of judgement

#### A. Genesis 19:1-14:

- 1) Lot welcomes the men who have come from God to Sodom to save him and his household, but he is not at this point aware of the purpose of their coming to the city.
- 2) He invites them to his house. However, the men of the city surround Lot's house and demand he turn over his guests to them that they might "know" them. There are many commentators who say this is an indication of these men being homosexual, that this is one of the sins of this city for which God desires to punish them.<sup>1</sup> (There is considerable controversy which has arisen about this kind of interpretation of this passage. Gay activists feel this is not a valid interpretation.)<sup>2</sup> Lot tries to satisfy them by offering his daughters in place of his guests, but they refuse him.
- 3) So in order to save Lot, the angels pull Lot into his house and cause those outside to be unable to see so that they cannot carry out their plans.

#### B. Genesis 19:12-14

- 1) Lot is warned of what the Lord God is about to do. He believes what they say and goes to warn his sons-in-laws.
- 2) The son-in-laws are unwilling and unable to believe that such a thing could happen. Probably this would be our response if someone came telling us something of the sort, even if it was someone we trusted.

#### C. (Read Genesis 19: 15-26.)

- 1) The time had come: God was going to destroy Sodom, but the Bible tells us that Lot "lingered." We can imagine how hard it was for him and his family to give up all that they had called home, knowing that they would never see it again. (Read vs. 16). But God was not going to abandon Lot and his family. The messengers grabbed them by their hands and lead them out of their house and out of the city. They are told to "flee to the hills," but maybe due to advancing age, or another problem, Lot bargained with the men to allow them to flee to a nearby city. They allow that. But they are told firmly, "...do not look back or stop anywhere on the plain." The angels would wait to destroy the city until Lot and his family were safely in the city.
- 2) We read in verse 23 that they arrived in Zoar. So they knew that they were safe, but it is at that point that Lot's wife decided to disobey the angel's command. She looked back and in an instant she "became a pillar of salt."

C. (Read vs. 26)- What does it mean when it says she "looked back"? And why was she so severely punished? For us, this punishment seems too severe for this simple act.

- 1) First of all, in the act of looking backwards, Lot's wife would have to stop going ahead and some commentators point out that even a brief stop at this point might have brought her within range of the sulfur and fire which fell on Sodom and Gomorrah.<sup>3</sup>
- 2) She disobeyed the angel's command **not** to look back, perhaps out of belief that such a terrible thing could happen to the city where she lived.
- 3) But her disobedience was also indicative of her unwillingness to give up all that she had in Sodom. She and Lot, having lived in Sodom, were undoubtedly well aware of the evil there. They were also very rich. Undoubtedly Lot's wife regretted deeply having to give up her life in Sodom, even if it was an evil city. That was surely painful. But God had taken special steps to spare her life, and with life and health, her husband and her daughters, she could

always start a new life somewhere else as they put their efforts and strength together. But by looking back she was refusing her salvation, the chance for a new life, which God had offered her.<sup>4</sup> She was so caught up in the past that she was unable to move ahead into the future.<sup>5</sup> If God had brought her and her family out of Sodom, if God loved them that much, surely God would provide for their future.

D. (Read Luke 17:32-33)- **“Remember Lot’s wife.”** God is offering each one of us His love and salvation. To receive it we will need to turn our back on our old ways of thinking and living (our self-centered living) and move **ahead** in trust that God will guide us and provide for our needs. God offers each one of us a new life with Him, but if we look back and hold on to our “old” way of life we will not be able to receive the new life which He offers us through Christ. Just as Lot’s wife, each of us has a choice to make. Just as Lot’s wife, we stand at a crossroads, and whichever road we decide to take will take us in a different direction. Let us pray that God will give us the strength and courage to chose rightly and the faith to move ahead.

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, *Living Ethically in the 90’s*, p. 51.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, *Moral Dilemmas: Biblical Perspectives on Contemporary Issues*, p. 166.

<sup>3</sup> Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 175.

<sup>4</sup> Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*(Book 2), p. 35.

<sup>5</sup> Price, *God Speaks To Women Today*, p. 37.

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