

PERSPECTIVES ON BIBLICAL WOMEN (II)

A STUDY OF SELECTED NEW 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 New Testament: Mary, the mother of Jesus, Elizabeth, Anna, Martha & Mary, The Woman of Samaria, Sapphira, Pricilla, Phoebe and Dorcas (Tabitha).

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 women of today may glean from the lives and faith of these women which might help them in their daily lives today.

OVERVIEW OF OLD TESTAMENT WOMEN

Name	Nationality	Summary of Nature and Action
(I) Mary	Hebrew	Chosen by God's grace for a very special role, Mary responded in humility and faith not fully knowing what all the consequences might be. As a result, she suffered much pain, but she was also able to know God's grace in abundance. She had a faith that could and did grow to embrace Jesus as Her Lord.
(II) Elizabeth	Hebrew	A righteous woman before God, who despite her inability to have children, served God faithfully and without bitterness. She believed God's promise of a child in her advanced age and praised Him for her grace towards her. She held no envy towards Mary, whose Son would be greater than her own, and encouraged her. The strength of her faith and humility are exemplary.
(III) Anna	Hebrew	A woman who had seen hardship in her life yet found deep meaning in her service to God in the Temple. Though advanced in age, her faithfulness to her duties in the Temple allowed her to see the long waited Savior. She then shared this Good News eagerly with others.
(IV) Martha	Hebrew	A dedicated and efficient hostess, she showed Jesus her love through serving Him. But she became so overly involved as a hostess she forgot to receive Jesus' gift to her. But her faith grew, and she served in a new way.
(V) Mary	Hebrew	Quiet and unassuming, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and her faith was nourished by His words. She gave what she had while the opportunity availed itself, generously and without restraints, to show her love to Jesus. The example <i>par excellence</i> of a life given to Him in love.

(VI) The Woman of Samaria	Samaritan	This anonymous woman comes to draw water at noon and meets Jesus. His understanding of her needs and what Jesus can offer her expand to include her salvation. She then shares her new perspective on faith with those she had avoided earlier.
(VII) Sapphira	Hebrew	Wanting to impress the members of the early Church, Sapphira and her husband agree together to share a portion of the proceeds of a land sale and claim it is the entire amount. She supports her husband in this deceit and lies herself only to have the truth revealed and lose her husband's life and her life in the process as well.
(VIII) Priscilla	Hebrew	Acting true to her name, Priscilla proves to be a <i>worthy</i> follower of Christ in aiding Paul. Her faith is expanded in the process and she is able to help Apollo grow in his faith. Her influence stretches far beyond the church in her home.
(IX) Phoebe	Hebrew	A single women who uses the opportunities that present themselves to her. As a deacon in the early church, she models the role of <i>servant</i> by her life style. Courageously traveling to Rome, she delivers Paul's <i>Letter to the Romans</i> which act has made an immeasurable contribution to the Church down through the ages.
(X) Dorcas	Hebrew	Another single woman who sees the needs around her and takes concrete measures to meet them. By using her gift of sewing, she meets the needs of the needy, but her gifts to them are also symbolic of her concern for them and an immeasurable encouragement. Her untimely death brings sudden grief, but the word of Peter bringing her back to life spreads the influence of her faith and love even further and draws others to faith in Jesus.

(I) - Mary

I. Scripture:

- Matthew 1:18-25; 12:46-50
- Luke 1:26-38; 39-56; 2:22-38; 4--51
- John 2:1-11; 19:25b-27
- Acts 1:14

II. Introduction:

- A. When thinking about Biblical women, and in particular women of the New Testament, there can be no other starting place other than that point at which The New Testament itself starts, the annunciation to Mary.
- 1) In the Garden of Eden, when Adam and Eve willfully disobeyed God's command and chose *their* will, sin entered the world. With sin came separation from the Creator and the resultant loss of life. Spiritual and physical death was the result.
 - 2) But even at that point, the Creator God was planning a way to save His beloved, to open the way for the salvation of humankind, to save us from our sins and give us eternal life.¹
 - 3) This plan unfolds and progresses throughout the Old Testament and the prophets of God consistently direct God's people to expect the coming of a Savior, One who will be called "Immanuel" ("God with us.")²
 - 4) The One who would be the key figure in the fulfillment of this prophesy is none other than Jesus Christ: the privileged woman who would bear Him and bring Him into the world, Mary.
- B. Mary's life and her role in fulfilling God's plan for humankind is unique. Among all Biblical woman Mary is unique "not because she is holy (free from sin and its consequences, as a segment of Christendom teaches) but because she is the mother of the Great Son. There is only one Jesus and there can only be one mother of

Jesus. As a mother she is one of us, but as the mother of the Great Son, she is preeminent.”³ Her deep love of God and her trust in God and her willingness to obey Him regardless of the consequences, as we will see in this study, is what makes her life a model for those attempting to live lives committed to God in a world where such commitment is not common.

III. Luke 1:26-38 (Matthew 1:18-25) & Luke 1:39-56:

A. Who is this young women whom God chose to be the mother of His only Son?

- 1) Mary, and the birth of her son Jesus, are recorded most clearly in the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew. The main difference in the two accounts is that the Gospel of Mathew records things from the perspective of Joseph, Mary’s betrothed, while Luke records these events from Mary’s perspective. In the case of the Gospel of Luke, scholars feel that the writer received most of his information from a close acquaintance of Mary, or from Mary herself.⁴
- 2) Although Mary’s blood line is not known exactly, it is known that she was of the tribe of Judah, the same as her betrothed, Joseph, but of a different family and the daughter of Heli.⁵
- 3) Mary’s home was in Nazareth, a small village in lower Galilee, about 15 miles from the Sea of Galilee and 20 miles from the Mediterranean Sea.⁶ It was a very small and insignificant village. Judging from Nathanael’s reaction to his brother Philip’s testimony about Jesus “son of Joseph of Nazareth” (“Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” [John 1:46]), we can assume that for one reason or another it was not the most desirable place to live. But as clearly seen throughout the Bible, God’s concern about one’s place of residence, status and the like are very different from us for “...the Lord looks on the heart.” (I Samuel 16:7)
- 4) It was undoubtedly this aspect of Mary(that is, her “heart”) which was appealing to God in His choice of Mary as the women

to bear His Son. As Jesus would grow up in close relationship to His mother, and her influence upon Him would be very strong, a woman in close relationship to God herself would be very important. The statement of the angel, "The Lord is with you," has often been interpreted to show her spiritual fitness for the honor He paid her. Her cousin Elizabeth's comment to Mary when she went to visit her, "And blessed is she who believed that there would be a fulfillment of what was spoken to her by the Lord." (Luke 1:45) as well shows Mary's faith and trust in God which is not something new, or sudden, but her typical relationship with and stance towards God. This position of faith, with her accompanying humility, place her among the "giants of faith" we encounter in the Bible.

When the Bible account begins regarding the birth of Jesus, Mary is betrothed to a carpenter by the name of Joseph whose roots can be traced back to David. (Matthew 1:16) We may assume that Mary was about 18 years of age as that was the usual age for betrothal and marriage.⁶ At this point we must look very carefully at the Hebrew understanding of betrothal. Betrothal lasted for a period of 12 months and legally constituted an actual marriage relationship, although sexual intimacy during the betrothal period was forbidden. This relationship could only be broken by "a legal transaction (in effect, a divorce), and the ground for such termination was adultery(see Deuteronomy 22:24)."⁷ Since Mary and Joseph were betrothed when she became pregnant, and Joseph assumed that she was an adulteress, and would therefore be stoned to death if she were exposed publicly (Deuteronomy 22:23-27), he decided to divorce her quietly. (Matthew 1:19) It was at that point that God spoke to Him in a dream revealing the plan He was going to execute through Mary. Against this background and understanding of betrothal and pregnancy during that period, we can realize the enormity of Mary's response to the angel. Though questioning the logistics of how the

pregnancy would come about since she was a virgin, Mary does not question God's intent. She undoubtedly knew what drastic problems might arise through that pregnancy, but at the same time expressed belief in what would come to pass and complete willingness to be a part of God's plan no matter what consequences that might bring. Mary's reply, "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word." (Luke 1:38) This humble submission to God's will, the unwavering trust that He will fulfill that will and the courage to believe that "with God all things are possible," is a model and an encouragement to each one of us in our walk of faith regarding how we are to live before God.

B. Luke 1:39-56:

- 1) The angel had told Mary that her relative "Elizabeth in her old age has also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month for her who was said to be barren." (Luke 1:36) She believed God's gift of grace and the miracle in Elizabeth's life so she willingly took the several day trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem to share Elizabeth's joy and her own.
- 2) Mary's response to Elizabeth's word of faith, in calling her "... the mother of My Lord...", is to again confirm by faith God's grace to her in His choice of her. "Stitching scraps of Psalms together with words remembered from the Old Testament thanksgiving of Hannah, mother of the prophet Samuel,"⁸ Mary praises God for "the Mighty One has done great things for me..." (Luke 1:49) Mary's hymn of praise, which has become known as the *Magnificat*, praises God for what He has already done when there is yet no physical evidence at all. This is the essence of Biblical faith. (Hebrews 11:1)
- 3) Rightfully, Mary sees God's work in her as of great political and historical consequence, a blessing for all humankind, and not just a blessing for herself alone. Once again God's great, merciful act to this unknown, young Hebrew woman is seen in complete

humility. There is only praise for God Who "has looked with favor on the lowliness of His servant." (Luke 1:48)

All that is to transgress is due to God's grace. As Karl Barth in his book, **The Great Promise**, clearly points out: "The expression 'to find favor' also occurs in the Old testament, and is never the result of an endeavor on the part of man."⁹ Mary praises God for His grace and not for something which has come about as a result of her own exceptional spiritual standing, superiority or achievements.

IV. Luke 2:1-11 & Matthew 2:1-12:

A. The trip to Bethlehem, Jesus' birth, and those who came to honor Him.

- 1) A trip of about ninety miles awaited Mary and Joseph as they went to register in Bethlehem due to a decree by the emperor, Ceasar Augustus. But that was not the worst of it. Mary's time for delivery was near and when they finally arrived in Bethlehem, and the birth pains were getting more and more regular, all the lodging that could be procured was a smelly stable with lots of animals for roommates! But where are the complaints? Mary could well have said: "Couldn't God do better than this for His own Son, let alone for me who has carried His child all these many months and gone through so many other hard times?" Here, again, Mary's positive faith in God, knowing that they were in God's care, made all the difference.
- 2) But Jesus' birth hadn't gone unannounced, at least to the humble shepherds carrying out their responsibilities as faithfully as they could on the Bethlehem hillside. They came to see for themselves what God was doing. They found Mary and Joseph with whom they shared all that the angel had told them and of the angel choir they had heard. Mary could have followed them when they left and gone through the streets telling all she met that she was the mother of the newly born Messiah...but she didn't. Luke tells

us: "But Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart." Rather than put herself in first place and get lost in self-admiration, she sat back to revel in what God was doing, and how He was doing it. What she "pondered" would be a nutrient to her faith and prepare her for what lay ahead. This incident was shortly followed by the visit of the wise men from the East who came bearing gifts for the newborn king. We can only assume that their visit, as well, was met with the same kind of thoughtful consideration that was given the shepherds.

V. Luke 2: 22-38:

A. According to Jewish Law, Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple for the Jewish purification rights.

- 1) Forty days after the birth of a son, or eighty days after the birth of a daughter, the mother was obligated to take the child to the Temple for purification rights, to present the firstborn male child to God and then redeem it with an offering. (Leviticus 12:8)¹⁰
- 2) It was here that Mary met two elderly saints who had waited in faith to see the Redeemer whom God would send: Simeon and Anna. Their testimonies of Who Jesus actually was more than likely was an encouragement to Mary. But the prophesy which Simeon gave to Mary, and the working out of that prophesy, was to have a profound affect upon her life. He told her: "This child is destined for the falling and rising of many in Israel, and to be a sign that will be opposed so that the inner thoughts of many will be revealed--and a sword will pierce your own soul, too." (Luke 2:35) The passing years would reveal the truth of this prophesy.
- 3) When Jesus was twelve years old. He accompanied Mary and Joseph to the the yearly festival of the Passover in Jerusalem. On the way home, they realized he was not with them and began a frantic search. Finally, returning to Jerusalem, they found Jesus in the Temple surrounded by the teachers. When Mary reprimanded

him for causing her and his father so much concern, he stated very simply and undefiently: "Why were you searching for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Luke 2:49) Mary's child, though an obedient son, was beginning to sense a stronger, deeper loyalty than that to his mother which dictated what He was to do. This was probably the first of the hurts, the "piercing sword," due to not fully understanding Jesus' mission completely, but it was only the first.

VI. John 2:1-11:

The wedding at Cana brought Jesus' family together once again. Jesus had turned thirty and had left his family home. Joseph seems to have died during Jesus' youth, so Jesus as the elder son would have taken his place as the bread winner of the family. His leaving to begin his private ministry would have had a big effect on the family. (Another "sword?")

The supply of wine at the wedding was nearly depleted which would cause a great embarrassment to the new groom and his bride. Mary seeks Jesus help, only to be told, "Women, what concern is that to you and to me? My hour has not yet come." (John 2:4) These words themselves, in the original language, were not particularly disrespectful, but the very fact that he addressed her as woman rather than mother must have had but one meaning for her, namely, that from now on the direction of His life's course had entered into His Father's hands. As painful as it is, letting lose of our children, giving them the independence to follow their own calling is extremely important, but very painful at times!

VII. Matthew 12:46-50:

So many adverse things had happened in response to Jesus' ministry and no doubt Mary, perhaps encouraged by her sons, felt the necessity to try to save Jesus from Himself, to protect Him before he got into more "hot water." So Mary and His brothers went to speak with

Jesus. When Jesus was told that his mother and brothers were there to speak with Him, he quickly used it as a chance to teach a truth about the Kingdom of God. "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" And pointing to his disciples, he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother." (Matthew 12:48) So the distance between Mary and her Son widens, and the piercings of the sword, which old Simeon had prophesied, were keenly felt.¹¹

VIII. John 19:25b-27:

We see Mary next at the foot of the cross, the work of the "sword" being completed. So had the work of Jesus been completed. One of His last words from the cross, the salve which would no doubt bring Mary healing after His death, was His deep concern for her future which He placed in His disciple John's hands. How deep her pain must have been. But pain can bring growth if placed in God's Hands, if we are able to know understand by faith that which the apostle Paul also learned in his experience. God told him: "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Mary discovered through her pain the depth of her own weakness, but also the sufficiency of God's strength. When we see her in Scripture next she is with the disciples.

IX. Acts 1: 14:

A. Jesus had ascended to the Father following His resurrection. We find Mary with her sons and the other disciples "devoting themselves together in prayer." Most likely Mary's faith, in the midst of all her pain, had born fruit. His brothers who once scoffed at Him and thought he had gone mad now embrace Him as their Lord. In fact, Church historians tell us, it is Mary's second son, John, who became the head of the Church in Jerusalem!¹²

B. Mary's faith was a faith which grew with age, aiding her to more deeply understand God's ways and when that complete understanding

was absent, to merely trust God's love and grace. Her faith was able to grow from love for her son to embrace love for her Savior. What she could not see with her eyes, she was able to see with her heart...and **that** is the essence of faith.

¹ Genesis 3:15

² Isaiah 7:14 (Matthew 1:23)

³ Velde, **Women of the Bible**, p.133.

⁴ Deen, **All the Women of the Bible**, p. 158.

⁵ Velde, **Women of the Bible**, pg. 135.

⁶ Unger, **The New Unger's Bible Dictionary**, p.818

⁷ Gower, **The New Manners and Customs of Bible Times**, p.65.

⁸ Owens, **Daughters of Eve**, p. 29.

⁹ Barth, **The Great Promise**, p. 26.

¹⁰ Unger, **The New Unger's Bible Dictionary**, p. 224.

¹¹ Lockyer, **All the Women of the Bible**, p. 98.

¹² Owens, **Daughters of Eve**, p. 38.

(II) - Elizabeth

I. Scripture:

- Luke 1:5-20
- Luke 1:24-25
- Luke 1:39-45
- Luke 1:57-66

II. Introduction:

A. Hebrew names, like Japanese names, have meaning and were not just given because the parents of the child were enamored with a certain name or liked how it sounded. In the Bible, in particular, names were often given the child by the parents as an expression of their faith or a sign from God Himself..

1) For example, in the case of "John," Elizabeth's son, the angel who appeared to Elizabeth's husband Zechariah told him they were to name him John (Luke 1:13 = "the grace or mercy of God."¹)

2) The same was true in the naming of Jesus, (Matthew 1: 21; Luke 1:31) which is the Greek form of "Joshua" which means "the Lord saves."²

3) The name "Elizabeth" in turn, given her by her pious parents, means "God is my oath," which refers to the oath, the promise, which God made to Abraham and fulfilled. (Genesis 12:1-3) Elizabeth's family line was of the priestly line of Aaron (Exodus 6:23) and she in turn was named after the wife of Aaron, Elishba.³

B. Elizabeth lived in the hill country of Judea with her husband, Zechariah, of the priestly order of Abijah, one of the sets of priests who ministered in the Temple in Jerusalem on the Jewish Sabbath. They lived approximately four miles south of Jerusalem.⁴

III. Luke 1:5-20:

A. Priests were allowed to marry, but only to pious women, only to those with blameless behavior (Leviticus 21:7), women who would not in any way be a detriment to their position or reflect poorly on the priesthood. This is our first indication of Elizabeth's spiritual stature, but only the first.

- B. The Scripture tells us that “Both of them (Elizabeth and Zechariah) were upright in the sight of God, observing all the Lord’s commandments and regulations blamelessly.” (Luke 1:6) This indicates that Elizabeth “didn’t simply follow in the spiritual wake of her pious husband, (but) she had an independently developed spiritual life and was honored because of her personal relationship with God.”⁵
- C. Luke goes on to tell us two other significant things about Elizabeth:
- 1) “But they had no children because Elizabeth was barren...” (Luke 1:7) For Elizabeth this was undoubtedly a continuing sad situation. “A childless state, more so for the daughter of a priest and the wife of a priest, was humiliating, for in Israel it was the dream of every woman that it might be her privilege to be the mother of the Messiah, promised to Eve, earth’s first mother.”⁶
 - 2) “...and they were both well along in years.” (Luke 1:7) When the angel appears to Zechariah, in response to the promise of the birth of a son, Zechariah’s response was “How can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years.” (Luke 1:18) We can draw the conclusion that they were beyond the natural, human ability to produce a child even under ordinary circumstances. Both husband and wife had undoubtedly waited, prayed and hoped for a child. This time of waiting had produced disappointment and for Zachariah, at least, the inability to believe he could be a father. We are not told of Elizabeth’s reaction when Zachariah undoubtedly wrote a message to her (since he had lost his voice) telling of the angel’s promise, “...but Elizabeth evidently had no problems in believing the fantastic promise, even though she has not received it as her husband had...”⁷

III. Luke 1: 24-25

- A. During the first five months of her pregnancy Elisabeth “remained in seclusion.” (Luke 1:24) Why she did this we can only guess. Perhaps, in her old age, she feared the possibility of the child aborting should she move about too much.
- B. But we can sense in her words in Scripture the deep thanksgiving

which she felt towards God. She saw this as God's act of grace and love towards her, not only in allowing her to experience the joys of motherhood so late in life, but for taking away "...the disgrace among the people..." (Luke 1:25) which she no doubt had felt so painfully. We cannot sense, however, any bitterness towards God for her condition of barrenness over so many years! Now she would have a child. God's grace and love towards her filled her with praise and joy.

- C. Elizabeth's faith was a patient faith which had been greatly tested and richly rewarded. Over the years, while patiently praying for a child, she could well have lost faith in God or become bitter. But she didn't!⁸

IV. Luke 1: 39-45

- A. Mary, knowing of Elizabeth's pregnancy, goes to visit her cousin Elizabeth to share God's grace with her.
- B. It is at this point that we can again see Elizabeth's deep faith and humility.
- 1) Although Elizabeth is the older, and the wife of an esteemed priest, she is willing to take "second place" to the younger, socially more obscure Mary. Elizabeth looked at her cousin as the one blessed above all others. (Luke 1:42) "No vanity, or selfish delight mars Elizabeth's character."⁹
 - 2) There was no jealousy to be seen in Elizabeth. Her son would be the forerunner to the Messiah, but Mary's Son would be the greater. But, "instead of being jealous of Mary, she was a true friend when Mary needed it the most—Elizabeth the encourager."¹⁰
 - 3) Elizabeth's faith is seen clearly as she acknowledges that the Son of Mary is the Christ and in so doing she becomes the first in a long line of persons to do so. Yet unborn, she worships Mary's Child in faith as her Lord.¹¹

V. Luke 1:57-66

- A. As was the custom in the Jewish faith and culture, when a child

was eight days old the family and neighbors gathered for the circumcising and naming of the child.¹²

- 1) The gathered persons assumed that they would name the child after his father, and it was the father's right to give the name. But Elizabeth spoke up bravely and said "No, he is to be called John." (Luke 1:60)
- 2) As there was no one among their ancestors by that name, they turned to Zechariah, probably expecting he would write something different. However, he confirmed Elizabeth's choice of the name and in so doing his speech was restored. This not only reveals the close relationship between this couple, but Elizabeth's courage to speak according to her convictions(faith) where others might have remained silent.
- 3) Elizabeth's strength of faith can be seen in her son, John the Baptist. Jesus acknowledged the greatness of her influence on her son, and her faith as well when he said "I tell you truth: among those born of women there has not risen anyone greater than John the Baptist." (Matthew 11:11)

The strength of Elizabeth's faith, and the humility which accompanied it, set a pattern which each of us would do well to emulate.

¹ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 155

² Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, (E-J), p. 869

³ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 50

⁴ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 168

⁵ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book I)*, p.143

⁶ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p.50

⁷ Karssen, *Her name is Woman (Book I)*, p.144

⁸ Karssen, *Her Name is Woman (Book I)*, p.145

⁹ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 153

¹⁰ Jacobs, *They Were Women Like Me*, p.33

¹¹ Karssen, *Her name Is Women (Book I)*, p.146

¹² Klinch, *Everyday Life In Bible Times*, pg. 160-161

(III) - Anna**I. Scripture:**

- Luke 2: 36- 38

II. Introduction:

Of all the women who are encountered in the New Testament, probably the shortest of all biographies is that which belongs to the woman called "Anna." But despite the brevity of the introduction given to her, it is well not to overlook her life and what it teaches about a life lived in close relationship to God.

The Gospel according to Luke is the only Gospel which contains this story of Anna. This is probably due to the writer being deeply impressed with "Jesus understanding of women and sympathy with their needs...."¹ Luke was therefore eager to show the reaction of women to Jesus from his birth. Just as we have seen that Luke recorded Elizabeth's faith in Jesus as the promised Savior, so Anna stands in the long line of women who saw Jesus with the eyes of faith and in turn witnessed to that faith.

III. Luke 2 : 36—38:

- A. "Anna", like other Hebrew names, has a meaning and in this case it means "favor, or grace," and is the same as "Hannah" in the Old Testament.²
- B. Luke tells us that she was the "daughter of Penuel, of the tribe of Asher." This tribe, though fifth in size according the population figures given in the Bible, was the only tribe West of the Jordan of the Jewish nation that did not produce a judge or hero. Of all the Jewish tribes, its influence was particularly insignificant.³
- C. There is quite a bit of controversy about Anna's age due to two ways of calculating her age. The Bible account tells us that "She was of great age, having lived with her husband seven years after

her marriage, then as a widow to the age of eighty four." (NRSV) Although this is the way the NRSV Bible translates this passage, the original Greek is very unclear and open for speculation. That is to say, it is not certain from the Greek text "whether we are to understand that she was **eighty-four** years of age or had been a **widow** for that length of time."⁴ From a common sense point of view, we would most likely interpret this verse in the same way that the NRSV does. Either way, her years of service in the temple are extremely significant. But that which also needs to be noted here is that the death of her husband did not bring her relationship with God, or her service to Him, to an end. Nor was her age a deterring factor. She did not withdraw from Jewish society or lose her faith, nor did she wallow in her grief. Instead, she turned her life over to God which opened up a new channel of usefulness as she served Him in the temple in Jerusalem. The Bible tells us "She had never left the temple but worshipped there with fasting and prayer day and night." (2:37) Her faithful dedication over many years continuing into her senior years gave her a unique opportunity and blessing. Being a widow, and an aged widow at that, she wouldn't ordinarily have had a chance in life, but in seeing the Christ-child she became "one of the most privileged women in the world."⁵ Faithfulness to the duty God had given her and trusting in God's promise of the Messiah prepared her heart for meeting Him. Then, her faithful, continual daily service in the temple opened up this opportunity. Even a few minutes of absence from the temple on that day would have caused her to miss the most important moment of her life. But in the course of her service to her God she met His Son.

D. "At that moment she came, and began to praise God and to speak about the child to all who were looking for the redemption of Israel." (2:38) Anna recognized the imprint of God on the baby before her and praised God for His faithfulness, but then she went one step further. She witnessed to what she had seen. She shared

eagerly what had been revealed to her with those who were seeking as she was the "redemption of Israel." So in a real sense, she became the first missionary of the Good News of Jesus Christ. Her faith was not a self-centered faith, even in her old age, but a faith which yearned to share with others hungering for the truth, those who were also waiting patiently for the sign of God's action. Stirred to action, "she laid aside her prophetic robes and put on the garb of a missionary."⁶ This opportunity, too, came after a lifetime of service to God and undoubtedly confirmed her assurance that God was at work in the world He had created. Having this opportunity to share this Good News with others, Anna continued to have an active part in the service of the Lord to whom she had dedicated her life. Rather than "retirement," she found a new and exciting way to share her faith.

¹ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 157

² Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 29

³ Unger, *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 113

⁴ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible (Vol. VIII)*, p. 64

⁵ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman*, p. 152

⁶ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 163

(IV) -Martha & (V) -Mary

I. Scripture:

- Luke 10:38-42
- John 11:17-44
- John 12:1-11

II. Introduction:

A. Up to this point in our study, we have looked at various persons individually and I do not plan to change this method of study in any way at this point. However, since the next two women whom we will consider are sisters and share many similar experiences (although their reactions to those experiences differ due to their individual personalities), we will look first at the aspects of their life which they shared in common.

Martha and Mary lived with their brother Lazarus who is well known for the fact that Jesus raised him from the dead after he had been dead for several days. (See John 11: 1-44)

B. Martha, Mary and Lazarus lived together in the same home which judging from the Biblical record belonged to Martha. Being older than Mary and Lazarus, as well as owner of the house, would then place the major responsibility of running the house in her hands.¹

C. Martha's home was in the town of Bethany. Bethany was a small village within walking distance of Jerusalem, about one and five-eighths of a mile east, lying on the east slope of Mount of Olives. Due to its excellent location to Jerusalem and the Mount of Olives, which Jesus and his disciples frequented, and the friendship between Jesus and the sisters and their brother, this home became a "home away from home" for the itinerant preacher Jesus while attending various festivals in Jerusalem.² This was no doubt a tremendous blessing to Jesus and to his disciples as well.

III. Martha:

A. Luke 10:38-42:

1) Hospitality was a very important part of Jewish life. One scholar suggests that "the urge to give hospitality seems to have been rooted in the experience of nomadic life. Nomadic people are conscious of the loneliness of the desert and that the provision of food is often a matter of life and death."³

So even as the Jewish people formed towns, and life became more settled, this custom continued very strongly. Throughout both the Old and New Testament it is seen as a virtue. Moses clearly pointed out that "it was a religious duty to show hospitality." (Deuteronomy 10:19)⁴ There is a strong tendency among writers and commentaries to be critical of Martha, particularly in light of what Jesus said to her and their interpretation of Jesus' appraisal of the situation is often negative. However, after study and careful consideration, it is my opinion that there are many positive features that can be seen in Martha's life style in this passage as well which outweigh the negative.

2) First of all, Martha was being faithful to the teachings of the Jewish faith in regards to providing for and caring for others. Martha expressed her love and concern for Jesus and his disciples in a very concrete way. She took her task of hospitality very seriously and tried to do her very best, not necessarily in order to be praised for her efforts but to bring comfort and renewal to those whom she hosted. This required serious thought, effort and a genuine concern for persons and hard work, all of which are traits which we might well emulate. Martha took her responsibilities as a host very seriously and although she too might have liked to sit with Mary at Jesus' feet, she persisted in the preparation of the meal. There is nothing wrong with that in and of itself.

3) But Martha also had her weaknesses, some which we may see in ourselves. Martha, on this occasion anyway, was greatly annoyed.

As Velde has so very aptly pointed out, "Martha was not managing her work, her work was managing her."⁵ Martha had lost her perspective in regards to her hospitality. As she became more and more irritated instead of examining the cause of her frustration she found fault with someone else. In this case, not only Mary but Jesus became the objects of her rebuff. She found fault with Mary for not helping her in her meal preparations, but she also blamed Jesus that He had not seen what was happening. "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself." (Luke 10:40) There is a touch of self-pity here.⁶

- 4) Jesus responded to her not in anger, but in love: "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things...." (Luke 10:41) That is the key: she had allowed herself to become "disturbed, distracted by many things or dishes."⁷ Maybe a little pride squeezed in the door there, too, as Martha tried too hard. She could have had a simpler, yet equally delicious meal, with a lot less trouble. That might have given her the time to stop for even a few moments, to sit with Mary and hear Jesus' words, have her spirit refreshed and gain a clearer perspective on things. Martha needed to learn to stop and take time to listen, to receive from Him whom she was serving as Mary had. And I believe Martha did do that finally as we can see from her next meeting with Jesus following the death of her brother, Lazarus.

B. John 11:17-27:

- 1) Martha, being the efficient person she was and out of faith that her friend Jesus could help, sent someone to inform Him of Lazarus' illness. She believed that Jesus could help, but He didn't arrive in Bethany until after Lazarus had been buried. When Jesus did come to Bethany, Martha went out to meet Him immediately. He had only been two miles away in Bethany, and yet he was several days in coming. Martha *might* have been very angry with Jesus for not coming sooner, but she wasn't. Rather than words of rebuke, I believe Martha's words are the product of deep grief

over her loss. "If You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that God will give you whatever you ask of Him." (John 11: 22) She may have been overly occupied with dinner preparations earlier, but it is obvious that she doesn't lack faith.

2) Martha had a faith that could grow. She listened carefully to what Jesus told her. When He said, "Your brother will rise again" she responded to Jesus by sharing what she had been taught: "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." Then Jesus said: "I am the resurrection and the life. Those who believe in me, even though they die, shall live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?" (John 11:25-26) Martha's response is remarkable: "Yes, Lord, I believe that you are the Messiah, the Son of God, the one coming into the world." (John 11:27) Martha not only believed the words which Jesus spoke, she saw in Him the personification, the reality, the truth of those words. She went beyond believing what Jesus told her to believe Jesus Himself! At this point her faith was released, hope was born and she remembered her sister and how much Jesus meant to her as well.

C. John 12:1-11:

1) "Six days before the Passover Jesus came to the home of Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. They gave a dinner for him, and Martha served...." (John 12:1-2) This is the last account that we have of Martha, but the whole scene seems to speak of peace. This meal is undoubtedly to thank Jesus for His gift of life to Lazarus. Undoubtedly Martha threw herself into the preparations, as always. But John merely says "...she served..." Although her personality is still very different from her sister, her way of serving seems to have changed.

2) The fact that Martha gave this meal "six days before the Passover" reveals how "courageous" a woman she was. Following Lazarus' return to life, the Pharisees were seeking a way to

destroy Jesus, and Lazarus as well. To continue to be associated with Jesus and risk incurring the wrath of the Jewish leaders and perhaps even death was a brave thing to do.⁸ Martha seems to have learned what is "the better part" (Luke 10:42) and in learning and practicing that she found strength and courage no one could take from her. Martha most likely was grateful not only for what Jesus had done for her brother Lazarus but for what he had done for her as well. Through Him Who is "the resurrection and the life" she had come to know about the deeper things of life and her hospitality no doubt revealed this change.

IV. MARY

A. Luke 10:38-42-

- 1) Encounters are a mysterious thing. Through the eyes of faith we can see the Hand of God at work in such an encounter to show us His love or to continue by this molding process to make us into the persons that He wants us to be, or both. The encounter of Mary with Jesus was just such a life-changing encounter. When it began we cannot clearly ascertain from the Biblical record, but we do know that Jesus' friendship with Lazarus, Martha and Mary was a great comfort to Him and his life had a dynamic impact on them. Luke's first record of this friendship, and its impact on Mary's life, takes place in the home that she shares with her brother and sister. Martha, the older sister, is busily, then frantically trying to get the evening meal prepared for Jesus and His disciples who are their guests. Where is Mary? Luke introduces us to her with the words "She (Martha) had a sister named Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to what He was saying." (Luke 10:39) Something seems amiss here in a culture where the women were expected to do the housework and the men were expected to be "sitting" and "listening." Those were the social expectations of that era, but they were not Jesus' expectations. Karssen clearly points this out in her book, **Her Name Is Woman**

when she writes: "He had introduced a new respect for women. He had offered her possibilities that had been unknown until then. He had lifted her to His plan. That is why she had felt so entirely at ease in His presence. Without any shyness, she has come and sat down in the midst of the men who were listening to His words."⁹

- 2) Mary's personality was in direct contrast to her sister's. She was quiet and very unassuming, but there is **much** more here than meets the eye.
 - a. Although she may be a quieter person than her sister, she, too, has courage. She had the courage to challenge convention, the status quo, to sit at Jesus feet and listen quietly to his teachings despite what society expected of her.
 - b. Mary was a person who probably didn't stick out in a crowd, but was a woman with a very meditative nature. She was a seeker of spiritual truth and her sitting at Jesus' feet symbolizes her search. "Mary, more than any other individual in the New Testament, was associated with His feet, betokening her humility, reverence and hunger for spiritual knowledge. She sat at his feet as a disciple, to learn of His will and word...."¹⁰
 - c. Mary took the time to **listen** to what Jesus had to say. Listening requires discipline, discipline to keep quiet and really focus on what the other person is saying. Listening goes beyond merely not talking. When another person is speaking we can still be actively debating with them or "voicing" our own opinion in our minds. Listening requires an openness, a willingness to be taught and also reveals a humility which says "there are many things I still don't know and I am sure there is something I can learn from you." Listening also involves patience and is not something that comes easily to most of us. Although our individual personalities may be subdued and be more naturally suited to listening, the skill of really listening to another is something which must be honed and developed by effort.
 - d. But "listening" is not always appreciated or understood by

others and in this case Mary's sister Martha was critical of what her sister was doing. Mary didn't respond to Martha's criticism, but Jesus did. "Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is the need for only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:41-42) I could write a book (and others have) about the "one thing" Jesus was speaking about here. This is a brief study of Mary and so I limit my comments to merely saying that this "one thing" is seeking to know God, to know His love and His will for each one of us. We know God through communion with Him: for us today this means communion with Him through prayer, Bible reading and meditation on His Word. For Mary and others in her day, it meant communion with Jesus by sitting at His feet, listening to His words. To do this you must make a choice and Mary made that choice. She undoubtedly knew her sister would be upset with her since she wasn't helping to prepare the meal to welcome Jesus, or that the men around her might be critical, but she still made that choice. It was an important choice and one that changed her life.¹¹ Jesus confirmed this fact when he said, "Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken away from her." (Luke 10:42) Her choice had life-changing, eternal effects. Martha and the others around her did not realize that the opportunities to entertain certain guests might not always be there, that Jesus might not always be there. Mary was not one to pass up a good opportunity to be with Him and learn from him so her choice had a profound effect on her future and on her faith.

B. John 12:1-8:

- 1) The next encounter recorded in Scripture that Mary has with Jesus is actually in John 11:1- 44. It is a very moving and an important section of the Bible as it tells us much about Jesus, and about Mary's sister Martha. Lazarus had died and been

entombed and the two sisters and their many friends are grieving his loss with them. Mary does meet Jesus again at this time and though her tears speak eloquently, her words with him are very few. It is my opinion that there is not too much additional light that can be shed on Mary's character from this meeting. For that reason I have chosen to move directly to John 12:1-8 which is perhaps one of the most memorable stories in the New Testament.

- 1) It is "six days before the Passover," which for Christians is eternally significant. Though Jesus was very much aware of what that year's Passover would mean, few around Him had any sense of His impending death. Martha was in her usual place, faithfully serving the meal to the guest of honor, Jesus. How things had changed! Jesus had changed the grief of that household into joy for Lazarus was there alive with them! Where was Mary? While Martha hosted a dinner to show her deep gratitude and love for Jesus, Mary, fitting her quiet nature, had prepared and brought her own gift of thanks and love to Jesus.
- 2) What Mary did in itself was not without precedent. When one was invited to a formal meal in Jesus' day, among other things the guests feet were washed and "next the guest's head was anointed with olive oil scented with spices."¹² However, there were several things which made what Mary did unique and which reveal yet other aspects of her character. First of all, Mary did not use olive oil, which was readily accessible and fairly inexpensive. Mary chose to anoint Jesus with spikenard, the oil from a plant in Northern India which would not only be difficult to obtain but would have the retail value of approximately "three hundred denarii," the equivalent of a year's wages for the average laborer.¹³ This was also the ointment which was used in Jewish burials for the anointing of the dead body.¹⁴ This spikenard would have been in a special container which would have to be broken to open and would have to be used at that time in its entirety.
- 3) Mary's gift was given quietly and unobtrusively. Depending on

which Biblical account of this act which you read (Matthew, Mark or John), what part of Jesus' body was anointed is different. Matthew and Mark record the oil being poured on Jesus' hair, while John speaks of it being poured on His feet. In all three accounts Mary wipes off the excess with her hair. We might well consider that she poured the oil on his hair and it ran down his garment onto His feet. But more important than this is what this act shows about Mary and her love for Jesus. First of all, she gave Jesus the best that she had to show how great her love and appreciation was for Him. Secondly, she gave it in its entirety as the flask could not be resealed. She didn't hold back anything for herself. Mary showed very clearly that she was "practical as well as spiritual."¹⁵ Mary, who had sat listening to Jesus' teachings so patiently and carefully, had undoubtedly heard him talk of his death. "She was the only one who realized that His time on earth was drawing to an end."¹⁶ So she did what she could in the time that was allowed to her. She didn't wait and by so doing lose the opportunity. This was what Jesus was referring to when he countered Judas' criticism of Mary's gift to him. "You always have the poor with you, but you do not always have me." (John 12:8) Frivolous? Too emotional? A shallow thinker? Mary was none of these. Her gift was the result of a deep, strong faith in and love for Jesus. "The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume." (John 12:3) Mary's deed is a perpetual reminder that the Lord highly values what we do for Him and ultimately that is the measure which will be used for judging all that we do. (see Matthew 25:31-46) Mary had learned that lesson as she sat at Jesus' feet.

¹ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p.87

² Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (A-D)*, p. 387-388

³ Gower, *The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times*, p. 241

⁴ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 165

- ⁵ Velde, **Women of the Bible**, p. 169
- ⁶ Karssen, **Her Name Is Woman**, p. 161
- ⁷ Lockyer, **All the Women of the Bible**, p. 89
- ⁸ Karssen, **Her Name Is Woman**, p. 164
- ⁹ Karssen, **Her Name Is Woman**, p. 168
- ¹⁰ Lockyer, **All The Women of the Bible**, p. 104
- ¹¹ Price, **God Speaks To Women Today**, p. 151
- ¹² Gower, **The New Manners & Customs of Bible Times**, p. 245
- ¹³ Harrison, **The Wycliffe Bible Commentary**, p. 332
- ¹⁴ Buttrick, **The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (K-Q)**, p. 510
- ¹⁵ Lockyer, **All the Women of the Bible**, p. 106
- ¹⁶ Karssen, **Her Name Is Woman**, p. 171

(VI) - The Woman of Samaria

I. Scripture :

John 4: 1-30

II. Introduction: (4: 1-6):

A. Throughout Jesus' ministry one of His concerns and continuing problems was not with those who were not interested in things concerning God, but with those who considered themselves the "experts" in religion, the Pharisees. The section of Scripture which we will look at together here is a good example.

1) Rumors were starting that Jesus was baptizing more persons than John and this would undoubtedly create a problem as they were constantly on the outlook for persons who might interfere with their authority.

2) Jesus did not want to irritate them, but at the same time He wanted to be free to share His message about God's love, forgiveness and redemption. On that basis, He decided to return to Galilee. He and His disciples were then in the area of Judea. Being Jews, they usually would have gone around Samaria when going north to Galilee, but Jesus went directly north which meant going through the center of Samaria.

B. Starting early in the day, they reached the town of Sychar where there was a well which had been dug by the Jewish patriarch, Jacob, and given to his son Joseph.¹

1) After this long journey by foot, Jesus was tired. Probably it was hot, too, as the Bible tells us it was the "sixth hour," which would be noon.²

2) Jesus sent His disciples to the town to look for food and He rested by the well.

III. Well water and the "Living Water." (4: 7-15)

A. It is at this well that we are introduced to a women whose name

and age we are not told. All we know at this point is that she is a "woman of Samaria," and these two facts are very important.

B. Firstly, because the Jews had no dealings with Samaritans due to past historical reasons.

1) In Jesus' day, a man would not speak to a woman whom he met on the street whom he did not know. And to ask her for a drink of water would be breaking another long Jewish tradition. Although both Jews and Samaritans were free to drink from this well, they would usually each have their own bucket as they would not drink from the other's bucket. For this reason, person's going on trips often carried their own small bucket with them.³ So for Jesus to speak to this Samaritan woman and ask her to give him a drink of water from the well would be breaking not only tradition but also the strongly held customs of that day. But there is something also very unusual in this record. It is noon, and this woman is coming to the well for water. Women would carry a jar that they would fill with water and carry to their home. Since noon was the hottest part of the day, women usually gathered at the well early in the morning or in late afternoon to avoid the heat and also to talk with one another.⁴ But this woman came by herself when there was very little chance of meeting anyone.

2) We will read later on that the reason for this is that she was an outcast from society due to her life style. She is a very lonely woman, one searching for acceptance and love. So she had gone from lover to lover. But as a result, no one would have anything to do with her.

C. So she comes to the well when there is the least chance of meeting anyone who might make an unkind comment to her or ignore her and cause her pain.

1) But this young Jew, whom she recognized as a Jew by his dress, not only speaks to her but asks a favor of her. Whereas others turned their backs on her, often condemning her, he speaks kindly to her. She doesn't want to get hurt again, so she speaks abruptly

to Him. But Jesus responds only with a love-filled offer: He tells her that He will give her some water, "living water" if she asks for it.(4:10)

- 2) The Samaritan woman is confused: the young man before her has nothing to draw the water with and she doesn't know where he will get this "living water" he talks about. She is thinking merely in human terms of the water in the well, but Jesus is slowly helping her to move on to a broader, deeper understanding of another kind of water which will bring her new life, love and joy!
- 3) The Samaritan woman is unable to see beyond the words that are being used to realize that Jesus is talking about something other than physical water, which is needed to sustain her physical life. Jesus is talking about water which will bring new life to her spirit, God's gift of His love and spirit which will give her eternal life.
 - a. Her deepest need was a spiritual need, and not a physical one.
 - b. We often make the same mistake. We think that the most important things in life are meeting our physical needs and satisfying them. But God has given each of us a spirit which must be nourished as well. It will die without His love, the "water" which brings life to our souls. Our bodies will die, but if we are in relationship to God, our spirits will live on with Him!
- 4) Then, finally, she asks Jesus for this "living water." (vs. 15). She still does not realize the meaning of Jesus' words, but if she receives that water she will never be thirsty and will not have to come to the well everyday, she thinks. But her request opens the door for Jesus to share more, to help her see herself as she really is and desire to change.

IV. A Step In Faith- Meeting the Savior (4:16-26)

A. The condition for change: facing oneself.

- 1) To receive Jesus' "living water," the Samaritan woman must "call her husband and come back."

2) Jesus was not changing the subject, but challenging the woman to face herself, her real condition. She had had five husbands and the man she was living with was not her husband. She had sought for life-giving love in the wrong place and she must acknowledge that in order to accept Jesus' healing love. She had answered Jesus truthfully, and He praised her for that....but then made her face the truth.

B. She realized she was not dealing with an ordinary man. Is He a prophet? If so he could help her understand more about faith. With that change in her thinking, the door to deeper communication opened.

1) The Jews worshipped God at the temple and the Samaritans worshiped God on Mt. Chorazin. Which place is the right place to worship, where God is?⁵

2) Here Jesus tells her an important truth (vrs. 21-25). God is a spirit so He can be worshiped anywhere, but he must be worshiped honestly, in truth, from our spirit and this can be done anywhere and at anytime!⁶

3) The woman tells Jesus she is awaiting the coming of the Messiah and He tells her plainly that He is the One she has been waiting for!

V. The Forgotten Jar- The Faith-filled Witness.(4:27-30)

A. The disciples return...and the woman leaves, leaving the jar at the well. It is no longer her most important concern. A great change has taken place in her and she must share it!

1) (Vs. 29)- She tried to avoid people before, but now she wants to tell them about Jesus.

2) She tried to hide the truth about her life before, but now she tells others without fear because she knows Jesus has accepted her as she is and has forgiven her. She has found new life through drinking the "living water" and wants others to know about it as well.

B. What Jesus did for this Samaritan woman He can, and will do, for

each one of us if we are honest about who we are and honestly admit our need for His love, for the "living water" which only He can give us. The water Jesus gives will bring new, meaningful, joy-filled life which we will want to share with others. His love and life are not limited to a certain time or place. All of these things we can learn from this Samaritan woman's meeting with Jesus. What we do as a result of learning this is up to each one of us.

¹ Ogilvie, *The Communicator's Commentary (John)*, p. 95

² Barclay, *The Gospel of John (Volume I)*, p. 139.

³ Barclay, *The Gospel of John (Volume I)*, p. 144.

⁴ Ogilvie, *The Commentator's Commentary (John)*, p. 96.

⁵ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible (Volume 8)*, p. 526.

⁶ Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible (Volume 5)*, p. 905.

(VII) - Sapphira

I. Scripture:

Acts 4: 32-36

5:1-12

II. Introduction: (Read 4:32-36)

A. Every year without fail the Christian Church celebrates a very important anniversary, the birth of the Christian Church. This took place 50 days following Jesus' return to heaven after His resurrection. At that time He sent His Holy Spirit to indwell the hearts of His disciples and all those who would come to believe in Him. That day is called *Pentecost*. As a result, Jesus' disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit Who gave them the ability to speak about Jesus with great power and conviction, and the Bible tells us that over 3,000 persons came to believe in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. Furthermore, Acts 2:47 tells us: "And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved." And by the time we read the 4th Chapter of Acts the 4th verse, we find that the number of believers had grown to 5,000.

B. These persons who believed in Jesus Christ in the early Church had a very special relationship. There were many who, moved out of love for Jesus Christ and His newly born Church, gave very freely of what they had so that all who believed regardless of their social status or background might have food to eat and be lovingly cared for.¹ The Scripture which we read together just a minute ago tells how these persons who believed in Jesus Christ lived and shared together. It says that they "owned everything in common." (vs. 32) and that...."there was not a needy person among them, for as many as owned lands or houses sold them and brought the proceeds of what was sold." (vs. 34)

1) Although there were many persons who did this, one person's

name is particularly lifted up in this passage of Scripture. Let's look at vs. 36-37 together once again. (vs. 36-37)

- 2) This man, and what he did, has a strong relationship to the story of Sapphira whom we will think about today. It is very obvious that what Barnabas did, and the attention which he received for what he did, had a great effect on all the person's in the early church. He was probably a very kind person, encouraging others by what he did for and with them. That is why they had given him the name of "Barnabas," "son of encouragement."² And the love he showed through what he did made a strong impression on the early believers. That is undoubtedly why Luke, the writer of Acts, recorded this incident.
- 3) And undoubtedly two of the person's who were particularly influenced by Barnabas's act of generosity, and the attention and admiration he received from many in the early Church for that, were the couple Ananias and Sapphira. That is the reason that I wanted us to read this section of Scripture because there is a strong relationship between what Barnabas did and what Sapphira and her husband did.³

III. Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-6)

- A. As in Japanese, Hebrew names have meaning. The name "Ananias" means "Yahweh(God) is gracious."⁴ And the name "Sapphira" means "beautiful," referring to both the external as well as the internal beauty.⁵ If both of them had lived up to their names, perhaps they might not have come to the disastrous end that they did, but that was not the case.
- B. Ananias and Sapphira appear to have had a close marital relationship. They considered together what they should do and they also acted together.⁶ Both of them made the decision to believe in Jesus Christ and to become a part of the new church and to share together with the other believers. But the continuing problem they had was in regards to what they had (their money) rather than what

they were (their characters, in relationship to God). What they had continued to be the most important thing in their lives although they wanted others to think otherwise.

C. We don't know whose idea it was first to sell their land and give it to the disciples to be used by the believers in their life together. However, it is very clear from the Bible passage that they had both agreed to sell the land which they owned and give the money they received to the disciples. They had also both agreed to give only part of the money to the disciples and to say it was the whole amount. Since the story about Barnabas and his generosity precedes the story of this couple, we can assume that they were very aware of what Barnabas had done. Furthermore, what they decided to do was based not on the selfless love and generosity which Barnabas had shown, but on a very different motive. Both of them wanted to receive praise and notoriety as Barnabas received for his gift. They wanted it to appear as though they were making a big sacrifice, giving all that they had, when in reality it was just a part. And in so doing they wanted to become well known and respected in the new Church just as Barnabas had become.

- 1) Their motive was, first of all, self-centered. They were making it seem like they were acting out of selfless love when actually they were doing this to receive the praise of the disciples and the other Church members.
- 2) Their motive was also based on jealousy of Barnabas. They wanted to receive the same notoriety which he had received. They were more concerned about pleasing people than they were about pleasing God. (Gal.1:10) So their actions were already mistaken because they were built on the wrong motives. What they were doing was for the wrong reason: self-centered love.
- 3) Both Sapphira and Ananais had seen many miracles in this new Church, and they saw that as it grew God provided for the needs of the members in a wonderful way. But they may have feared for the future. If they gave away all they had, and they needed money

for something, what would they do? It may seem to us at first glance that what they did was very wise, but in reality it shows a basic distrust of God's provision for them in the future...even though Ananai's name means "God is gracious." If they really believed that they would have known God would take care of their future as well as the present.

- 4) They also made the mistake of forgetting that the gift they were giving, although given to the disciples for all the believers, was a gift to God to be used for His Church. They did not look at their gift as a gift to God, so they probably felt they were just deceiving the disciples. They thought the disciples could be fooled, and they might have been, but they forgot that God knows all and sees all, that they could not deceive God. And, that God must punish all who try to deceive Him because He is a Holy God, a God of Truth.
- 5) (vs. 1-2) – Ananais discussed with Sapphira what he would do, and with her knowledge he sold the property and kept back some of the money. Sapphira had two opportunities to advise her husband to do the right thing.⁷ Even if she first agreed to the sale of the property, deciding to keep back some of the money, when the property was sold she could have advised her husband not to do what they had first talked about. She could have advised him to tell Peter that this money was a portion of what they had received and there would have been no problem. But for many reasons, she encouraged her husband to do wrong. One of the things we can learn here is the responsibility we have as couples to help one another, support one another, in doing the **right** things rather than the wrong. Even if Ananais was unable to see his mistake, Sapphira could have helped him. Instead, she chose to support him in the wrong way and in so doing caused his downfall. Sapphira had several chances to influence her husband to do the right thing, but she chose not to do so. As a result she lost her husband. Whether he died from natural causes or not we do not know, but

when Peter confronted him with his deceit, he died.

III. Sappira Gets Another Chance (Vrs. 8-11)

- A. Not more than three hours after her husband's death, Sapphira went to see Peter. She had not heard what had happened. It is at this point we see how fair Peter was in the way he treated her. He did not accuse her of holding back some of the money, but instead asked her if they indeed sold the land for a certain amount of money. Here she is given another chance to be honest before God, but she decided to continue the lie. This was the very same mistake which her husband had made.
- B. How hard it is to tell the truth once you have lied! Sapphira had the chance to do that, but she didn't take that opportunity, with fatal results! She too died on the spot just like her husband. Sapphira lost her husband, the money she tried to hold back, and her own life....all because she would not tell the truth. Sapphira and her husband were judged by the same standards. Neither of them could blame the other for their sin like Adam did Eve and Eve the snake. (Gen. 3:13) Sapphira had several chances to right the wrong that she and her husband had planned, but she didn't.
- C. The lesson which the early Church learned, and we can learn as well, is that each of us is held responsible for our moral choices. Each of us, too, must then face the consequences. Though there are many things which influence the choices which we make, those choices are ultimately our own. May God give us the strength to make the right ones.

¹ Barclay, *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 41.

² Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (A-D)*, p. 356.

³ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 215.

⁴ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (A-D)*, p. 124.

⁵ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (R-Z)*, p. 219.

⁶ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 222.

⁷ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book 2)*, p. 216.

(VIII) - Priscilla

I. Scripture:

- Acts 8:1-4; 18:18-20; 18:24-26
- Romans 16: 3-5
- I Corinthians 16:19
- II Timothy 4:19

II. Introduction:

A. The name "Priscilla" in Hebrew means "primitive," that is that which is "venerable" or "worthy," belonging to the good things of the past. It can also be written "Presca," which is the informal, familiar form of the same name¹. It is this name which Paul often uses when referring to Priscilla, as in II Timothy 4:19, and shows the close and special relationship which they had. This form of the name means "worthy," as something valued from an earlier era which is still of great value. Priscilla's name and her husband Aquila's name are Roman, and historians feel that Priscilla may have belonged to a distinguished Roman family². It is very interesting that every time Priscilla is mentioned her husband's name is mentioned as well. In some instances her name is mentioned first, in other instances his name is mentioned first. The fact that she is always mentioned with her husband tells us something about both of them, which I will talk about next. But the fact that her name is so prominent in a period in history when the society gave preference to men, and did not usually stress the role of women, makes Priscilla and what she did very important.

B. We do not know from the Bible record anything about Priscilla and her husband's background, nor how they met. We do know that they had lived in Pontus, a section of Rome. They are introduced as husband and wife and we can assume from that introduction that they had a very close relationship. We also know from the Bible

that when Paul met them in Italy they were there not of their own free will but because Claudius, the emperor of Rome, had demanded all Jews to leave Rome. This was due, basically, to the fact that a great deal of tension had arisen between the Jews living in Rome between those who believed in Jesus as the promised Jewish Messiah and those who did not. To eliminate that friction, Claudius banished all Jews from Rome, so Aquilas and Pricilla had come to Italy.³ Both were believers in the risen Christ as Savior and Lord and although the Bible doesn't tell us clearly, their reputation for their witness to Jesus must have followed them to Italy because Paul chose to live with them (probably on their invitation). He would not have made his home with them were they not strong Christians. And in addition to being strong Christians, they, like Paul, were also tent makers, making tent cloth by weaving goat hair and threads together to form the cloth.⁴ One observation that can be made here is that Priscilla and her husband did not let their move to Italy destroy their faith but took it as an opportunity from God as a new chance to share their faith.⁵ They trusted that God would lead them into a new work and this He did by bringing them together with Paul. As a result of their meeting Paul, both Pricilla and Aquila were able to grow in the Christian faith and as we will read went on to do a wonderful work for God. Had they not been cast out of Rome, they probably would never have had this kind of opportunity. So their bad experience, placed in God's hands, trusting in Him, worked out for their own personal growth in helping Paul and numerous others as well. The misfortune that Priscilla and her husband share became a blessing to Paul. They shared a common faith and a common occupation and no doubt being able to be in a home filled with love and faith was a wonderful comfort and strength to Paul as he tried to share the Christian faith.⁶ More often than not, he found opposition and misunderstanding to his message, so to have Priscilla and her husband to share his problems with, and to pray with, was undoubtedly a great encouragement and

strength to him. You have probably noticed by now that Priscilla and her husband lived in a place called Corinth, and that is where Paul met them. You see, their home became the center for not only Paul's tent making, but also his preaching. It was the church in their home which was the beginning for the church at Corinth to which Paul later wrote two letters to the Church of the Corinthians.⁷ So not only was Priscilla willing to have Paul in her home, but she was willing to open her home to others who believed in the Lord and this became the Corinthian Church.

III. Acts 18: 18:

A. The time has come for Paul to move on and you would expect that after having been driven from Rome and settling down in Corinth that Priscilla and Aquila would not want to move. But as we just read in the 18th chapter of Acts, when the apostle Paul sailed for Syria Priscilla and Aquila went with him.

You can see here that security, being in one place and having a quiet existence, is not the most important thing for these two! Commentators state that no doubt during the times of weaving the tent cloth, Priscilla and Paul talked about spiritual things, their faith, and undoubtedly it was not just a matter of Paul teaching Priscilla. Her faith and understanding of the way God works through his Son Jesus Christ undoubtedly had an affect on Paul. So when he left Corinth, he wanted his close friends in the faith to go with him to help him in the establishment of new churches. Whether or not Priscilla had had a formal theological education as Paul did before being converted, the Bible does not tell us. But it is obvious, as we will see shortly, that she had a deep understanding of the Gospel. This did not come about naturally but had to be obtained, requiring diligent study and prayer.

We can sense in this text that Priscilla was a women who trusted God's leading. She had most likely discovered from her experience in coming from Rome to the unknown town of Ephesus, Paul coming to

them, and the church starting in their home, that God will lead step by step if you trust him. So she once more stepped out in faith into the unknown. She trusted that God would continue to lead her and Aquila. And God did just that!

IV. Acts 18: 24-26:

Priscilla was not only a good student, but a good teacher.⁸ One is dependent on the other. She had allowed God to prepare her so that she could then pass on His truth to others. And God opened that opportunity for her. She had learned a great deal from the Scripture which she had read, and from Paul. So when the man "Apollos, a native of Alexandria," came to Ephesus, Pricilla and Aquila were quick in inviting him to the church in their home and sharing with him. He knew the Old Testament Scriptures well, and understood the gospel that John the Baptist had preached, but He did not know about the fullness of God in Christ. It was this that Priscilla taught him. The Bible says, "she taught him about Jesus accurately." She must have done this in a very humble, loving way or as a man in that culture and age he would not have listened to a women!

V. Acts 18:27-28:

What Pricilla shared with Apollos then became a blessing to many. If we are willing to share humbly and lovingly with another person the truths God has taught us, He will bless that person. But then God will work through that person to help others. This is what Jesus meant when He gave the parable about the leaven in the loaf. (Matthew 13:33) God's Word continues to work from one person to the next that all might come to know God's love! Pricilla was probably completely unaware of the influence her sharing would have, but that did not change the breadth of its scope.

III. Conclusion:

A. Romans 16:3-5. Paul never forgot the influence of this wonderful

Christian couple. When he wrote his Letter to the Romans, he shared how they had "risked their lives" for him. Apparently their influence on many Gentile churches had been very big, just like the leaven on the flour in the parable we just read. Priscilla didn't try to be great, to have this kind of influence, but it came to her naturally because she was humbly trying to follow Jesus.

B. I Corinthians 16: 19/ II Timothy 4:19.

Priscilla and Aquila sent their greetings along to others and Paul send his greetings to them. Their fellowship in the Lord must have been a great blessing to them both. Priscilla undoubtedly discovered, even though she apparently never had children, that through her service to Jesus Christ she had an ever-growing family, a family consisting of those whom God had given her to share her faith with and to love. (Matt. 19:29) And surely they loved her in return. The church in her home undoubtedly was a great blessing to many. Priscilla's example of a women dedicated to God's service and the effect one life can have has much to tell us in our century as well.

¹ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible (A-D)*, p. 176.

² Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 122.

³ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 245.

⁴ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 228.

⁵ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 227.

⁶ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book 2)*, p. 195.

⁷ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 246.

⁸ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 125.

(IX) - Phoebe

I. SCRIPTURE :

- Romans 16:1-2

II. Introduction:

- A. In short, almost unnoticed passages in the Bible, we frequently find mention of persons whose names are not familiar to us and whom we may have overlooked frequently when reading the Bible. Yet at the same time these persons are those whose service to Jesus Christ and to His Church have had a great affect not only on Church history, but on the Church's growth and development. One such person is the woman whose name appears in the 16th Chapter of Paul's Letter to the Romans: Phoebe. This letter which Paul wrote to the churches, more than any of his others, has had a profound affect on the thinking and theology of the Christian Church. In this letter, Paul points out clearly the sin of humankind and God's judgment of that sin, but also the salvation which God has planned for humankind to free us from sin. For this reason, his letter has had a profound affect on persons down through the ages. It was this letter which moved Martin Luther, the founder of the Protestant Reformation, to risk his life in protesting the wrongs which he saw within the Catholic church. It was Martin Luther's stance on faith in Jesus Christ's death on the cross as an atonement for our sins, and that "faith alone" is the source of our salvation, which gave birth to the Protestant Church.¹ It is from this branch of the Christian faith that Aoyama Gakuin was born. So this letter of Paul has had, and continues to have, far reaching effects on the hearts and thinking of many persons throughout the world.
- B. The Letter to the Romans was written in a very unsettled period of history. Had it been damaged or lost before Paul could get it into the hands of the Church in Rome it might never have been

included in our Bible.

It is at exactly this point that the life and service of this brave woman, Phoebe, comes to the forefront. Biblical scholars point out that it was Phoebe whom Paul chose to carry this precious letter to the Church in Rome.² Rome was the center of the Eastern world at that time and the expression "all roads lead to Rome" was not an exaggeration. So the fact that Paul wrote and sent **this** letter to the Roman Church, where it would then be dispersed to other parts of the world, was without mistake part of God's plan for His new Church.

Paul would undoubtedly have liked to deliver this letter himself as he had not previously visited this church, but he was unable to do that. So he sent Phoebe as his ambassador, as the one who would carry and deliver this letter. In a time in history when the position of women was definitely subservient to men, the fact that this woman was chosen for such an important task is in itself a testimony to her character and the estimate of her character in the eyes of Paul.

- 1) The name Phoebe, in the Hebrew language, means "pure or radiant as the moon."³ Paul's deep respect for her as a Christian can be seen in the brief introduction he gives us in the 16th Chapter of Romans. This indicates that she lived up to her name in many ways, that her life was a light which radiated the love and teachings of the Jesus Christ in whom she believed.
- 2) In the early Christian Church, the position which you held was not nearly as important as the life you lived.⁴ In fact, persons who were chosen for leadership positions in the early church were those who were noted for their service, those who put the Gospel which they believed and preached into concrete action. How you lived each day was far more important than the title you had.

II. Romans 16:1-2:

A. Many of the women in the Bible whom we have studied so far are

introduced in the context of a story which gives us some idea about who they are. But the information which we are given here by Paul about this woman called Phoebe is contained entirely in these two verses. But despite that, on the basis of Paul's succinct introduction, I believe there are several things which we can learn about Phoebe which can help us in our daily lives.

- 1) The date for Phoebe's trip to Rome and the writing of this letter has been placed by Biblical scholars between the years AD 53 and 58.⁵ It was a time in history when "few people were privileged to travel and most of the travelers were men."⁶ People still lived very isolated lives and it would be some time before that would change.
- 2) The Biblical account of Phoebe given us by Paul does not tell us how Phoebe came to be a Christian, but it does reveal without a doubt that she was a very dedicated, loving Christian. Paul refers to her as "our sister," which of course would mean "our sister in the faith." So she had a vital part in the family of Christ in the Church at Cenchrea. But this term "sister" also points to a mutual, spiritual relationship with Paul, a position of status.⁷ In a society in which the woman were placed far below men, Phoebe took her place in the family of God with grace and with a deep faith.
- 3) Paul refers to Phoebe as "a deacon of the church at Cenchreae..." The title "deacon" is used in some branches of the Protestant Church to refer to persons at an administrative level, but actually means "servant."⁸ The word in the Common Bible Translation which we are using picks up this meaning very clearly. As I mentioned earlier, how a person lived out their faith in the early Church was much more important than the position which they held. So when Paul speaks of Phoebe in this way he is paying her a high compliment.
- 4) In the later part of the 2nd verse, Paul points out how she has been a "servant." He tells us that "she has been a benefactor to

many and of myself as well." When Paul speaks of her as a "benefactor" he is referring to the fact that Phoebe has done a great deal to help those who were unprotected and despised, that she "had come to the help of converts in need, and that she had fought the battles of those who were oppressed."⁹ This has led some scholars to believe that Phoebe was a person who had considerable financial resources. Biblical scholars have also pointed out that unlike most women in her day, due to her wealth, she often traveled and that her trip to Rome was probably personally financed.¹⁰ And if indeed she did have considerable financial resources, we can assume that she used them for the benefit of others and her wealth did not make her pretentious and arrogant. Her style of life as a "servant" points to a woman who shared generously of not only what she had but of who she was. Apparently she had also personally cared for Paul himself as he preached in her area. She may even have cared for him at one time when he was ill.¹¹ It is also suggested that she, like Aquila, had opened up her home for Paul to use as a preaching place and a meeting place for Christians.¹² It would appear that Phoebe was unmarried, but she was not without a "family". Her service to those around her, as well as to Paul, undoubtedly gave her a purpose for living and a family of love which left little time for her to be lonely.

III. Conclusion:

- A. Phoebe lived in the harbor town for the province of Corinth, and in order to travel to Rome to deliver Paul's letter to the church there, she would have had to make a long and dangerous trip by land and then by sea. This points to Phoebe's courage which was most likely a product of her faith in God.
- B. She was also a woman who didn't wait around for something to do. She went about helping others, and on the basis of that service Paul **chose** her to give her the great responsibility of taking his

letter to Rome. She didn't ask for that responsibility, nor did she refuse it when it came. She lived each day by placing it in God's hands and then responded joyfully to whatever task he gave her.¹³ This is where Phoebe's real greatness lies. By serving God faithfully in small things in her daily life, she was called upon to serve him in larger ways. Her daily trust in God had prepared her for a task which required a great deal of trust. Thanks to Phoebe's obedience and willingness to serve God, we have Paul's Letter to the Romans in our Bible today!

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- ¹ Oglvie, *The Communicator's Bible (Romans)*, p. 11.
 - ² Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 230.
 - ³ Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 1005.
 - ⁴ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 231.
 - ⁵ Buttrick, *The Interpreter's Bible (Romans)*, p. 358.
 - ⁶ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book 2)*, p. 228.
 - ⁷ Karssen, *Her Name is Women (Book 2)*, p. 239.
 - ⁸ Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, p. 287-288., p. 497.
 - ⁹ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 231.
 - ¹⁰ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 231.
 - ¹¹ Price, *God Speaks to Women Today*, p. 185.
 - ¹² Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 497
 - ¹³ Price, *God Speaks to Women Today*, p. 186

(X) - DORCAS (Tabitha)

I. Scripture:

- Acts 9:36-43

II. Introduction:

- A. When we look carefully at the Bible accounts of Jesus' life, we can see very clearly that there are many woman among those who were called his "disciples," His followers who followed him even to the cross when many of the men fled for their lives. (Luke 23:49)
- B. At Pentecost, when the Holy Spirit came upon the disciples and empowered them to minister as the new "body of Christ," there were women kneeling in prayer who rose in the Spirit's power to go out and continue to serve Jesus. (Acts 1:14) They did this with their words, through their testimonies of what Jesus had done in their lives. They also used the abilities which God had given them to express Jesus' love in very concrete ways, through meeting the needs of the poor, the lonely, the imprisoned.¹ In the Christian faith, it is this concrete expression of faith which shows that one's faith in Jesus is not merely an ideology or a philosophy. It is a mistake to think of faith only in terms of one's private fellowship with God, gaining blessings from Him for yourself. It is sharing those blessings with others which shows that that faith is the "real thing." (James 2:17) Jesus stressed again and again that love is seen in practical terms, that "love" is an action word. In the lives of the women whom we have studied so far we can see this expression of their faith and it is this aspect which we can see so very clearly in the life of this woman, Dorcas.

The name "Dorcas" was the Greek equivalent of the Hebrew name, "Tabitha," the name of the mother of Joash, an Old Testament King.² She was probably referred to as Dorcas by the residents of Joppa as the port city of Joppa had many foreigners living there,

many of whom spoke Greek.³ The name "Tabitha" has the meaning of "gazelle," and conjures up a picture of a beautiful creature.⁴ We will see as we progress in our study of Tabitha that her character, the loving and caring spirit which caused her to help so many, reveals that she lived up to the name she was given. We can say without any hesitation that she had a beautiful character.

III. Acts 9 :36

- A. The first thing which we learn about Dorcas is that she lived in Joppa. Joppa was a busy seaport about thirty-four miles northwest of Jerusalem and as such "became an important Christian center during the years when the new faith was spreading from Jerusalem across the Mediterranean."⁵ Since it was a harbor town, there were undoubtedly many in the town who were fisherman. At that period, as always, this can be a very dangerous occupation and it is even today on the Mediterranean Sea. Historians have recorded that frequently fishing vessels were destroyed in storms at sea and the bodies of fishermen were often washed ashore in Joppa.⁶ For this reason, there would be many woman who had suddenly been made widows, sometimes left with the support of small children as well. In a society where the men were the ones who brought in the income to support the family, and there was no social welfare, this would be a drastic situation.⁷ Such widows and their children would be forced into immediate poverty. It was probably for these widows and their children, as well as for the aged and the homeless that Dorcas chose to use her sewing skills to provide them with clothing.
- B. We also learn from the Bible that Dorcas was a "disciple." As we study the Bible, we discover that there were very few women who were mentioned in just this way. To be a "disciple" in this case is to have chosen Jesus Christ as Lord, to have chosen to follow him, to try your best in God's strength to follow His teachings and attempt to follow His example in your daily life. It was undoubtedly this dedication which was the unseen power in Dorcas' life. As a disciple of One who gave His time and very life's blood for those

He loved, she would be eager to help others in need in whatever way she could. Through such she could serve her Lord Jesus. (Matt. 25: 31-40) She didn't just **desire** to help those in need, she actually **did** help. Luke, the writer of Acts, is very clear about this when he tells us "...she was always doing good and helping the poor." (vrs. 36) There are several things which we can surmise from these words. First of all, she had a very positive nature. So often when something needs to be done, we hear people say: "I can only do this," stressing that the talent they have or the contribution which they can make is very insignificant, so it would be better if they didn't try. But Dorcas' attitude was one which seemed to say: "There may be some things which I cannot do, but **I can** do this"....and so she took her needle and thread and set about doing something! Secondly, she didn't compare herself to others, for example, with those who had a gift of leadership, and because she didn't have that same gift remain inactive. No, she did what she could and in doing so was able to help the people around her. And in doing things for others, Dorcas was also doing something for herself. As she kept herself busy with sewing many garments for the poor, she kept herself busy so she had no time for self-pity, or being envious of others, or worrying about what she couldn't do.⁸ Furthermore, Dorcas was a very wise and observant woman who saw the needs around her where she was and attempted to do something to meet those needs. She found her place in Joppa. She didn't spend her time wondering where she might use the gifts she had, but realized God had already given her a place of service.

C. Nowhere in this account do we read about Dorcas being married or having a family. Following her death, those who mourned for her were those who had been the recipients of her gifts of love and not those related to her by blood. You could say that in many ways Dorcas was a woman "ahead of her times."⁹ In that period of time, to be married and to have children was considered the socially acceptable thing and the way for a woman to be fulfilled. But we can imply from this account that Dorcas experienced fulfillment while

working on her own (outside of marriage) which was unique for the time in which she lived. Rather than complain or grieve over her situation in life, she used the skill which she had to make the best of things and in the process was able to help many others in their struggles.

IV. Acts 9: 37-39

A. But this woman who had done so many wonderful things for so many was suddenly gone. The Bible merely tells us that "...she became sick and died." Fortunately, there were other disciples there who had heard of Peter and the power of healing others physically which God had given him. In fact, this section of Acts, starting from verse 32, tells about Peter's visit to Lydda, not too far from Joppa, where he was when Dorcas died. There he had healed a paralytic man who had been bed ridden for 8 years. This was only one incident of many and the news of God's healing others through Peter had gone obviously before him. So they sent for Peter and he came at once.

B. When he arrived in Joppa, he was taken to the upper room where Dorcas' body had been washed and placed. Peter encountered many who were in deep grief as they had lost a close friend. Those there were quick to show Peter all the many things Dorcas had made for them. As I read this passage, I realized for the first time that the persons gathered around Peter and showing him these clothes were not grieving because they had lost the source of receiving free clothes. These clothes were just a symbol of Dorcas' love, her concern for them. And that love, that concern shown in such concrete form, had undoubtedly become a a great encouragement to them. The clothing was a symbol that someone cared for them, that someone loved them. The neatly sewn garments had given them **hope** and this was the best gift of all. But the one who had given them so much was gone!

V. Acts 9:40-43

A. Peter sent them out of the room, and after prayer, addressed Dorcas by her Hebrew name of Tabitha, commanding her to arise. And she did! Peter led her to her friends, who were undoubtedly overjoyed. And the Biblical account tells us that the news of Dorcas' healing "became known over all Joppa and many believed in the Lord." (vrs. 42) As God had used Dorcas' sewing skills to help many, He used Dorcas' death and then the miraculous news of her being brought back to life to help many more. When in verse 43 we are told "...Peter stayed in Joppa for some time..." it was undoubtedly to help others understand about this Jesus who had brought new life to Dorcas.¹⁰ So her ministry went on. Her influence continues to touch the lives of many through a worldwide society named in Dorcas' honor, "the Dorcas Society." This society has helped millions of people through the love-filled sewing of countless dedicated women who make clothes for the needy as well as care for them.¹¹

B. Dorcas' life is a testimony to the influence of one woman who placed her life in God's hands. She was a woman who saw what needed to be done and did it, a woman who put her love into action. The same thing can happen today in each of your lives if you are willing to trust God's leading and use the gifts He has given each one of you.

¹ Price, *God Speaks to Women of Today*, p. 171.

² Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 46.

³ Lockyer, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 46

⁴ Buttrick, *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, p. 864.

⁵ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 218.

⁶ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book 1)*, p. 183.

⁷ Karssen, *Her Name Is Woman (Book 1)*, p. 183.

⁸ Velde, *Women of the Bible*, p. 229.

⁹ Karssen, *Her Name Is Women (Book 1)*, p. 183.

¹⁰ Henry, *A Commentary on the Whole Bible*, p. 123.

¹¹ Deen, *All the Women of the Bible*, p. 219.

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