



# Strong Women of the Bible

Who Broke  
the Status  
Quo  
and Won  
GOD's  
Favor

Rosanne  
Ferreri

.....

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen:  
to loosen the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke,  
to set the oppressed free and break every yoke?  
Is it not to share your food with the hungry  
and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter—  
when you see the naked, to clothe him,  
and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"*

*(Isaiah 58:6-7)*

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This book was written to empower women  
to throw down the gauntlet and challenge,  
as the women in the OT an NT dared to do...  
the societal and political values being promulgated worldwide,  
refuting the second-class mindset held about women and children,  
....to bring about peace on earth, not just in the hereafter.

# Table of Contents

*The New Jerusalem Bible is quoted primarily throughout this book. When I defer to the wording in the KJV or the New International Version, I have advised the reader. All quoted references can be located in the endnotes.*

Introduction.....2

## ***The Old Testament***

The Bare Essentials to Frame the OT .....7

Old Testament Society .....11

Mother Binah and Daughter of Shekinah .....19

Baat-kol, Daughter of the Voice .....24

Eve .....26

Mystical Judaism .....30

Chakras .....31

Tree of Life .....32

Sarah and Hagar, Rebekah, Rachel and Leah .....35

Tamar .....38

Puah and Shiprah, Bithiah, Jochebed, Miriam and Zipporah .....40

Rahab .....44

The Daughters of Zelophad and Achsah.....45

Deborah.....46

Jael .....49

Delilah.....50

Ruth and Naomi .....52

Hannah .....	54
Michal, Bathsheba and Abigail.....	57
Huldah.....	59
Judith.....	60
Vashti .....	62
Esther .....	63
Proverbs Noble Woman.....	65
Queen of Sheba.....	67
Susanna .....	68
Victim Stories: Warnings to Society.....	71
Social Justice Was Always Required (Old Testament) .....	73
Social Justice Was Always Required (New Testament).....	75

***The New Testament***

Estimated Chronology for the Life and Ministry of Jesus.....	79
Jesus Family Tree (Paternal).....	81
Jesus Family Tree (Maternal) .....	82
Anna, Mary (Mother of Jesus), Mary Clopas, Mary Salome and Elizabeth.....	83
The Gifts of Mary .....	85
Aristotle vs. Christ: A Radical Shift in Thinking .....	87
Jesus Preaches the Good News to Outcasts .....	88
Mary Magdalene/Miramne, Martha and Lazarus: Siblings .....	104
Mary Salome.....	108
Mary “of Clopas” .....	109
Gender Equality, as Jesus Taught It.....	110

Sheep in Another Fold .....	123
Beatrice (aka Veronica) and the Via Dolorosa .....	124
Jesus said on the cross, Psalm 22.....	125
Abba (Father) or AB-BA (Father Mother)?.....	126
The Ten Commandments, Interpreted Esoterically .....	127
The Order of Virgins, Widows and Deaconesses .....	128
The Women of Acts .....	133
The Women of Romans .....	139
The Women of Corinthians.....	140
The Women of Philippians .....	141
The Women of Colossians .....	142
The Women of First Timothy: Widows.....	143
The Women of Second Timothy.....	144
The British-Roman Connection .....	145
The Women of Titus, Who Wrote Hebrews? The women of Second John.....	147
The Wife of Peter.....	149
The Wife of Paul.....	150
Hidden Women, Hidden Purpose .....	151
James and Mary, Peter and Paul: Internal Power Struggles .....	154
Sexist Passages When Properly Read Reveal a Call to Egalitarianism .....	155
Heal the Sinner but Do Not Condone the Behavior .....	157
We Have a God That Sees Women.....	159
Women Who Carried the Torch (110 AD-present) .....	162
Endnotes.....	169
Resources .....	176

PLAY: In the Temple of Lectures .....	177
POETRY: Women of the Bible .....	199
APPENDIX: Artwork .....	220
The Jesus Family Tomb .....	230
About the Author: Publicist USA.....	232



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*Jesus said:*

*"Let one who seeks not stop seeking until that person finds;*

*and upon finding, the person will be disturbed;*

*and being disturbed, will be astounded;*

*and will reign over the entirety."*

*(Gospel of Thomas)*

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## INTRODUCTION

From the day we are born, we are taught to fit into our culture and its worldview. That worldview teaches us what is of value and what is not, who is strong and who is weak, and who is to lead and who is to follow. We have a choice each day to accept a worldview that is defined for us and blend in, or to remember that we are made in the image of God and behave like it. Our feet cannot be in both camps simultaneously. We cannot value having more than our neighbor—which is what status and affluence are all about—and yet walk a godly walk, which considers every person equally important in the sight of God.

The worldview of our society is undeniably patriarchal; it is obsessed with status—constantly striving to get something ahead of, or instead of, another person. Patriarchy only thrives when single women, married women, children and widows are overlooked. But, as the French saint, Joan of Arc, stated in 1431 AD, *it is to God that we owe ultimate allegiance not to male rulers or man-made institutions*. Teaching women to obey men is worldly; it is cultural; it is not based on scripture, as I will show you. Patriarchy is an emperor with no clothes. Churches have but three roles to play in our lives: to proclaim freedom from political tyrants, to proclaim freedom from religious depots (and direct reliance on God), and to be activists for social justice. All institutions, including churches, need to become superior conduits to those in need; the volume of money collected every Sunday is more than sufficient to meet the needs of those in desperate circumstances. “Create edifices of marble and gold and send the people to beg from social service agencies” was never one of Jesus parables! Jesus turned cultural biases against women, children and widows upside down; he confronted those seated in positions of power in the temple whose gluttony was responsible for a widow’s poverty.

In order for this world to be repaired, gender equality has to become the defined goal. “Neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, *male nor female*, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” has

to be linked to “He is the way, the truth and the life.” You cannot be a misogynist and a follower of the way. In addition, we need to do away with the terms “poor” and “rich,” “disabled” and “fit,” “blue collar” and “white collar,” “middle class” and “upper class,” along with “laity” and “priest.” Imagine a world without these artificial divisions... It should be clear that all man-made institutions cause separation which leads to competition, a false feeling of superiority, enmity and, sooner or later, violence. Jesus attacked the predominant worldview of his time, a fight that continues to this day; he sought to break down cultural traditions that interfered with a person’s ability to walk in another’s shoes and feel empathy. We have to face the fact that patriarchy is one of the inherited worldviews that Jesus specifically came to upset and overturn; he was ostracized by other rabbis for doing so and he *did it anyway*, often risking his life so women would not be harmed.

*By confining the Bible to the “authorized canon,” men have ensured that women’s stories that rock the status quo never get heard.* It is imperative that we look at the redacted books because that is where we resurrect women’s names. They aren’t just “the wife of” in the banned books; women have an identity. There is no reasonable justification for elevating the stories of male leaders and willfully omitting, redacting and outright burying those about women. You will have to forgive my pointing out these facts, but Old Testament male leaders often fell far short of leading exemplary lives! Abraham subjected Sarai to potential adultery not once, but twice; Jacob sent his wives and children out in front as a human shield when he visited Esau. Moses completely forgot the holy commandment to circumcise the son he fathered with Zipporah. Aaron allowed the Hebrews to make a golden calf to worship while Moses was on Mount Sinai receiving the commandments for daily life; Joseph forced the masses into slavery by absorbing their land and property during a seven-year famine; Samson repeatedly broke his Nazirite vow;

Saul was ultimately rejected by YHVH. David committed adultery with Bathsheba and sent her husband to the front lines of battle to be killed. Solomon collected thousands of wives; God told Job to brace himself [i.e. man up]. The men of the New Testament, unfortunately, do not fare better. Peter denied Jesus three times; Thomas doubted until he put his hands in Jesus' side; the sons of Zebedee demanded seats of honor; Judas betrayed his leader with a kiss meant for friendship; none of the men stayed awake in the Garden of Gethsemane, as requested. No men stood at the foot of the cross and suffered with Jesus. The male disciples were constantly rebuked for lack of faith, lack of understanding, and lack of courage.

On the other hand, there is a steady image that begins in the Old Testament and endures through the New Testament, which demonstrates what a true disciple looks like and that image has a remarkable *feminine* face. We need to spend more time focused on those who said, "I am willing" *and truly meant it* than those who said it with their lips and ran away. Jesus promised that the truth would be liberating and lead humanity out of the darkness of ignorance. The time has arrived for women to say to their religious leaders without equivocation:

"If you continue to redact the Bible, I will leave your midst, taking with me my family, my time, my money, my energy and my unique talents. I was set free by Jesus, and I refuse to be shackled again."

There can be no doubt that the Bible is a *subversive book* about a radically inclusive plan to destroy all inherited worldviews and overturn the balance of power. Those who actually read the Bible (and are not passive recipients of information from the pulpit) discover a heretical message that does not line up with the "authorized views." The only thing we really have to fear are modern-day Pharisees who want to keep people dependent and blindly obedient. They will defend the indefensible—racism and sexism—to the bitter end. As we saw with the Civil Rights

Movement, you can't always change the heart of your oppressor, but you can certainly create laws to curb his intolerant actions. Creating a dominion-free world is *hard work* and requires activism, for the manner in which this particular religious book is interpreted and taught to the masses effects how women and children are treated all over the globe. Nobody, even an atheist or agnostic, is immune from the Bible's impact since the call to "spread the good news" has become synonymous with public policy making and foreign "nationbuilding." Women must learn how to defend themselves using the Bible against those who would torque the Bible to oppress them. The chauvinistic/misogynistic view that women are chattel and breeders is indefensible. Women who followed God's laws and disobeyed political and religious leaders leap from each of the books of the Bible, carrying the torch of truth from Genesis through Acts into the present day, shining light into dark places where abuses of every type reside. These women are my heroes and mentors. Without the many Puah's and Shiprah's in the Old and New Testament, you *would not have much of a plot*; the annihilation of the Hebrew people at the call of Pharoah would have made the Bible sixty-five pages long. The Hebrew people were repeatedly saved due to quick-thinking, spirited *godly women* who broke man-made rules!

Set aside everything you've been told about what is in the Bible; forget the culture in which you live and your preconceived notions about what is "normal" or "natural." Look at this story again with fresh eyes, for there is more that has been omitted than has been told. Women and men are *equally equipped* with souls that respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. We must awaken to the real "women's work" that is begging to be done, which is to behave as children of light and shine a spotlight into dark places all over the world that have taken *mammon as their master*. As 1 Corinthians 3:16 states, "Do you not realize that *you are a temple of God* with the *Spirit of God* living in you" destined to do *as Jesus did, and more?* It is true!

## The Old Testament

## *The Bare Essentials to Frame the OT*

In approximately 1850 BC, Sarai and Abraham became the first leaders of the Hebrew people and espoused the idea of “one God.” The Cave of the Patriarchs, located in the ancient city of Hebron on the West Bank, is venerated and visited by 21<sup>st</sup> century Jews, Muslims and Christians; it testifies to the existence of Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, Jacob and Leah. The mother of Abraham, according to the *Babylonian Talmud Baba Bathra, Chapter 5* was named Amthlai, daughter of Khrubu, and Abraham’s father was Terah. Terah had a second wife (or a concubine) who gave birth to Sarah. This first society was matriarchal with women naming their children, the family line traced through the mother’s line, and “bride-service” required of all prospective grooms. There were “kinsman groups” headed by the great matriarchs named above until the time of David, when the people clamored for a “state” and a “king,” engaging in wars to create a workforce of slaves and concubines. Israel was named for Sarah, which the Hebrew people wrote as “S R.”

1677 BC: A wife was found for Sarai and Abraham’s son, Isaac, and her name was Rebekah; Laban was Rebekah’s brother. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons: Jacob and Esau.

[The argument over birthright was the start of a cultural war between female and male leadership. The story of Jacob with Laban’s cattle shows a lack of understanding about genetics.]

Abraham’s brother, Lot, had two daughters named Paltith and Ado, with his wife, Ildeth (Book of Jasher 19:24, 19:52).

1569 BC: Jacob married the two daughters of Laban, Rachel and Leah, after 14 years of labor.

Joseph, Rachel’s favorite son, married Asenath, daughter of an Egyptian priest.

1532 BC: During a time of famine, Joseph led the people into servitude to Pharaoh, acquiring all of their property and valuables, in exchange for food.

1393 BC: Moses, future leader of the Hebrew people, was born.

1280 BC: Ten plagues were called upon Egypt and Moses cried repeatedly, “Let my people go!”

[Seventy families escaped led by Miriam, Moses and Abraham. The Israelites wandered for forty years in the desert with the Arc of the Covenant, the Ten Commandments, and the Holy Spirit (Shekinah) as their guide. They were “Hap-Piru”, people, meaning “people who have renouncing king and city” This name “Habriru” became “Hebrew.” Each clan had its own household gods and they said that poor people and non-citizens mattered. Israel was founded on a radical rejection of the established political authority and established worship of the king as God by the Egyptians. ]

1156 BC: Deborah rallied the northern tribes to war and Jael killed their enemy—Sisera.

1120 BC: Widows, like Ruth and Naomi, gleaned the corner of fields for food to keep alive.

1090 BC: Delilah removed the town’s Goliath—Samson—who proved a false Nazirite.

1047 BC: Hannah’s child, Samuel, led the people as a judge, priest and prophet.

[The overthrow of matriarchy occurred when the Hebrew men demanded a “king” and codified laws. Women were made into commercial transactions and sexual objects. Men sold their daughters and sons into slavery to pay off their debts and “redeem” them when financially solvent. Worship of the female principal became fear of the female principal, then domination of the female principal, then false belief in male superiority, in that order. It is in Sumer [Egypt] that prostitution was developed by PRIESTS, who prostituted female captives to bring in men with money to the temple.]

1026 BC: The Hebrew’s 1<sup>st</sup> king, Saul, reigned using violence, until he was replaced by David.

1004 BC: The Hebrew’s 2<sup>nd</sup> king, David, focused on poetry, astronomy, and enlarging his harem.

965 BC: The Hebrew’s 3<sup>rd</sup> King, Solomon, built a temple that symbolizes how to unite with God. He bankrupted the kingdom while building this temple, large palaces for his 700 wives and 300 concubines, and stables for his 4,000 horses.

865 BC: Prophet Elijah, the “Thunderer,” preached powerfully against the worship of Ba’al.

800 BC: Prophet Jonah (whose name means dove) spent three days in the belly of a whale.

755 BC: Prophet Amos confronted wealthy men and women on issues of social justice.

750 BC: Prophet Hosea confronted faithlessness and those following false religions.

735 BC: Prophet Micah scourged avaricious priests.

734 BC: Prophet Isaiah insisted upon justice and sincerity in worship.



689 BC: Child sacrifice took place in the Jewish temple under King Manasseh.

639 BC: Prophet Zephaniah predicted a coming Day of the Lord, a final judgment day.

626 BC: Prophet Habakkuk confronted the question of how evil pervades the world.

621 BC: Prophetess Huldah analyzed the Lost Book of the Bible—Deuteronomy.

612 BC: Prophet Nahum wrote about the end of the Assyrian Empire and its capital, Nineveh.

609 BC: Jewish independence was lost for 400 years.

605 BC: Prophet Jeremiah predicted the destruction of the temple.

593 BC: Prophet Ezekiel confronted those with lukewarm faith.

586 BC: Nebuchadnezzar burned down Solomon's temple and exiled Jews. During the exile in Babylon, Jews developed a non-sacrificial form of worship requiring only a meeting place [synagogue].

586 BC: Prophet Obadiah predicted the restoration of the exiles.

585 BC: Lamentations, one of the five major scrolls read on feast days, was composed.

550 BC: The Pentateuch was compiled: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy.

538 BC: King Cyrus allowed the exiled Jews to return.

530BC: Prophet Daniel spoke of a forthcoming persecution under Antiochus.

520 BC: Prophet Haggai spoke of restoration of the temple to come.

520 BC: Prophet Zechariah rebuked the people for turning from God.

515 BC: The rebuilding of the temple was commenced.

480 BC: Queen Vashti adamantly refused to be treated like a sex object and did not come when called.

474 BC: Haman planned to annihilate the Jews, but Queen Esther saved her people.

432 BC: Prophet Malachi spoke of the failures of priests and the people in their religious duties.

394 BC: Aristotle was born [along with his theory of male superiority].

375 BC: Aramaic replaced Hebrew as the language of the Jews.

350 BC: Prophet Joel spoke of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon women and their daughters.

250 BC: The Pentateuch was translated into Greek and was called the Septuagint, Latin for the 70 translators who worked on it.

180 BC: Joshua Ben Sira wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes.

175 BC: Jason was made high priest.

167 BC: Antiochus IV banned obedience to Jewish laws and tortured Maccabees who resisted.

142 BC: Simon was made high priest: the Essenes separated from Simon and founded a monastery at Qumran; those that continued to follow Simon were called Pharisees.

120 BC: The Book of Judith was compiled.

94-88 BC: The Pharisees led a six-year civil war; fifty thousand people were killed; eight hundred Jews were crucified.

72 BC: Herod the Great was born.

50 BC: The Song of Solomon was compiled by the Pharisees.

37 BC: Herod the Great was made governor of Galilee.

20 BC: Herod the Great created the temple in Jerusalem...and an amphitheatre to honor Caesar.

## OLD TESTAMENT SOCIETY

Early Hebrews held fast to the belief that there existed but one God whose name could be symbolized in a four lettered tetragrammaton—YHVH. God was not considered to be a trinity of men. God was believed to be an Elohim—a quaternity in which we have a Y, which stands for Yod, the Father; an H, which stands for Heh, the Mother; a V, which stands for Vav, the Son; and another H, which stands for heh, the daughter and bride of the Son. This concept is laid out in the Jewish mystical book called the *Zohar*.<sup>1</sup> The early Hebrews renounced the belief system of the Greeks with multiple gods and goddesses, and that of Molech which required child sacrifice, but they did recognize [on and off] the existence of Asherah, *wife of God*. Prophets, priests and prophetesses functioned to keep the people from worshipping inanimate objects and following amoral practices, such as the extension of daughters for the purposes of “sexual hospitality” to guests. For the most part, the Hebrew people were able to avoid pantheism and Molech, but the paradigm of opposition between a God that was solely male and a Creator that was both masculine in nature (holding the world in place) and feminine (an activator) lasted centuries... *and has perhaps never ended*. We do know that women wove tent weavings for the Asherah as late into the Bible as 2 Kings 23:7, so those that heavily edited the Bible did not remove her completely! When they traveled in the desert, the Hebrews worshipped in a tent called a tabernacle and the Holy Spirit (a feminine force called Shekinah) moved with them in a cloud hovering over the Arc of the Covenant, which was a vessel containing the tablets of stone on which the Ten Commandments were inscribed, along with Aaron's rod and manna. When they settled in the “land of milk and honey” they named Canaan, they built a physical temple to house the Arc of the Covenant. *[Reader, all footnotes have been published as endnotes at the back of the book. The New Jerusalem Bible is quoted whenever scriptures are referenced, unless I've specifically noted otherwise.]*

From the twelve tribes of Israel, the tribe of Levi was chosen to be priests to intercede on behalf of the people to eradicate their sins by making grain and animal offerings on an altar to create an “aroma pleasing to God.” Laws were determined, covering every aspect of human life, which were eventually compiled into Leviticus. Women played a vital role as prophetesses, judges, musicians, artisans, bearers of the family line, midwives and healers. God blessed them saying:

“If you live according to my laws, if you keep my commandments and put them into practice, I shall give you the rain you need at the right time; the soil will yield its produce and the trees of the countryside their fruit; you will thresh until vintage time and gather grapes until sowing time. You will eat your fill of bread and live secure in your land” (Leviticus 26:3-5).

The Hebrews subsisted primarily by farming; their tents were made of goats’ hair and their homes were made of stone or mud bricks. In ancient Israel the harvest season extended from April through November. In April they harvested barley, peas, chickpeas, lentils and vetch; in May, wheat and oats. June was the time for trees and vines to be maintained so grapes, almonds, dates, pomegranates and figs could be collected from August through September. Olives were harvested September through November. Sheep and goats provided milk and hair for coarse cloth; goat skins were used for containers for liquids, like wine and water. Meat was considered a luxury; eggs, cheese, goat meat and mutton were a part of their daily diet; herbs were used to season food, and honey was their main form of sweetener. The harvest seasons could be divided in three: spring brought the grain harvest; summer brought the grape harvest, and fall brought the olive harvest. Festivals were organized around these three seasons. The first fruit of grains would in all likelihood have been barley, since wheat ripens a month later.

Women were “needleworkers in violet purple, red purple and crimson linens” and made coats and other family clothes (Exodus 35:26, 1 Samuel 2:19; Proverbs 31:24). Craftsmen, such as blacksmiths, potters, carpenters, stonemasons and tentmakers, set up shop under tents. They cared for one another and believed in sharing; everything they owned was considered a temporary gift from God, especially their land. Leviticus also outlined rules that pertained to the redemption of land (Leviticus 25:23): “Land will not be sold absolutely, for the land belongs to me, and you are only strangers and guests of mine.” Every fifty years, property reverted back to whoever originally owned it. *The people were told not to ever get too attached to their property. They were also told not to ever get too attached to money:* “If your brother becomes impoverished and cannot support himself in the community, you will assist him as you would a stranger or guest, so that he can go on living with you. Do not charge him interest on a loan, but fear your God, and let your brother live with you. You will not lend him money on interest or give him food to make a profit of it.” They were to do this because they were once foreigners in a foreign land and were recipients of God’s mercy in Egypt (Leviticus 25:35-38). We can learn much about the role of women in Hebrew society, directly from scriptures:

- The early priests were undeniably married: Aaron had a wife named Elisheba who bore him four children: Nadab and Abihu, Eleazar and Ithamar (Exodus 6:23); Isaiah’s wife was a prophetess (Isaiah 8:3) who gave him a child. In addition, Zechariah was married to Elizabeth, who gave birth to John, the Baptist (Luke 1:5-25).
- Women were allowed to rest on the Sabbath with their family (Exodus 20:10).
- Mothers were to be honored at the same level as fathers (Exodus 20:12).
- Any child that did violence against his mother was put to death (Exodus 21:15-17).
- Women contributed to the wave offering with brooches, earrings, and ornaments (Exodus

35:22-23). The wave offering was a peace offering, one of the first-fruits of the harvest; it was named for the sheaves of barley that were waved before being given to the priests.

- Women brought freewill offerings to God (Exodus 35:29).
- Women served at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting (Exodus 38:8).
- The wife, daughters and sons of the high priest ate the sacrificial food (Leviticus 10:14).
- Women were given more time with their baby, if it was a girl than a boy (Leviticus 12:1-5).
- Women were not to be degraded and made into prostitutes (Leviticus 19:29).
- If a man committed adultery with another man's wife, both were put to death, not just the woman (Leviticus 20:10-12).
- Women who sold themselves into slavery could "redeem" themselves [buy back their freedom] at a lower cost than men (Leviticus 27:4).
- Those with infectious diseases—male and female—were treated the same, separated from the camp until healed (Numbers 5:1-3).
- Both men and women could take a Nazirite vow, renouncing all fermented drinks and not cutting their hair as an outward symbol of dedication (Numbers 6:2).
- The priest shared the wave offerings with his daughters, sons and wife by "perpetual decree" (Numbers 18:11, 18:19).
- If a man died and had no sons, his inheritance could go to his daughter. If he did not have a son or daughter it went to his brother. *This means daughters had higher priority than brothers* (Numbers 27:8-9).
- Young girls could make vows to the Lord, as could older women and widows (Numbers 30:4).
- Women were protected from holding to their vows if they were young (Numbers 30:4-6).
- Both husbands and wives traveled to feasts and ate in the presence of the Lord

(Deuteronomy 12:12, 12:18, 16:11, 16:14).

- Women and men alike could sell themselves for a period of six years, but in the seventh year they were to be set free (Deuteronomy 15:12-13).
- Women who were taken captive during war, could not be sold or treated like slaves; they could only become wives (Deuteronomy 21:11). If a man changed his mind, he had to set her free.
- If a son did not obey his mother and father, both the mother and father were to appear before the elders of the gate to testify to his dishonor (Deuteronomy 21:18). In this instance a woman's testimony was required (and therefore it was certainly considered *credible by law*).
- A man could not make up lies and claim a woman was unfaithful just so he could divorce her...and become a philanderer (Deuteronomy 22:13-19).
- Women and men were prohibited from being "shrine prostitutes" (Deuteronomy 23:18).
- A woman who was recently married was *entitled* to the "joy of one year" with her husband before he could be enlisted for war (Deuteronomy 24:5).
- Widows had to be allowed to glean the fields for food (Deuteronomy 24:17-19) and hold on to their cloak and other property.
- Women were able to humiliate men publicly at the city gate when they refused to abide by the Levirate law and provide an heir to their husband's estate [see following section on Levirate Law] (Deuteronomy 25:5-10).
- Women, men and children were to appear at the Feast of Tabernacles to hear the official reading of the law (Deuteronomy 31:10-13).
- If a father, like Caleb, wanted to leave his inheritance to his daughter(s), he could do so

(Joshua 15:19). Job made his three daughters equal heirs with his seven sons (Job 42:15):

“Throughout the land, there were no women as beautiful as the daughters of Job, and their father gave them inheritance rights like their brothers.”

- The “law of thy mother” pays tribute to her teaching and authority (Proverbs 1:8, 6:20).

### The Arc of the Covenant



### The Ten Commandments

- #1. You shall have no other gods to rival YHVH.
- #2. You shall not make for yourself any carved image of YHVH and bow down to it.
- #3. You shall not misuse the name of YHVH, your God.
- #4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.
- #5. Honor your father and mother.
- #6. You shall not kill.
- #7. You shall not commit adultery.
- #8. You shall not steal.
- #9. You shall not give false evidence against your neighbor.
- #10. You shall not set your heart on your neighbor’s wife, servants, animals or possessions.

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**The Levirate Law (Deut. 25:5-10):** “If brothers live together and one of them dies leaving his widow childless, the dead man’s wife must not marry a stranger outside the family [and give away his property to another tribe]. Her husband’s brother must come to her and, exercising his duty as brother, make her his wife, and the first son she bears must assume the dead brother’s name; by this means his name will not be obliterated from Israel.” A kinsman that refused to follow the Levirate law could be “unsandaled” in a legal shoe-removing ritual known as halitzaha; the widow shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull the shoe off his foot, spit in his face, and make this declaration: ‘Thus shall be done to the man who will not build up his brother's house!’”

**Rights of a First-born:** These rights included the birthright and the blessing. The birthright pertained to the physical property left to the son or daughter. The blessing was the transfer of leadership for the family. A first-born from the tribe of Levi worked as a priest. The birthright son could redeem/restore land lost to another party, buy family members out of slavery, buy and sell flocks, assist siblings by providing food, clothing and shelter, and take care of widows and unmarried girls; he was given a double portion of the father’s inheritance to fulfill this important role; it was also his job to fulfill the Levirate Law. With great responsibility also came great honor.

.....

**The Bride Price:** This was a fee paid to the girl’s father of approximately five hundred shekels

[approximately five years wages] by the groom; it served as proof that he would be able to take care of his wife in the future and it purchased new dresses for her in the first year. The groom was informed of his ongoing responsibility to provide his wife with the necessities of life [Code of Hammurabi]. In addition, she was given a dowry from her parents that included tents woven with goats' hair, robes, utensils and a wedding feast. Bridal ornaments are mentioned in Isaiah 49:18 and Jeremiah 2:32; a suitor's bridal gifts are mentioned in Genesis 24:53 and Psalm 45:12 [Royal Wedding Song]. Wedding robes were adorned with jewels in Isaiah 61:10. Presents were given to the parents to obtain their favor in Genesis 24:53, 34:12, and Hosea 3:2, along with a seven-day nuptial banquet described in Genesis 29:22, Judges 14:12, Esther 2:18, the parable told in Matthew 22:1-5, and the wedding at Cana in John 2. The dowry amount was usually 1/10<sup>th</sup> of a father's estate and the young bride held title to her dowry, even though her husband managed it. A wife's property could not be sold without her consent, and this was done to discourage divorce.

**Proof of Virginit**y: This may sound crude to us today, but it was their version of the DNA test. After the wedding feast, the husband took his bride into the nuptial chamber (Psalms 19:5, Joel 2:16) and consummated the marriage. A cloth or garment was set on the bed, so the blood from the breaking of her hymen would be preserved and thereby constitute *legal protection* for her in the event her husband tried to back out of the marriage or made false claims about her. The punishment for adultery was severe (Leviticus 20:10) to keep both parties faithful: If a man commits adultery with another man's wife—with the wife of his neighbor—both the adulterer and the adulteress are at fault. The testimony of two or three witness was required (Deuteronomy 17:6).

## MOTHER BINAH and DAUGHTER SHEKINAH

The tetragrammaton YHWH has two H's in it, one for the Mother and one for the Daughter. The Mother is also known as Wisdom in the form of understanding; she is known by the following names: Binah, Sophia, Breathe of God and Logos. Her daughter is known as the Holy Spirit—*Ruach HaKodesh*—which is a *feminine noun* in Hebrew. She is the vehicle for the outpouring of higher teaching and spiritual rebirth on earth—a *feminine aspect of God*. Her additional names are Shekinah, the Bride of Christ, the Sabbath Bride, and the Sabbath Queen. These two entities assist the Father in creating the world as we know it. Both compassionately intercede on behalf of humanity to alleviate suffering, by illuminating spiritual seekers with the love of God. Some consider them the “upper and lower mothers” (Binah and Malchut) in the Tree of Life. Genesis states:

"The earth was without form and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Holy Spirit was hovering over the face of the waters..."

The Holy Spirit works closely with God. They form the foundation for the earthly family—the father, mother, son *and oft-forgotten daughter*. When we remove all references to God as feminine, the womb-like imagery in the Bible ceases to make sense, and we have no means of procreation. Removing the feminine faces of YHVH represented in H, the mother and the daughter, denigrates the true nature of God and makes outcasts of the feminine half of our society. Let it not be forgotten that the scriptures do say: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. And the Word *was God*." All things came into being through the Holy Spirit we are told. She was assigned the formation and ordering of the natural world and communication of insight to mankind, as these scriptures show:

- “YHVH created me, first-fruits of his fashioning. Before the oldest of his works, from everlasting, I was firmly set. From the beginning, before the earth came into being. The

deep was not, when I was born, nor were the springs with their abounding waters. Before the mountains were settled, before the hills came into birth; before he had made the earth, the countryside, and the first elements of the world. When he fixed the heavens firm, I was there, when he drew a circle on the surface of the deep, when he thickened the clouds above, when the sources of the deep began to swell, when he assigned the seas its boundaries—and the waters will not encroach on the shore—when he traced the foundations of the earth, *I was beside the master craftsman*, delighting him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere on the earth, and delighting to be with the children of men” (Proverbs 8:22-31).

- “Although she is alone, she can do everything, herself unchanging, she renews the world, and generation after generation, passing into holy souls, she makes them into God’s friends and prophets” (Wisdom 7:27).
- “Strongly she reaches from one end of the world to the other and she governs the whole world for its good” (Wisdom 7:30).
- Wisdom makes statements that YHVH is typically known for: “Whoever finds me, finds life” (Proverbs 8:35) and she directs human affairs: “She shares the secrets of God’s knowledge, and *she chooses what he will do*” (Wisdom 8:4).
- Who is it that traveled with the Israelites in the desert and delivered them from Pharaoh? “It was *Wisdom* who delivered a holy people, a blameless race from a nation of oppressors...She guided them by a marvelous road, herself their shelter by day—and their starlight through night” (Wisdom 10:15-17).

- Wisdom also has power over life and death (Wisdom 16:13) and provided for the people manna that “conformed to the taste of whoever ate it, it transformed itself into what each eater wished” (Wisdom 16:21).
- Wisdom looks for those who seek truth as their highest aim; we are told to seek truth first and everything else will be given unto us. She is the “mistress of the art of thought,” says Proverbs 8:12; good advice, prudence and perception also belong to her. She daily issues an invitation to obtain understanding instead of a love for money and the trinkets it can buy.

“Is not Wisdom calling?

Is not Understanding raising her voice?

On the heights overlooking the road,

at the crossways, she takes her stand;

by the gates, at the entrance to the city,

on the access-roads she cries out:

‘I am calling to you, all people,

my words are addressed to all humanity.

Simpletons, learn to behave,

Fools, come to your senses.

Listen, I have something important to tell you,

When I speak, my words are right.”

(Proverbs 8:1-11)

The Holy Spirit serves as the channel of communication with humanity. She is one of the most powerful religious figures in Christianity; Emperor Constantine dedicated his principal church to the Holy Wisdom (Hagia Sophia) of God. The imagery of Sophia's heavenly wedding banquet can be seen in murals and iconography throughout Europe. Her gifts are wisdom, strength, insight, counsel, joy, peace, meekness, and prophecy. The New Jerusalem Bible gives the reader the complete text of the ancient canon as it was fixed in the 4<sup>th</sup> century AD, translated directly from the original Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek texts; it includes The Book of Wisdom. The Book of Wisdom is unfortunately absent from the King James Version (KJV) of the Bible used by Protestants. Under the rule of Constantine, emphasis on the dominion of men prevailed and what was written by men took precedence over dreams and intuition which were considered to be too feminine. Women were degraded during this time period to being useful only for the fruit of their womb and household skills. The Shekinah of God, which traveled like a cloud with the Hebrew people across a barren desert, providing both light and direction, was an integral part of the Hebrew story, however. When the earth was formed, the Shekinah as a "divine wind" swept over the waters. When the androgynous earthling called Adam was created, Shekinah gave it the "breath of life." The Shekinah can be visualized as "a tree of life" reaching from what is mortal and rooted in this earth to what is eternal. Through this tree, of which we are a part, we reunite the soul with the eternal family—Binah (Mother), Father (Chokmah), Son (Tifereth) and Daughter (Malchut/Holy Spirit).

The Aramaic translation of the Lord's Prayer by Neil Douglas-Klotz recognizes Shekinah, the Holy Mother, as should we:

"Oh, Birther of the Cosmos, hallowed be thy name."<sup>2</sup>

## Apprenticeship to Wisdom

“My child, from your earliest youth choose instruction,  
And till your hair is white you will keep finding wisdom.

Like ploughman and sower, cultivate her

And wait for her fine harvest,

For in tilling her you will toil a little while,

But very soon you will be eating her crops.

(Ecclesiasticus 6:18-20)

Do not be impatient of her bonds;

Court her with all your soul,

And with all your might keep in her ways;

Search for her, track her down; she will reveal herself;

Once you hold her, do not let her go.

(Ecclesiasticus 6:25-27)

If you wish it, my child, you can be taught;

Apply yourself, and you will become intelligent.

If you love listening, you will learn,

*If you pay attention, you will become wise.”*

(Ecclesiasticus 6:32-34)

## BAAT-KOL

Her name literally means "daughter of the voice," daughter of Sophia, the Holy Spirit. She is that small, quiet voice that speaks wisdom when you ask for guidance. Her voice from heaven clears up all matters about conflicting, existing law. The Baat-Kol was present when Moses heard a voice in the fire (Deuteronomy 4:33):

“Did ever people hear the voice of God speaking from the heart of the fire, as you have heard it, and remain alive?”

Job heard the Baat-Kol in the rushing wind right before he was rebuked for questioning God’s design. At Jesus’ baptism, the Baat-Kol was present with the Holy Spirit. Jesus saw the Holy Spirit descending *like a dove* upon him...

“And suddenly there was a voice from heaven, “This is my Son, my Beloved; my favor rests on him” (Matthew 3:17).

The Holy Spirit and the Baat-Kol were present at the transfiguration where Jesus met with Elijah and Moses: “And a cloud came, covered in shadow; and from the cloud there came a voice, “This is my Son, the Beloved. Listen to him” (Mark 9:7). The Baat-Kol and Holy Spirit were also present when Jesus was in the Garden of Gethsemane, troubled about what was to come:

“What shall I say?” said Jesus, “Father, save me from this hour? But it is for this reason that I have come to this hour. Father, glorify your name.”

The Baat-Kol replied: “I have glorified it, and I will again glorify it” (John 12:28).

As on earth, where it takes the parenting skills of both a mother and father to raise a child, so too in heaven; God used and continues to use both feminine and masculine skills to perfect our soul making.



**Meditation Words:**

Create a quiet, comfortable place to sit for 20-30 minutes in silence each day. Sit in the lotus position [or if you are elderly in an upright chair] and focus on your breath. Breathe in and out, listening to each inhalation and exhalation. Allow the voices inside you to blend with those outside of you, until you can no longer tell the difference. The Mother letters are Alef (air), Mem (water) and Shin (fire), the basic elements; express this by saying the sound AH as an inhalation, followed by MESH as an exhalation.

**Y-H-V-H**

Seated, visualize YHVH as separate letters before you on a wall, representing the fullness of God as Father, Mother, Son and Daughter.

**Prayer to the Holy Spirit:**

Breathe in me, O Holy Spirit, that my thoughts may all be holy.

Act in me, O Holy Spirit, that my work, too, may be holy.

Draw my heart, O Holy Spirit, that I love but what is holy.

Strengthen me, O Holy Spirit, to defend all that is holy.

Guard me, then, O Holy Spirit, that I always may be holy.

Amen.

## EVE

"Then God said, Let *us* make people in *our* image, to be like *ourselves*. *They* will be masters over all life—the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky and all the livestock, wild animals and small animals" (Genesis 1:26).

In this passage, God, the Father and Mother, are having a conversation. Either the Father is initiating the action with “let us” or the Mother is doing so. Notice that singular pronouns—he, she and it—have not been chosen; plural pronouns fill this sentence. God is YHVH comprised of Father (Y), Mother (H), Son (V), and the oft-forgotten Daughter (H). Two beings were created—not one male—to reflect the image of God. It is important to acknowledge that God did not make Adam first, as is always taught. Even in the second Genesis story, Adam was not first. “Ha adam” means “earthling”; this first androgynous earth-being was placed on a planet called Earth. Looking around, the earthling was unable to relate to any of the animals as a companion; the earthling needed to be separated into two parts that were comparable—an *‘ēzer kenegdô*. The Hebrew expression, *‘ēzer kenegdô*, does not indicate inferiority or subordinate. In the Old Testament, the term “helper” describes one who can provide ethical, spiritual, and physical help to a person in great need. God is said to be the “helper” of humankind in Exodus 18:4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 33:26, 33:29; Psalms 20:2, 33:20, 70:5, 89:19, 115:9-11, 121:1-2; 124:8, 146:5 and Hosea 13:9. God is not subordinate to humankind, and neither is Eve subordinate to Adam. To summarize, God created an androgynous, earthling first and then divided it by gender. As an androgynous being, Adam *could not* fulfill God’s plan; it was not until separation into gender occurred that God blessed the plan and called it “very good.” If you are tempted to think in terms of seniority, then remember that Eve was God’s final accomplishment and, more often than not, we call a finished, final product *one’s masterpiece!*

Lillie Devereaux Blake in *The Women's Bible*, "Comments on Genesis" states:

"It cannot be maintained that woman was [made] inferior to man even if...she was created after him, without at once admitting that man is inferior to the creeping things, being created after them."<sup>3</sup>

Until there was separation into male and female, "Adam" was surrounded by animals, incomplete, unhappy, and woefully unable to procreate. Eve means "life giving," or "mother of all who have life"; she was not called the "cursed one" by God or Adam, nor should we burden her daughters with a hex. Right from the beginning it is apparent that the two earthlings were very different, yet complementary, and required to work together. She was yin to his yang. Adam tended the garden, the library of scripture. Eve interpreted the word, using wisdom. The clue to their relationship can be found in the terms *ish* for man and *isha* for woman; both contain part of the word *aish* for fire; the flame of the Holy Spirit was present in *both beings*. Eve offered Adam the opportunity to stay with her, eating of the "fruit" of sexuality, and they chose to start a family rather than be immortal. "Be fruitful and multiply" was the decree after "the fall." At that moment, their eyes were opened and they entered the first stage of moral growth, *aided by necessary trials and tribulations*, and children were required to carry on their legacy. It should be noted that monogamy was the ideal relationship or Adam would have been provided with multiple wives, and Eve would have been given multiple husbands. The creation of harems brought only marital and political strife to those who tried it. Every creature that was brought forth by YHVH was done so intentionally; nothing on earth is without purpose or to be denigrated. There are no human beings who could ever be outside the kingdom of YHVH; that's akin to saying YHVH created a subset of people to be oppressed. *Only humans do that.*

Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD) believed that hard work and struggle were necessary for

the growth of the human soul and were not a divine punishment. I concur. If bearing children is such a curse, than why is Mother Mary exalted in “The Magnificat” for bearing Jesus? Why isn’t John, the Baptist considered unworthy to serve any messiah, being vaginally born by Elizabeth? Building, growing and creating are part of the human experience, not an evil “fall.” This story fulfills one purpose—to explain how humans first began to taste life. The reason we are called homo sapiens comes from “homo,” meaning human being, and “sapere” which means to taste. In sum, human beings taste life by having both positive and negative experiences. Bumps and bruises come along with learning how to carry one’s self. Rather than being a *fall or degradation*, this moment in humanity should be looked upon as a progression in moral growth; before this point, Adam and Eve did not know the difference between good and evil, or even if they were naked or clothed. [Knowledge of what was beneficial vs. harmful must have been a blessing in winter when Adam and Eve had to determine which cave was free of predators!]

A careful study of the Hebrew Bible and Jewish writings would alter the views of many on “original sin.” Unsupported in either, original sin was added to Genesis first by Tertullian in 155-200 AD and later by Saint Augustine in 354-430 AD. Let us not forget that Tertullian is also recorded as saying about women: “You are the devil’s gateway; you are the unsealer of the tree; you are the first forsaker of the divine law.” [When you wonder how women were redacted from the Bible, look to Tertullian!] Original sin is a *theory* that early church theologians conceived to explain evil; it states that the body and soul are created simultaneously by an individual's parents and the inclination to sin is transmitted from parent to child. The early Christian church fathers were widespread in their interpretation of “the fall.” Justin Martyr (100-165 AD) believed Adam and Eve were exiled for acknowledging the existence of other gods; Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) said lust was the reason for exile; Tertullian (155-

200 AD) felt wisdom was obtained before they were permitted to have it; John Chrysostom (374-407 AD) and Jerome (347-419 AD) agreed that gluttony was the real issue. Irenaeus of Lyons (115-202 AD) believed the fall was necessary for moral growth and soul making. Judaism is emphatic, however, that a person is born innocent, not evil. "Original sin" was not with us from the very beginning, as these excerpts from the King James Version prove:

- "The fathers shall not be put to death for the children; neither shall the children be put to death for the fathers: every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (Deuteronomy 24:16).
- But the children of the murderers he slew not: according unto that which is written in the book of the law of Moses, wherein the Lord commanded, saying, The fathers shall not be put to death for the children, nor the children be put to death for the fathers; but every man shall be put to death for his own sin" (2 Kings 14:6).
- "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son: the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him" (Ezekiel 18:20).
- In those days they shall say no more, "The fathers have eaten a sour grape, and the children's teeth are set on edge. But everyone shall die for his own iniquity: every man that eateth the sour grape, his teeth shall be set on edge" (Jeremiah 31:29-30).
- While simultaneously negating the concept of original sin, the reader of the Book of Job is cautioned against lustful behavior, harming widows, and putting one's faith in mammon, all actions taken since birth: "Have I been insensible to the needs of the poor, or let the widow's eyes grow dim? Have I eaten my bit of bread on my own without sharing it with the orphan?...Have I put my faith in gold?" (Job 31:13-25)

## MYSTICAL JUDAISM

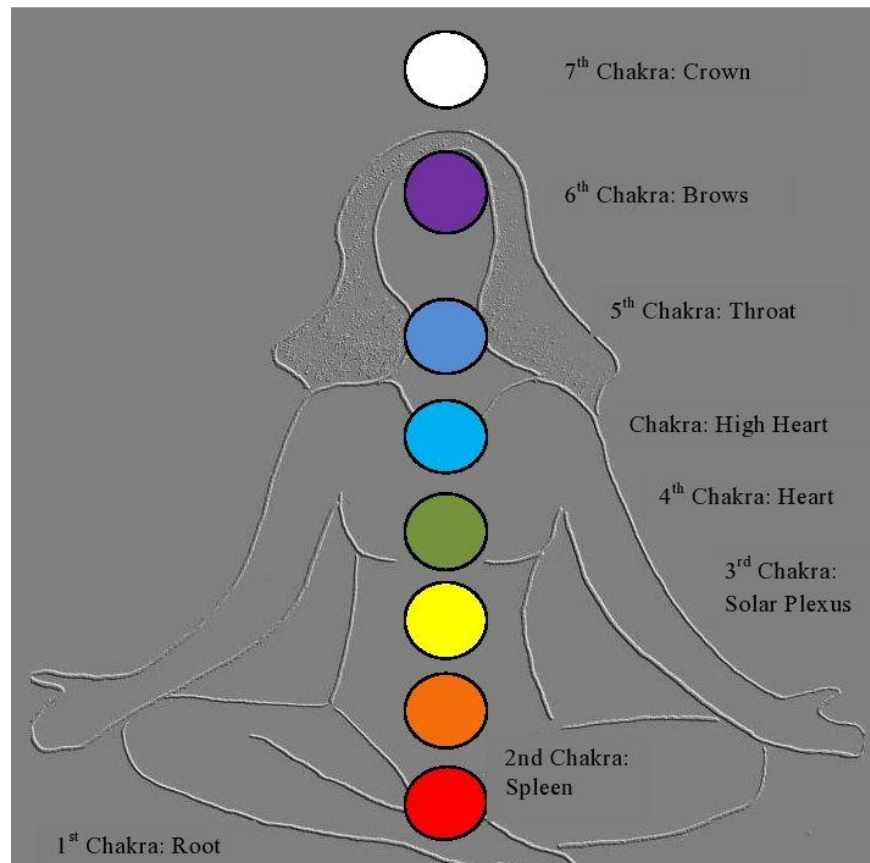
If Christians have been confused by the layering of teachings from many origins, so too have Jews. Rabbi David A. Cooper in his book, *God is a Verb*, addresses this fact:

“I often encounter objections to elementary mystical Jewish teachings by fellow Jews who are unfamiliar with the scope and breadth of their own tradition. Typically, they are in denial. I have been told that meditation is not Jewish; belief in reincarnation is not Jewish; praying alone is not the Jewish way. These people are all mistaken. Indeed, Jewish mysticism is a profoundly sensual, nature-connected spiritual practice that openly discusses angels and demons, soul’s journey after death, reincarnation, resurrection and the goal of achieving messianic consciousness.”<sup>4</sup>

If “knowing God” means more than memorizing law, then we have to take a closer look at what spiritual leaders have been saying since time immemorial—*God is within*. Simply avoiding acting out our sinful thoughts is insufficient. A direct relationship that is akin to marriage is what we should be seeking, so we can be changed from within. “It comes when we *invite wisdom*,”<sup>5</sup> says Cooper. We cannot invite wisdom unless we are receptive to it. Kabbalah means “receive” and the Tree of Life is a symbol for the accessible vehicle available to every person to facilitate direct communication with God. The Tree of Life was also used as the design for Solomon’s temple — “God’s house on earth” (Exodus 25:8-9) — and it is integral to the story of Jacob’s ladder. Gothic churches, like Chartres and Notre Dame [Our Lady], contain within them the floor plan of the Tree of Life. We cannot denigrate the Kabbalah without simultaneously denigrating Solomon and his wisdom teachings! Since the East Indian chakra system is identical to the Tree of Life, we are wise to study it, along with teachings on meditation [aka *prayer*].

Jewish mysticism states: *“Where there is unbalanced force, there is the origin of evil.”*

Sexism, racism, ageism are all caused because people seek unfair advantage over another person. Unbalanced forces are the origin of evil and seeking equilibrium should be the highest aim of all who seek God. The reason we see imbalance in the world stems from the imbalance of male and female energies within each person, and the imbalance of women and men in the world. The Chakra system has defined the energies by color and their location on the body is identical to the Tree of Life spoken of in the Kabbalah. What has actually happened is the Tree of Life has been turned UPSIDE DOWN, with sex taking priority instead of godliness.



This is the message God has given us to pass on to you.

That God is light and in him there is no darkness at all” (1 John: 5).

“Therefore if your whole body is full of light and no part of it dark, it will be completely lighted, as when the light of a lamp shines on you.” (Luke 11:36)

**The Tree of Life:**

**Inner Work for the Soul**

**Imitate these virtues!**

Binah (Understanding) Chokmah (Wisdom)  
 (at your brows)

Gevurah (Severity) Chesed (Mercy)  
 (at your throat)

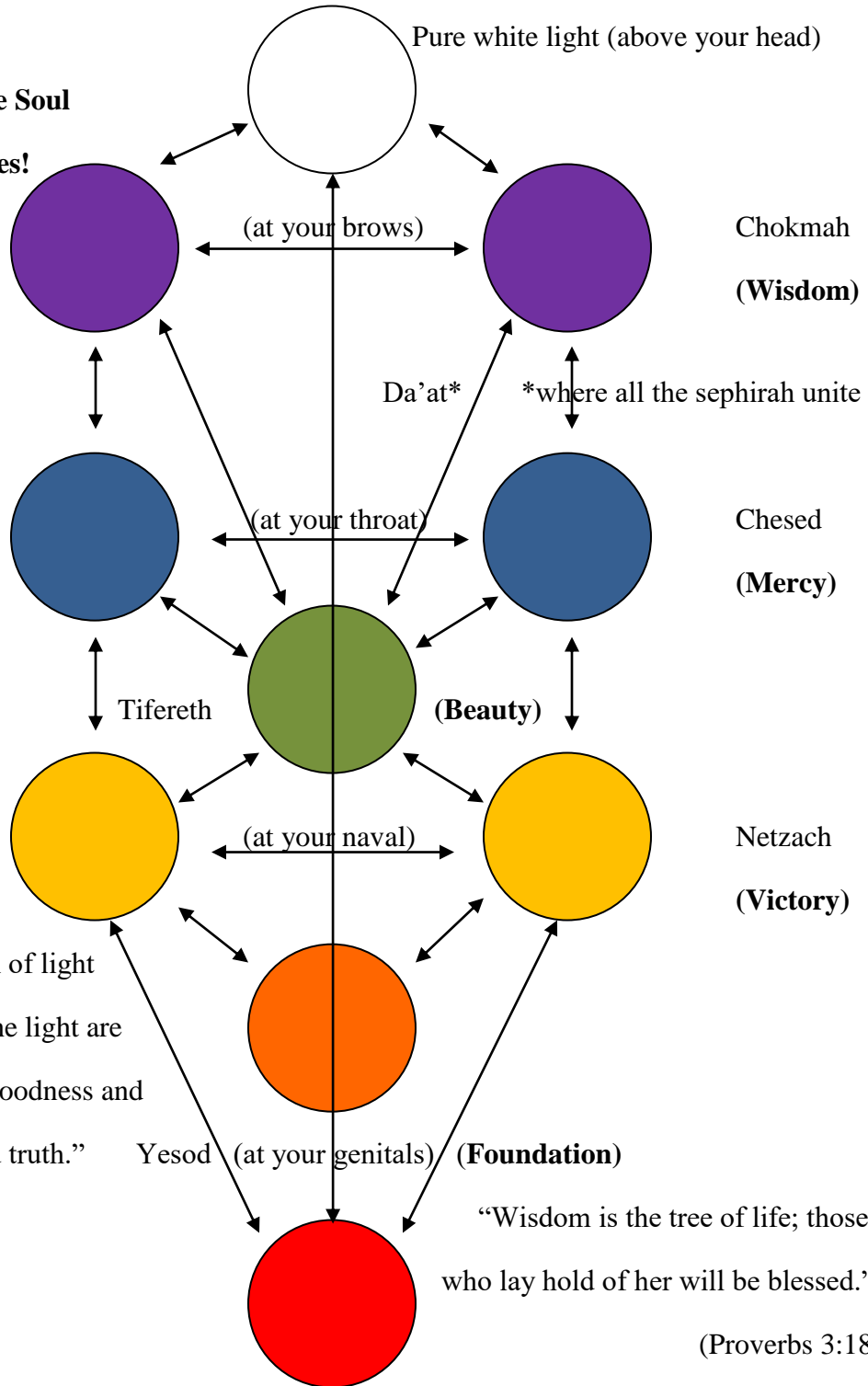
Hod (Splendor) Netzach (Victory)  
 (at your naval)

“Behave as children of light for the effects of the light are seen in complete goodness and uprightness and truth.” (Ephesians 5:9)  
 Yesod (Foundation) (at your genitals)

“Wisdom is the tree of life; those who lay hold of her will be blessed.”

(Proverbs 3:18)

Malchut (at base of spine) is **Kingdom**. Center line is your spine.





\*The Tree of Life should be considered a symbol for your body. At your feet are the roots of the tree called Malchut, considered to be the entrance to the Kingdom within; moving up is the Yesod, or the sexual organs that permit you to leave a legacy. At your naval is the chakra for training in wise judgment, and opposite it is Hod, which gives you sufficient self-esteem to do the right thing even when it's difficult. At the throat is Chesed where you find mercy and acceptance of others and opposite it is Gevurah, which reminds you that every act you take has repercussions. Tifereth is your heart, a place of insight and the location of beauty and love. The Chokmah and Binah work with the Holy Spirit at the crown of your head; they stand for two types of wisdom; male acquisition of knowledge called Chokmah is tempered by female Binah, known as Wisdom in the Old Testament. All of these sephirah (also called chakras) make up the *Kingdom of God* within you. The goal is to climb the tree, progressing through the pathways, to unite your heart and soul with God's will. The top of the tree is not more important than the bottom; the right side of the tree is not more important than the left or visa versa; you must try to achieve balance at every level to make progress in this all-important soul work.

I see no reason for the true nature of the Tree of Life to be kept secret, other than this: *once you know it*, you are far less dependent upon locations and designated priests for your "spiritual bread" and you become keenly aware that *we are all sons and daughters of God*, deserving of life's abundance regardless of geography and economic status. Unfortunately, in our society we have denigrated the feminine, made children objects of sex for pedophiles to abuse, cut the tree in two, amplified imbalance, and minimized the Godhead by making the almighty solely male. For four thousand years women and children have been used as human shields by men in war times. 800,000 children go missing in the USA every year, sold to pedophiles, with women kidnapped and turned into breeders. **No, the problem is not the Tree of Life; it is the**

**raw fact that it is being used to amplify only aggressive warlike tendencies and crush those that belong to women and children. *Rather than being used to achieve holiness, evil men have turned it upside down and said, “We shall have redemption through SIN.”*** Men have denigrated all things learned through intuition, meditation and heart-knowledge and favored what is learned by the head alone, asserting that all things Adam are far more important than all things Eve, even as they dress up like transgendered freaks and try to replace biological women:

“To be sure, all human beings must combine receptivity and assertiveness, softness and firmness, feeling and clear thinking. However, this combination must be present *in every person*. Every woman and every man must be receiving as well as giving, soft and firm, emotional and rational, in order to be a complete human. However, the structure of almost all societies tend to split the human person into two halves, the male and the female, and even to insist that it is prescribed in natural law. Biology is transformed into ontology! But, in fact, women are no more constituted primarily by their sex than are men; they are primarily human, persons—just as men are.”<sup>6</sup> The evil ones are taking the



GOOD THINGS God gave us and using them for EVIL PURPOSES and we can see this in their perversion of the rainbow in their LGBTQi+ flag. They have literally flipped the chakra and the Tree of Life upside down with carnal desires ruling the roost in red and no sign of

the white, pure God light.

## SARAI and HAGAR, REBEKAH, RACHEL and LEAH

God sees women; God knows when they are thirsty in a dry desert. God knows when women are in times of trial; nothing misses God's eye. God wants women to trust their instinct and alter the course of history like the early matriarchs did.

Old Babylonian law tried to get around God's plan for the ideal family; a man was prohibited from having more than one wife, *except when she was childless*. When a man had two wives, one was considered primary and the other was secondary; this was outlined in a contract that caused much distress for the "lesser wife." Women were put into three categories: wives, slaves and concubines. Wives came to their husbands with a dowry; slaves captured in wartime who were given in marriage were called "handmaids" (amah); concubines were slaves who were freed when their mistress or husband died. Slave wives did not have any marital rights, status, and only limited choices for their future. Perhaps the fact that the loved one in each of these stories is childless has something to teach modern women who yet think their value is tied to their ability to produce children; apparently, God doesn't think so, nor did Abraham and Jacob.

Sarai must have been a strong woman. Ten years younger than Abraham, she endured near adultery at the hands of two kings when he insisted she pretend to be his sister instead of his wife. YHVH interceded and protected this princess on both accounts (Genesis 12:12, 20:21). At the age of ninety, Sarai appeared to be too old to bear children, but she trusted God. She must have been a leader for she made sure that her son, Isaac, received Abraham's blessing and inheritance instead of Ishmael, son of Hagar. Abraham had to be taught by God to follow his wife's lead and to break the societal mold: "Whatever Sarah tells thee, thou shalt harken unto her voice" (Genesis 21:12).

Once Isaac was grown, a wife was sought for him in Abraham's hometown of Nahor.

Rebekah's willingness to care for Abraham's thirsty camels proved her to be a diligent worker; she was not chosen based on her sex appeal or her ability to carry off the latest fashion trend, as modern women are asked to do (Genesis 24). Rebekah was asked if she wanted to travel five hundred miles and become the wife of Isaac. She was not forced into marrying whomever her father arranged for her to marry; it is clear that she was not a financial transaction between men:

“Let us call the girl [she's not a woman yet] and find out what she has to say.’

They called Rebekah and asked her, ‘Will you go with this man?’ She replied, ‘I will.’

And forthwith, Rebekah and her maids mounted camels and followed the man.”

Like Sarai, Rebekah altered history in her choice of which son would receive the family blessing; she chose Jacob instead of Esau; her husband was too old to know the difference and was easily duped with a hairy costume that resembled Esau's hairy arms. Jacob worked fourteen years for his uncle Laban in order to marry Rachel; seven of those years he labored for her sister, Leah, whom he was told he had to marry first; the next seven were for Rachel, the one he truly loved. Jacob consulted with both of his wives when he considered leaving Laban to start his own home; he did not claim “headship,” thump his chest, and impose a decision upon them, as evangelical Christian men are ill-advised to do today:

“In answer [to Jacob's question] Rachel and Leah said to him, ‘Are we still to inherit anything from our father's estate? Does he not think of us as outsiders now? For not only has he sold us, but he has completely swallowed up the money he got for us. All the wealth that God has reclaimed from our father belonged to us and our children in any case. So do whatever God has told you’” (Gen 31:14).

Rachel intelligently took her father's household idols, which helped establish a claim to her father's estate, sat on them and refused to give them back to her father; she used the law against

“ritual uncleanness” during menses to her advantage. She did not allow a man (her father) to take from her what he legitimately owed her. Like the woman with menses who insists on being healed by Jesus, Rachel breaks with “ritual uncleanness” rules that jeopardize her standing in the community and claims her inheritance. As her ancestors did, Rachel picked the son best suited to be the kinsman redeemer, and his name was Joseph. Despite being sold to traveling gypsies by his brothers and put in prison due to the sexual advances of Potiphar’s wife, it was Joseph who had the sense to store up grain in advance of a seven-year famine. One might wish that Joseph had stopped there and not been driven by the profit motive to enslave those who were starving, but he succumbed to the ways of men, until Moses had to cry out in the name of God: “Let my people go!”

These three stories show us examples of women who gave the child with the right gifts a special opportunity; they broke with the established laws about firstborns, the birthright and blessing, which happens too often in the Bible to be insignificant. God used these women as conduits to advance a story about gifting. Let us also not forget that the Angel of the Lord first appeared to an Egyptian woman named Hagar who desperately needed water to survive; Jesus also gave “living water” to an outsider, a Samaritan woman at a well. Both Old Testament and New Testament stories prove that the women of the Bible are not adjuncts to men’s stories, but *change agents*.

.....

*Sarai means princess.*

*Rebekah means to tie up or secure.*

*Hagar means flight.*

*Rachel means ewe, one with purity.*

*Leah means delicate.*

## TAMAR

Women without a son or husband in Hebrew society were vulnerable; we see this clearly in the story of Naomi and Ruth, who must glean fields to feed themselves; husbands and sons were their only form of *social security*. It was the responsibility of a kinsman to take care of widows and single women, keep the family line going, and provide protection. In this story, Judah failed in his responsibility as kinsman to take care of Tamar, so she had to force him to comply; this sexually-charged story ends with her being called “righteous”:

“Then Judah said to Onan, ‘Take your brother’s wife, and do your duty as her brother-in-law to maintain your brother’s line.’ But Onan, knowing that the line would not count as his, spilt his seed on the ground every time he slept with his brother’s wife. What he did was offensive to YHVH, who killed him too. Then Judah said to his daughter-in-law Tamar, ‘Go home as a widow to your father until my son Shelah grows up,’ for he was thinking, he must not die like his brothers. So Tamar went home to her father. A long time passed and then Shua’s daughter, the wife of Judah died” (Genesis 38:8-12).

Judah did not release Tamar from the Levirate Law, which would have allowed her to keep her dowry, nor did he give her a child to carry on her husband’s name and give her security in her old age. He kept her in limbo, which was unjust, and in “widows weeds,” a black head-to-toe dress with a dark black veil (Genesis 38:14, 38:19). In effect, it sounds like widows wore a distinctive garb akin to the Muslim chador or the burka, which should not surprise us since the daughters of Isaac and the daughters of Ishmael are *branches of the same tree* started by Sarai and Abraham:

“When Tamar was told, ‘Look your father-in-law is going up to Timnah for the shearing of the sheep, she changed out of her widow’s clothes, wrapped a veil around her to

disguise herself, and sat down in the entrance to Enaim, which is on the way to Timnah; for she saw that although Shelah was grown, she had not been given to him as his wife.’ Judah, seeing her, took her for a prostitute, since her face was veiled. Going up to her on the road, he said: ‘Let me sleep with you’” (Genesis 38:13-16).

Tamar agreed to receive a goat as partial payment for their intimacy, but she also obtained his signet ring, cord and staff. These were specific to Judah’s household and proved his identity. She was smart; she didn’t want to be put in danger when it came to light that she was pregnant out of wedlock. True to character, Judah behaved rashly when he discovered Tamar to be with child; this was when she produced all of the items necessary to prove that he was the father, and since he owed her security according to the Levirate Law, she was right to claim what belonged to her. The cries from Judah’s household of males to “burn this woman!” ended abruptly, just as they did when Jesus was asked to condemn only the woman caught in adultery.

Women had few options in the Old Testament; patriarchy exposed them to bodily danger and financial and food insecurity, but they used the rights they had to achieve positive outcomes and they were called “righteous” for doing so!

Tamar was one of four women named by Matthew in his genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1); the others are Rahab (the innkeeper/prostitute), Ruth (Moabitess), and Mary, mother of Jesus (also initially accused of adultery).

.....

*Tamar means palm tree.*

.....

## PUAH and SHIPRAH, BITHIAH, JOCHEBED, MIRIAM and ZIPPORAH

If the midwives Puah and Shiprah had followed Pharaoh's instructions, all of the male children born to Hebrew women would have been killed the moment their heads crowned the birth canal. Luckily, these two women knew they were accountable to God first and men second and they made up a lie: "Hebrew women give birth before we arrive!" Moses was saved by his older sister, Miriam, placed in a wicker basket, floated down the Nile river, saved by the Pharaoh's own daughter, Bithiah, and given to Moses' mother, Jochebed, to nurse (Exodus 1:15-21). Six women defied the orders of Pharaoh, risked their lives, refused to comply, and altered the course of Hebrew history. Bithiah said in Exodus 2:7, "This is one of the little Hebrews..." *She felt sorry for it*, we are told. It is clear that Bithiah knew Pharaoh's edict and defied it; that took backbone. Jochebed, having no options, chose the path that gave Moses a chance to live, as many teen mothers do today when they give up their child for adoption. We should note that this would not be the last time the Hebrew people would be dependent upon the kindness of *foreign women* to save them from peril.

The deeds of Miriam are considered a hymn of praise and thanks to God. Clement of Alexandria praised her as "being on fire with Wisdom (Sophia)." Her words are the first celebration of the crossing of the Sea of Reeds, integral to Jewish worship of Passover and the Christian celebration of Holy Saturday. It is to be remembered that the people did not leave Miriam's side when she contracted a skin disease; they stayed with her until her health was restored. If she is criticized for questioning Abraham's marriage outside the faith to Zipporah, we should remember that the law given by Moses required exclusivity to prevent acceptance of "false idols" and abominable practices. Aaron was not above error either; he allowed the people to melt their jewelry into an idol, while Moses was receiving the Ten Commandments from God.



For this, both Moses and Aaron were punished in Numbers 20:12, when additional unfounded fears about God’s ability to provide basic water were the last straw:

God’s edict was harsh: “Because you could not believe that I could assert my holiness before the Israelites’ eyes, you will not lead this assembly into the country I am giving them.”

How could Abraham and Aaron have doubted after nine plagues, the parting of the Sea of Reeds, the giving of the Ten Commandments, the arrival of daily manna and quail that appeared unbidden from the sky to sustain them, and the Arc of the Covenant which traveled with them in a smoke column indicating God’s presence? It is unthinkable. It is interesting to note that Moses was protected by Bithiah, just as Zipporah protected her newborn son. Moses clearly received the commandment to circumcise, but Zipporah—a foreign woman—honored the commandment and acted as the *mohel* (Exodus 4:24-26).

.....

*Puah means splendid.*

*Shiprah means brightness.*

*Bithiah means daughter of YHVH.*

*Jochebed means Jehovah is her glory.*

*Zipporah means a female bird.*

*Miriam (Mary) ma'or, means to be like a star,  
filled with light, both illuminated and illuminator.*

.....

Miriam composed the oldest known work of poetry in the Bible:

### *Song of Miriam*

I shall sing a song to YHVH, for he has covered himself in glory,  
Horse and rider he has thrown into the sea.  
Yah is my strength and my song,  
To him I owe my deliverance.  
He is my God and I shall praise him,  
My father's God and I shall extol him.  
Yah is a warrior. *Yah is his name.*

Pharaoh's chariots and army he has hurled into the sea;  
The pick of his officers have been drowned in the Sea of Reeds.  
The ocean has closed over them; they have sunk to the bottom like a stone.  
Your right hand, YHVH, wins glory by its strength,  
Your right hand, YHVH, shatters your foes,  
And by your great majesty you fell your assailants;  
You unleash your fury, it consumes them like chaff.  
*A blast from your nostrils and the waters piled high;*  
The waves stood firm as a dyke; the bed of the sea became firm ground.

The enemy said, "I shall give chase and overtake,  
I shall share out the spoil and glut myself on them,  
I shall draw my sword, my hand will destroy them."  
You blew your breath, the sea closed over them;  
They sank like lead in the terrible waters.  
YHVH who is like you, majestic in sanctity,  
Who like you among the holy ones,

*Fearsome of deed, worker of wonders?*

You stretched your right hand out, the earth swallowed them!  
In your faithful love you led out the people you had redeemed,  
In your strength you have guided them to your holy dwelling.

Hearing of this, the people tremble  
Pangs seize on the people of Philistia;  
The chieftains of Edom are dismayed,  
Moab's princes—panic has seized them.  
All the inhabitants of Canaan have melted away.

On them fall terror and dread;  
Through the power of your arm they are still as stone  
While your people are passing, YHVH,  
While the people you have purchased are passing.  
You will bring them in and plant them  
On the mountain which is your heritage  
The place which you, YHVH, have made your dwelling,  
The sanctuary, YHVH, prepared by your own hands,

YHVH will be king *for ever and ever*.

(Exodus 15:1-18)

RAHAB

My Bible calls her a prosperous innkeeper; your Bible may call her a prostitute. She may have been both or neither. What we do know for certain is that she worked with flax:

“She had taken them [the Hebrew spies] up to the roof and hidden them under some stalks of flax *which she had laid out there*” (Joshua 2:6).

Her ambiguous background puts her in good company with many others in the Old and New Testament. A Canaanite woman, Rahab hid Hebrews spies who were scouting out the city, in return for their promise to save her family in the coming war; by hanging a scarlet cord outside her window, she indicated that her home was to be passed over. The scarlet cord was also used by Tamar, who indicated that Zerah was to be considered the first born, even though Perez arrived first; Tamar tied a red cord around the favored child’s foot.

Rahab’s lie was like that of Puah and Shiprah; she followed God’s laws and not man’s. In doing so, she lived to marry Salmon [one of the spies] and continued a bloodline that led to Jesus. Sarah, Jochebed and Rahab are named again as heroines of faith in the New Testament in Hebrews 11; Sarah is mentioned in v. 11, Jochebed in v. 23, and Rahab in v. 31. Rahab’s son, Boaz, restored the family line of Naomi and gave Ruth a son named Obed. All of these heroic women are listed in Matthew 1:1-16 and Luke 3:23-38. Once again indebted to the kindness of an outsider, the Hebrews take refuge with one who *might not make your deacon’s list!*

.....  
*Rahab means fierceness.*  
.....

## THE DAUGHTERS OF ZELOPHEHAD and ACHSAH

In the middle of the Book of Joshua is a forgotten story of six feminists named Mahlah, Noa, Hoglah, Milchah, Tirzah and Achsah. The first five were the unmarried daughters of Zelophehad; they were ostracized for remaining independent, but they did not give up when they experienced gender discrimination; they went to Moses and laid out their case. Up to that point under Hebrew law, all inheritance was directed through the men in the family (Numbers 27:1-11, 36:2-12; Joshua 17:3-5). The daughters of Zelophehad realized their father—as a first-born son—received the traditional *double-portion of inheritance* from his parents, and they were not about to let their future security slip through their fingers. Upon stating their case, the law was changed to include women; the only condition was that if they ever married, it had to be within their tribe. Here is how the passage reads:

“And Moses brought their cause before the Lord. And the Lord spoke unto Moses, saying, ‘The daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of an inheritance among their father’s brethren; and thou shalt cause the inheritance of their father to pass unto them’” (Numbers 27:7).

Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, was promised to a man named Othniel who was able to capture a town called Debir (Joshua 15:16-19). She was given land as her dowry, but she requested springs to irrigate her field. She was given an upper springs and a lower springs (see the Tree of Life), when she requested “more.” Far from being a “discontented bride” or “covetous,” which is how Herbert Lockyer portrays her in *All the Women of the Bible* (1967), Achsah appropriately wanted the rivers of life promised by Jesus; women everywhere should be unafraid to ask *and receive!*

*Achsah means adorned. Mahlah means large. Noa means movement.*

*Hoglah means dancing. Milcah means queen. Tirzah means pleasing.*

## DEBORAH

Why is the story of Deborah, whose name means “honeybee,” so rarely told? She was a judge and a prophetess. She is described as being “like the sun, when it comes out in full strength” (Judges 5:31). To be clear, there is no record of a man named “Lappidoth” anywhere in the Bible. “Lappidot” correctly means torch. “Eshet lappidot” should be interpreted as “Deborah, a spirited, fiery woman.” She didn’t passively wait to be told what to do or think. Deborah used to sit under Deborah’s Palm between Ramah and Bethel in the highlands of Ephraim, and people would come to her and trust in her judgment to settle disputes. One day, she sent for Barak, son of Ephraim and the Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and gave him this message:

“YHVH, God of Israel has commanded, ‘Go! March to Mount Tabor and with you take ten thousand of the sons of Naphtali and the sons of Zebulun. I shall entice Sisera, the commander of Jabin’s army, to encounter you at the Torrent of Kishon with his chariots and troops; and I shall put him into your power’” (Judges 4:6-7).

Barak replied to Deborah with humility:

“‘If you come with me, I shall go; if you will not come, I shall not go, for I do not know how to choose the day when the angel of YHVH will grant me success.’

‘I shall go with you then,’ she said, ‘ but the way you are going about it, the glory will not be yours; for YHVH will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.’ Deborah then stood up and went with Barak to Kedesh” (Judges 4:8-9).

Moses clearly was not afraid to make Deborah a judge; Moses had too many women in his life who kept him alive to consider being unjust to women. Nowhere in this book is it implied that Deborah’s role is “unnatural” for one of her sex either. In fact, it is quite the opposite. Barak

refused to act without her approval. He allowed her to dictate the timing of war, because he trusted her judgment more than his own. This story gives a whole new meaning to “in her place” and “women’s work,” doesn’t it? Similar to Deborah is Huldah, the prophetess. Huldah’s husband appears not to be threatened by her authority nor is King Josiah, who selects her over Habbakkak to interpret the Lost Book of the Bible—Deuteronomy (2 Kings 22:13-20). Again, gifting is the final lesson here, and God raised up Deborah, who pronounced that women deserve credit for taking on the mantle of leadership, while Reuben, Dan, Gilead and Asher deserve chastisement for staying among the sheep and the safety of their boats and ports.

*The Song of Deborah and Barak (excerpt Judges 5:1-17)*

That the *warriors* in Israel *unbound their hair*, that the people came forward with a will,

Bless YHVH!

Listen, you kings! Give ear, you princes!

From me, from me comes a song for YHVH.

I shall glorify YHVH, God of Israel.

YHVH, when you set out from Seir, when you marked from the field of Edom,

The earth shook, the heavens pelted, the clouds pelted down water.

The mountains melted before YHVH of Sinai,

Before YHVH, God of Israel.

In the days of Shamgar, son of Anath,

In the days of Jael,

There were no more caravans, those who went forth on their travels

Took their way along by-paths

The villages in Israel were no more,

They were no more

Until you arose, O Deborah

*Until you arose, mother of Israel!*

*They were choosing new gods*

*When war was at the gates.*

Was there one shield, one spear to be found

Among the forty thousand men in Israel?

My heart is with the leaders of Israel,

With the people who came forward with a will!

Bless YHVH!

You who ride white donkeys and sit on saddle blankets as you ride,

And you who go on foot, sing—to the sound of the shepherds

at the watering places!

There they extol YHVH's blessings,

His saving acts for his villages in Israel!

(Then YHVH's people marched down to the gates.)

Awake, awake, Deborah! Awake, awake, declaim a song!

Take heart, to your feet Barak, capture your captors, son of Abinoam!

Then Israel marched down to the gates; like champions,

YHVH's people marched down to fight!

The princes of Ephraim are in the valley.

Behind you, Benjamin is in your ranks.

Captains have come down from Machir,

Those who wield the commander's staff from Zebulun

The princes of Issachar are with Deborah;

Naphtali, with Barak, in the valley follows in hot pursuit.

*In the clans of Reuben, there was much searching of heart.*

*Why did you stay among the sheepfolds, listen for the whistle with flocks?*

*Gilead stayed on the other side of the Jordan,*

*And why should Dan have stayed aboard ship?*

*Asher remained behind the sea, peacefully living within his ports...*



## Jael

General Sisera did not die bravely on the battlefield with his men; he escaped like a coward and wandered into the tent of Jael, whose people were allied against the Israelites. Recognizing that the defeat of Sisera would be a political turning point, Jael responded to protect her people from imminent violence, just like Rahab did. She lulled Sisera into a false sense of security—in the same manner as Delilah and Judith, who will be discussed later—and then put a tent peg through his head. Barak’s reluctance to act stands in direct contrast to Jael’s swift action; the men in this story were utterly crushed in defeat at the hands of two women, just as Deborah predicted.

### *The Song of Deborah and Barak (excerpt, Judges 5:24-27)*

Most blessed of women be Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite

of tent-dwelling women, may she be most blessed!

He asked for water; she gave him milk;

She offered him curds in a lordly dish.

She reached her hand out to seize the peg,

Her right hand to seize the workman’s mallet.

She hammered Sisera, she crushed his head,

She pierced his temple and shattered it.

Between her feet, he crumbled, he fell, he lay;

At her feet, he crumpled, he fell.

Where he crumpled, there he fell, *destroyed*.

.....

*Jael means wild gazelle.*

## DELILAH

The Book of Judges outlines many Hebrew leaders who began their careers with glory and ended in defeat, because of their arrogance. In Judges, we see a military leader named Jael boast that he will sacrifice the first thing that comes through his door if he wins a major battle, only to lose his only daughter who greets him first. Here we see Samson pretend to honor God with a Nazirite vow, while his behavior imitates that of the bully named Goliath. The story of Samson and Delilah has been one of the most misinterpreted stories in the Bible, in my opinion, because it has been kept isolated from other major stories of women who have killed ungodly men—that of Jael, Judith, Esther, and Susanna. Delilah and Susanna reveal a side of patriarchy that few men want to address—*an uncontrolled lust for power*. The lesson to be learned here is that women will not stand idly by while men endanger their lives, break the commandments, renege on their vows, and threaten the well-being of society.

Delilah was not a “bad girl of the Bible” as you’ve been told. Much like Rahab, Delilah was hired to restore the peace. Samson vowed to maintain an unshaven head as a symbol of his devotion, avoid all types of fermented drinks, avoid marrying foreigners, and not touch the carcass of a dead animal. Samson made a mockery of his vow as soon as puberty ended. First, he married someone his parents did not approve of from the tribe of the Philistines, enemies of the Hebrews. He posed a riddle to them with a solution that could not be unraveled through normal word play. His senseless riddle revealed that he’d eaten from a carcass and broken his Nazirite vow; the riddle additionally endangered his bride—a perpetual *symbol for Israel* in the Bible. Her family was threatened by his rashness: “Explain the riddle to us, or we shall burn you and your father’s family to death,” said the Philistines (Judges 14:15). It also took *seven* days of weeping on her part, before Samson relinquished the answer. Seven is a symbolic number in the

Bible; in seven days the earth was created; there are seven notes to a musical scale; there are seven visible, major planets in our solar system. His father-in-law found his bride a more suitable partner, but her short alliance with Samson caused her *family's demise*. Samson then torched a neighbor's field and refused to make the required restitution. In addition, at no point did Samson repent. He followed misdeed with misdeed, visiting a prostitute next, breaking his vow of chastity. When you look at Samson in toto, it is clear he was in need of being taught a lesson.

Delilah entered this fray at the request of those afraid of Samson; he was their Goliath. She was sought out to deal with him, just as Rahab was sought out to hide the Hebrew spies. Delilah was a strong woman, like Judith and Jael, who knew how to deal with a man of Herculean strength and a weakness for lust. She lulled him into a false sense of security, just as Jael and Judith did, before removing his hair. It should be noted by the reader that Delilah never had to resort to lying to discover the source of his strength; Samson gave her this information of his own free will, with little thought for the consequences [just like Esau who lost his birthright over a bowl of lentils]. Samson lost his bride over a silly riddle; his hair was removed because he was no longer a practicing Nazirite. His strength from God was literally taken from him because of his unworthiness, as was his eyesight, which plunged him into eternal darkness. Judges 16:19 states: "She lulled Samson to sleep in her lap, summoned a man and had him shear off the *seven* locks from his head." Plunged into darkness, Samson became fully aware of the length and breadth of his fall from grace, so he used what he'd always relied upon—his brute strength—to end his tragic life. There can be no doubt that women like Deborah, Jael and Delilah were placed in the Bible to expose weak male leaders; scripture is useful for edification and much of it includes a call to repentance. Therefore, if this particular story makes men of ill repute squirm, then it should be remembered that it was designed to do *exactly that*.

## RUTH and NAOMI

Despite the fact that Naomi lost her husband and sons to war, the Book of Ruth shows us she was not hopeless. Without survivors to carry on the family name, Naomi soon realized that she was the owner of her husband's inheritance. Thinking Boaz her kinsman redeemer, she instructed Ruth in how to continue her husband's family line. If Boaz refused to continue her family line, she would have been able to subject him to being "unsandaled" at the city gate (Deuteronomy 25:7-10). The Levirate Law dictated that she was entitled to protection from her "kinsman redeemer" and Naomi was determined to ensure her future and that of Ruth through Boaz. Naomi refused to accept that widows were destined to a life of destitution and begging.

Ruth was straightforward; she did not just ask Boaz for the right to glean the corners of his field, which were given over to foreigners and widows to feed themselves; she asked for far more—to "glean and pick up what falls behind the reapers" (Ruth 2:7). Her unusual request caused Boaz to notice her. Ruth thereafter demonstrated her ability to work hard; she kept away from the other men who were gleaning to avoid the appearance of impropriety (and potential molestation) and fully trusted Naomi as a matchmaker:

“So wash and perfume yourself,” said Naomi, ‘put on your cloak and go to the threshing floor. Do not let him recognize you while he is still eating and drinking. But when he lies down, take note of where he lies, then go and turn back the covering at his feet and lie down yourself. He will tell you what to do.’ Ruth replied, ‘I shall do everything you tell me’ (Ruth 3:3-5). In the middle of the night, he woke up with a shock and looked about him; and there lying at his feet was a woman. ‘Who are you?’ he said; and Ruth replied, ‘I am your servant Ruth. *Spread the skirt of your cloak over your servant* for you have the right of redemption over me” (Ruth 3:8-10).

We may not know what “spread the skirt of your cloak” means or exactly what was uncovered, but Boaz appreciated Ruth’s invitation, saying to the crowd at the gate the following day, “Today you are witnesses that from Naomi I acquire everything that used to belong to Elimelech (her husband) and everything that used to belong to Mahlon and Chilion (her sons) and that I am also acquiring Ruth the Moabitess, Mahlon’s widow to be my wife, to perpetuate the dead man’s name in his inheritance, so that the dead man’s name will not be lost among his brothers and at the gate of his town” (Ruth 4:9-10).

Ruth soon bore a child whom Naomi loved with all her heart named Obed; this child became the grandfather of David and an ancestor of Jesus. The women were *restored* to full honor and dignity by having faith, being inventive, and not succumbing to despair. Ruth’s promise to follow Naomi into an unseen land and uncertain future is still used today at weddings, even though the words are said from *daughter-in-law to mother-in-law*:

“Wherever you go, I shall go. Wherever you live, I shall live. Your people shall be my people, and your God will be my God” (Ruth 1:16).

In the end, character does count, ladies, if the man is *worthy of your attention*! It is to be remembered that Boaz selected Ruth for her virtues, for her great moral qualities and her pursuit of justice. He did not defy his parents and think of a wife as a sex object as Samson did in “her *face* pleaseth me.”

.....

*Ruth means something worth seeing, a friend.*

*Naomi means pleasantness.*

## HANNAH

“In the bitterness of her soul she prayed to YHVH with many tears, and she made a vow:

“YHVH, should you condescend to notice the humiliation of your servant and keep her in mind instead of disregarding your servant, and give her a boy, I will give him to YHVH for the whole of his life and no razor shall ever touch his head” (1 Samuel:11).

Hannah wanted a son to dedicate to YHVH, as others had done with their firstborn. The priest, Eli, mistook her fervent prayers for drunkenness, but Hannah rebuked him: “No, my lord. I am a woman in great trouble; I have not been drinking wine or strong drink—I am pouring out my soul before YHVH” (1 Samuel 1:14-15). We are left to wonder why someone with the status of a priest was incapable of recognizing fervent prayer when he saw it; years later, the priest Zechariah disbelieved Elizabeth’s truthful statement that she had been visited by an angel and he was struck dumb. Those considered weak, prove to be strong; those considered wise, prove to be foolish. This foreshadows the complete reversal of power in the Beatitudes to come. Hannah’s wish was granted by God based upon her faith, and she raised a godly son named Samuel, as promised.

### *Song of Hannah*

*(1 Samuel 2:1-7)*

My heart exults in YHVH,  
In my God is my strength lifted up,  
My mouth derides my foes,  
For I rejoice in your deliverance

There is no Holy One like YHVH,  
(indeed there is none like you)  
No Rock like our God.

Do not keep talking so proudly,  
Let no arrogance come from your mouth  
For YHVH is a wise God,  
His to weigh up deeds.

The bow of the mighty has been broken  
By those who were tottering are now braced with strength.  
The full fed are hiring themselves out for bread  
But the hungry need labor no more;  
*The barren woman bears sevenfold*  
*But the mother of many is left desolate.*

YHVH gives death and life  
Brings down to Sheol and draws up;  
YHVH makes poor and rich,  
He humbles and also exalts.

During 167-164 BC, Antiochus IV Epiphanes—called the “wicked offshoot”—killed and sold thousands of Jews into slavery. He violated the Jewish holy sites and set up an altar to Zeus [also known as “the appalling abomination”] in the Holy of Holies (1 Maccabees 1:54; Daniel 11:32):

“The king sent edicts by messengers to Jerusalem and the towns of Judah, directing them to adopt customs foreign to the country, banning burnt offerings, sacrifices and libations from the sanctuary, profaning Sabbaths and feasts, defiling the sanctuary and everything holy, building altars, shrines and temples for idols, sacrificing pigs and unclean beasts, leaving their sons uncircumcised, and prostituting themselves to all kinds of impurity and abomination” (1 Maccabees 1:44-49).

Anyone who did not obey the call by Antiochus to renounce their customs and unify under one

religion was to be killed. Books of the law were torn up and burned. Eleazar, one of the foremost teachers of the law, was martyred for refusing to eat pork; many others followed his example and chose death rather than deny the existence of YHWH. Hannah was also the mother to the seven “sons of Abraham” martyred in the Book of Maccabees. The violence of this chapter attests to the cruelty of Antiochus, but this tyrant was not allowed to have the final word. *Tongues removed spoke against him*. One of Hannah’s sons said before dying:

“You have no power over human beings, mortal as you are, and can act as you please. But do not think that our race has been deserted by God! Only wait and you will see in your turn how his mighty power will torment you and your descendents” (2 Maccabees 7:15-17).

Hannah’s response was much like Miriam’s at the foot of Jesus’ cross; she was forced to watch her heirs die, but she refused to let them suffer the worst of agonies alone. Her pain must have been extreme, but she did not allow her captors to take away her dignity or strip her of her faith:

“Bending over him, she fooled the cruel tyrant with these words uttered in their ancestral tongue: ‘My son, have pity on me; I carried you nine months in my womb and suckled you three years, fed you and reared you to the age you are now, and provided for you. I implore you, my child, look at the earth and sky and everything in them, and come into being in the same way. Do not fear this executioner, but prove yourself worthy of your brothers and accept death, so that I may receive you back with them in the day of mercy’” (2 Maccabees 7:27-29).

.....  
*Hannah means “grace of God.”*  
.....



## MICHAL, BATHESHEBA and ABIGAIL

The disadvantages of a monarchy were numerous and foreseen:

Samuel said, “This is what the king who will reign over you will do. He will take your sons and direct them to his chariots and cavalry, and they will run in front of his chariot. He will use them as leaders of a thousand and leaders of fifty; he will make them plough his fields and gather in his harvest and make his weapons of war and the gear for his chariot. He will take your daughters as perfumers, cooks and bakers. He will take the best of your fields, your vineyards, and your olive groves and give them to his officials. He will tithe your crops and vineyards to provide for his courtiers and his officials. He will take the best of your servants, men and women, of your oxen and your donkeys, and make them work for him. He will tithe your flocks and you yourselves will become his slaves. When that day comes, you will cry aloud because of the king you’ve chosen for yourselves, but on that day YHVH will not hear you” (1 Samuel 8:10-18).

The people were determined to have a king, however, so they could mimic other nations; as expected, King Saul and King David used the cautionary speech above as a *job description*.

Abigail was a lovely woman who was married to a man named Nabal, which unfortunately means fool. While hiding from King Saul, David escaped to Abigail's village. His men took none of Nabal's sheep; in fact, they protected Nabal's property, but eventually they were hungry and asked for food. Turned away by Nabal, David was inclined to destroy the entire village when Abigail presented a better plan. She wasted no words of excuse for Nabal's actions and spoke of him with utter contempt. She collected food in spite of her husband's command not to do so, and encouraged David not to shed blood. Her quick thinking saved David's reputation and her village (1 Samuel 25:23-31). The story of Abigail and Nabal is one of the many

reminders in the Bible that spiritual gifts know no gender, and women belong in the realm of politics where they can calm down fools who think violent retribution is the only option.

Another of King David's wives, Michal, performed a role much like that of the prophet Nathan. Michal confronted David over the hypocrisy of "leaping and dancing before the Lord" half-dressed, when the entire house of David was visibly losing moral ground. When David was weighed as a father, he was found lacking in authority, much like Saul. David treated Michal, who loved him in her youth (1 Samuel 18:20) and helped him escape the wrath of Saul (1 Samuel 19:11-12) like a political pawn. Michal correctly refused to recognize David's authority, just as Vashti refused to recognize that of Xerxes, and Abigail refused to recognize that of Nabal. All three women refused to obey irrational men, reproached them, and denied them their marital bed—the *ultimate insult*. David's parting comment to Michal was a foreshadowing of things to come: "I will lower myself even further than that." *And, he certainly did with Bathsheba!*

To be clear, Bathsheba was not a hussy as she is perpetually portrayed; she was bathing at night in her own courtyard, when all of the men were supposed to be off at war, when King David watched her like a peeping Tom from his balcony (2 Samuel 11:1-5). He was so intent upon having her, that he sent her husband to the front lines of battle, hoping her husband would be quickly killed to cover up his scandalous behavior. God made clear to Bathsheba's son, Solomon, what was forgotten by Saul and David: "If you turn away and forsake my laws and commandments which I have laid down for you...then I shall uproot them from the country I have given them and shall disown this temple which I have consecrated in my name and make it a *proverb and a byword among all the peoples*" (2 Chronicles 7:19-20).

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*Michal means perfect; Bathsheba means daughter of an oath; Abigail, source of joy.*

## HULDAH

“On hearing the Book of Law he tore his clothes. Then the king commanded Hilkiah, the priest, ‘Go consult YHVH on behalf of me and the people about the words of the book that has been discovered; for YHVH’s furious wrath has been kindled against us because our ancestors disobeyed the word of YHVH by not doing what this book says they ought to have done. The priest Hilkiah, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah wife of Shallum son of Tikvah, son of Harhas the keeper of the wardrobe; she lived in Jerusalem in the new town. They put the matter to her.” (2 Kings 22:11-20).

In 621 BC, Huldah was a tour de force among prophetesses; she was the one King Josiah sent for to interpret the Lost Book of the Bible—Deuteronomy. A descendent of Rahab, Huldah was related to Jeremiah; while he preached repentance to men, she preached repentance to women. She was called upon by Josiah to interpret this book because of her high position at the college of Jerusalem. Huldah was a *teacher to kings* on the topic of Jewish law and government! Note that marriage does not appear to have been an impediment to her ability to serve as a prophetess and a teacher. Given that there were several other male prophets available at the time, Huldah is owed her due when it comes to being chosen above all others. The case against women priests does not hold water when we look at the examples of Deborah and Huldah in the Old Testament and Anna in the New Testament. The specific mention of Huldah’s work at the college proves that women were interpreting and teaching the law as early as 621 BC. Josiah did not say Huldah was “ineligible” to interpret the law because of her gender, as leaders of the Southern Baptist Convention continue to do, clinging to male dominance with tightly closed fists.

*Huldah—a prophetess and teacher of the law.*

## JUDITH

I noticed last year that the Book of Judith was conspicuously absent from every Protestant version of the Bible, which leaps from Nehemiah to Esther over Tobit and Judith. It is time we asked *why*? This book relates a story of a military struggle against Nebuchadnezzar in the town of Bethulia located in Samaria. The story opens with a wealthy moral widow named Judith who was beautiful in appearance and very intelligent. Her husband Manasseh had left her “gold and silver, menservants and maidservants, herds and land, and she lived among all her possessions without anyone finding a word to say against her, so devoutly did she fear God” (Judith 8:8).

Judith knew how women were treated in war times; she did not want her town to be taken over by Nebuchadnezzar’s men; the married women would be slaughtered and the virgins would be violated or made into slaves. Two town elders lacked courage in fighting this violent foe, so Judith chastised them; they wanted to give God *five days* to save them and then surrender:

“Listen to me, rulers of the people of Bethulia!” said Judith, [to elders Chabris and Charmis] “ You were wrong to speak to the people as you did today and to bind yourself by oath, in defiance of God, to surrender the town to our enemies if the Lord did not come to your help within a set number of days. Who are you, to put God to the test today? *You, of all people, to set yourselves above him?* You put the Lord Almighty to the test! *You do not understand anything, and you never will!*” (Judith 8:11-13)

Like Deborah who stated the victory would go to a woman, Judith twisted in the knife, saying to the men the following:

“If you cannot sound the depths of the human heart or unravel the arguments of the human mind, how can you fathom the God who made all things, or sound his mind or unravel his purposes?” (Judith 8:14). “If indeed they capture us, as you expect, then all

Judaea will be captured too, and our holy places plundered, and we shall have to answer with our blood for that profanation” (Judith 8:21). Uzziah then replied, “Everything you have just said comes from an honest heart and no one will contradict a word of it. Not that today is the first time your wisdom has been displayed; from your earliest years all the people have known *how shrewd you are and of how sound a heart*” (Judith 8:28-29).

Judith responded like Deborah and did not shy away from her leadership role. She explained the precarious predicament of her town to God and asked for the strength to remove a brutal warrior named Holofernes, as Esther did with Haman. Judith’s counsel (Judith 8:10–33, 13:17–26) was followed by the entire city of Bethulia; like Deborah, she gave commands to the army (Judith 14:1–4). Her prayers, like Deborah’s, were recorded (Judith 9:1–19; 13:6–9) and her victory was uncontested: “Open, open the gate! God, our God, is still with us, to show his power in Israel” (Judith 13:11). Her story became an important part of Jewish worship. Her “little white lie” that put a warrior at ease before being dealt with is parallel to that of Tamar, Puah and Shiprah, Rahab, Jael, Delilah, Michal, and Abigail—all “lies” were deemed justified. Once lulled to sleep, Judith beheaded Holofernes (Judith 13:8-9) and saved the women of her town from being defiled. There isn’t a good reason for the Book of Judith to have been redacted from all Protestant texts, except for the fact that Judith overcame one of the great warriors of her time *without male assistance*. That must have offend male sensibilities sufficiently to have caused its redaction, or perhaps it bothered male ministers to note, yet once again, that it was a woman who pointed out the nature of God and took on a teaching role. Nevertheless, scripture stands as written; Judith did “break their pride by a woman’s hand” (Judith 9:10).

.....

*Judith means Jewess.*

## VASHTI

Xerxes organized a feast that lasted 180 days to make a public display of his greatness. Wine flowed in abundance and the king and his men were quite drunk when Xerxes decided to call for his spouse, Queen Vashti, to be brought before him as an object of entertainment. Of Persian birth, Vashti refused to be unveiled and stared at by the king's drunken men, so to each of the couriers Xerxes sent to command her presence, she stated in effect, "I am not going to debase myself by such an act. *I will not come.*" The men increasingly grew petrified that their wives would also not come when called, even for reasons as frivolous as this one. On the advice of inept councilors, Xerxes overreacted by issuing a public decree that Vashti was to be banished. This drew even more unwanted attention to the fact that Vashti had flouted a king's directive. An *initially more compliant* queen named Esther was then put in Vashti's place (Esther 1:9-22, 2), but she soon followed in Vashti's footsteps to bend Xerxes to her will. Vashti's story is fascinating because of the extreme measures Xerxes took to assert his authority. He looked the fool, not because of Vashti's refusal to come, but due to his demand that "every man be the master of his own house" even when highly irrational (Esther 1:22). [See also story of Abigail and Nabal.] Unable to convince men with words [because they were inebriated], Vashti had to demonstrate by taking firm action. Had she attended, she would have debased her title and, by extension, all women. This story makes clear that even a king cannot overrule the rights of godly women. The only regal ruler here was Vashti. The first lesson of Vashti is to men: those that make their wives into sex objects *lose* their life partners; the second lesson warns women not to be compliant in the face of injustice. Yes, "Vashti was the prototype of the higher unfoldment of woman beyond her time. She stands for the human development when womanliness asserted itself and begins to revolt and to throw off the yoke of sensualism and of tyranny."<sup>7</sup>

## ESTHER

Because of the actions of Nebuchadnezzar, the temple of Jerusalem was destroyed in 586 BC and the aristocracy was put in exile for fifty years. Hebrews were assimilated into Babylonian society during this period called the diaspora. The story of Esther takes place when many were yet displaced in Palestine and were trying to learn how to live amid bigotry and prejudice. Esther, whose original name was Hadassah, was a Jewish orphan raised by an uncle name Mordecai; he forced her to keep her race and parentage a secret for her own safety. The focus of the *Book of Esther* is on her ability to persevere against such odds with God's help.

Mordecai must, however, be blamed for causing the crisis in the Book of Esther; he refused to bow to Haman as a representative of the government, unlike Joseph who paid homage to his superiors when he was in Pharaoh's court. The issue between Mordecai and Haman was undeniably one of egos gone awry, for no Jewish laws against courteous bowing existed. Mordecai's ancestor, Saul, was an enemy of Haman, however, and old vendettas apparently never die. Over time, Haman grew to despise Mordecai for refusing to show him respect and this hatred grew until Haman designed a Jewish pogrom to be rid of all that reminded him of Mordecai.

Still smarting from his rebuff by Vashti, Xerxes decreed that no one, including his new queen, was to come before him *unless he called them* under penalty of death. Like Judith, Queen Esther gave instructions to her uncle and her servants to fast and pray for her in preparation for her dangerous endeavor; she was going to appear unbidden before Xerxes (Esther 4:10–17). Her prayers were recorded in Esther 4:1–19 and were much like the prayers of Judith in their plea to *have the strength* to foil an evil plot:

“My Lord, Our King, the Only One, come to my help, for I am alone and I have no

helper but you, and I am about to take my life in my hands (Esther 4:17). Oh God, whose strength prevails over all, listen to the voice of the desperate, save us from the hand of the wicked, and free me from my fear!” (Esther 4:19)

By the time Esther stated, “If I perish, I perish,” she was ready to obey God’s laws instead of those created by her tyrannical husband, even if it meant death. Throughout her trial, Esther kept her head and used what opportunities she had to influence the course of events. She designed a banquet, symbol for heavenly rejoicing, as the means for deliverance:

“If I have found favor in your eyes, O king, and if it please your majesty, grant me my life—that is my request and the lives of my people—this is all I want. For we have been handed over, my people and I, to destruction, slaughter and annihilation...”

(Esther 7:3-4)

Swiftly, “good news” was sent out in letters by Xerxes to every corner of the king’s property to ensure that Jews in the kingdom were not annihilated; Xerxes thereby also made certain that he was not criticized through his relationship to a Jew named Esther. The plot hatched to eliminate *this queen* was averted by the queen, just as Vashti averted the humiliation of all women in her refusal to come when called. One of the most profound statements in the entire Bible is made by Mordecai in his moment of desperation, when he gets to the end of his rope and realizes that the entire future of the Hebrew race *depends upon the actions of one woman*:

"Who knows but that you [Esther] have come to the throne *for just such a time as this?*"

(Esther 4:14)

*Let all women who have ears...hear!*

.....

*Hadassah means myrtle and Esther means star.*



## PROVERBS NOBLE WOMAN

*“It is remarkable that the influence of women is so readily and universally recognized in leading the strongest men into sin, but so uniformly ignored as a stimulus to purity and perfection,”*

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Woman’s Bible*<sup>8</sup>

Proverbs 31 was written by Bathsheba to her son, Solomon, on the topic of how to find a virtuous wife. He did not listen to his mother and married Pharaoh’s daughter, taking polygamy to a whole new level, collecting 700 wives and 300 concubines in all. This led to endless strife and the downfall of his empire.

Is there anything Proverbs Noble Woman could not do? She had command over staff. She had concern for the needy. She had a sense of her own worth. She was respected by all. She knew every aspect of production in creating garments. She was a supervisor. She was valued for her wisdom; she was praised by her children; men wished she was *their wife*! She knew the right way to plant vineyards; she sold and bought land. She was someone to be reckoned with, ladies! She was not passive and submissive, waiting to be told what to do. She had discretionary money she used to buy land and she made wise investments to expand her territory. What Jabez *prayed for*, the Noble Woman of Proverbs *accomplished*.

### *The Perfect Noble Woman*

The truly capable woman—who can find her?

She is beyond the price of pearls.

Her husband’s heart has confidence in her,

from her he will derive no little profit.

Advantage and not hurt she brings him all the days of her life.

She selects wool and flax,

she does her work with eager hands.

She is like those merchant vessels

bringing her food from far away  
She gets up while it is still dark,  
giving her household their food,  
Giving orders to her servant girls  
*She sets her mind on a field,  
then she buys it;*  
With what her hands have earned,  
she plants a vineyard.  
She puts her back into her work  
And shows how strong her arms can be.  
She knows that her affairs are going well;  
her lamp does not go out at night.  
She sets her hands to the distaff,  
her fingers grasp the spindle.  
She holds out her hands to the poor,  
she opens her arms to the needy.  
Snow may come, she has no fears for her household,  
With all her servants warmly clothed.  
She makes her own quilts,  
she is dressed in fine linen and purple.  
Her husband is respected at the city gates,  
taking his seat among the elders of the land.  
She weaves materials and sells them,  
she supplies the merchant with sashes.  
She is clothed in strength and dignity,  
she can laugh at the day to come.  
When she opens her mouth on the conduct of her household,  
No bread of idleness for her.  
Her children stand up and proclaim her blessed,  
her husband too sings her praises:  
*“Many women have done admirable things, but you surpass them all!”*

## QUEEN OF SHEBA

The kingdom of Sheba (Kush) was known to be a center for astrology. The warrior Queen of Sheba, whose name was Nicaule according to Josephus, presented herself as a judge of Solomon's wisdom. She was known as a "Candace," a queenly title used also by another queen whose eunuch was converted by Peter in Acts 8:26-39.<sup>9</sup> The kingdom of Nubia was known for its fearsome women warriors and I'm certain an entire book could be written about their spectacular lives—or perhaps an epic, cinematic movie on the scale of *Lawrence of Arabia*.

The queen of Sheba had heard of Solomon, and the wisdom given him by the Lord:

"She came to test him with difficult questions. She arrived in Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels laden with spices, and an immense quantity of gold and precious stones. Having reached Solomon, she discussed with him everything she had in mind, and Solomon had an answer for all her questions" (1 Kings 10:1-2).

Solomon was far from biased against her because of her gender; he shared his wisdom with her and gave her all she desired [many say, a child]. The Song of Solomon is commonly believed to be a series of love poems to the Queen of Sheba. Nicaule reminded Solomon that he had been blessed by YHWH to execute justice and righteousness, and she acted like a prophet to warn him not to digress. Jesus talked about the Queen of Sheba, Solomon's wisdom, and his own:

"The Queen of the South will appear against this generation and be its condemnation, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and look, there is something greater than Solomon here" (Matthew 12:42).

.....

*Sheba comes from Seba'at, and sabaoth, which mean "heavenly host."*

.....

## SUSANNA

The Book of Susanna, like the Book of Judith, has been redacted from Protestant texts, because it shames men. The story of Susanna will sound familiar; it is much like that of Bathsheba in that men with power wielded it inappropriately. Like Bathsheba, Susanna was a woman of extraordinary beauty who chose to bathe in her private garden. Two elderly men, who were the judges of the town, inappropriately invaded her privacy. We are told that “wickedness has come to Babylon through the elders and judges *posing as guides* to the people.” These men watched her bathe every day like peeping Tom’s until they hatched a plan to achieve their wicked desire. They were going to force her to have intercourse under threat of being stoned for adultery with a fictitious lover, if she did not comply. Knowing that it took two witnesses to condemn a woman of adultery; they thought they had a *watertight plan* in each other’s testimony [pardon my pun]:

“So they waited for a favorable moment, and one day Susanna came as usual, accompanied by two young maidservants. The day was hot and she wanted to bathe in the garden. There was no one about except the two elders, spying on her from their hiding place. She said to the servants, ‘Bring me some oil and balsam and shut the garden door while I bathe.’ They did as they were told, shutting the garden door and going back to the house by a side entrance to fetch what she had asked for; they knew nothing about the elders, for they had concealed themselves. Hardly were the maids gone when the two elders sprang up and rushed upon her. ‘Look’ they said, ‘the garden door is shut, no one can see us. We want to have you, so give in and let us! Refuse, and we shall both give evidence that a young man was with you and that this was why you sent your maids away”” (Daniel 13:15-22).

Susanna cried out as loud as she could, which was required of a victim of such abuse so as not to be confused with adultery, but the elders were determined to convict her based on the rule of two witnesses. Susanna knew scripture well and sent forth the following powerful prayer for help: “Eternal God, you know all secrets and everything before it happens; you know they have given false evidence against me.” This “daughter of Judah who could not stomach men’s wickedness” (Daniel 13:57) responded to her terrible trial like Esther, with prayer and faith (Dan. 13:42–44). On the following day, the required meeting was held to determine Susanna’s guilt or innocence. The assembly accepted the word of the elders and, *to all outward appearances*, Susanna was going to be condemned unfairly, but God hear her prayer and a boy named Daniel became his mouthpiece. The men were thoroughly cross-examined about the location of the supposed act of adultery, but the men so obviously disagreed about the type of tree near the location that their lie was exposed. The first said the tree was a mastic and the second said it was an oak. The false accusers were put to death (as in the Book of Esther) and an important lesson about not *using the law to break the law* was made.

Women would do well to remember this story as they work for social justice. There is a way to deal with corrupt men that is non-violent: you can shine a bright light into dark places and expose criminal behavior, and not tolerate being victimized. Like the Book of Judith, the story of Susanna is rarely told because it puts men who were supposed to be leaders in the community in a painfully negative light. What I said earlier about Delilah, bears repeating about Susanna, however; this story of female courage should not be redacted. If it makes men of ill repute squirm, it should be remembered that it was *designed to do so* as a *cautionary warning* against such behavior and halt potential sex offenders!

*Susanna means lily.*

.....

*“Parts of the Bible are so true,  
so grand, so beautiful  
that it is a pity it should have been  
bound in the same volume  
with sentiments and descriptions  
so gross and immoral.”*

Elizabeth Cady Stanton, *The Women’s Bible*<sup>10</sup>

.....

## VICTIM STORIES: WARNINGS TO SOCIETY

If you do not respect women, say the terribly violent victim stories, your society will disintegrate, entire tribes will be cut off, and you will not be favored by YHWH. Meant to be shocking to scare people into upright behavior, the message is clear: when women are defiled, *the part of God that is feminine is also defiled*. Unfortunately, men have read the victim stories as evidence that such abuse has been with us since the beginning of time and may always remain. US policies against wife abuse and sex trafficking are admittedly weak because some men [*plus certain women who are complicit in the oppression*] are unwilling to accept that the same rights to personhood given to men have been given to women by YHVH.

*The Story of Dinah and Schechem:* The United Nations estimates that sex trafficking is a \$9.5 billion industry and among the top three sources for organized crime. The effect of sex trafficking reaches beyond the victim's suffering. In Genesis 34, Dinah was destroyed by Schechem who raped her and kept her hostage in his home. The rape of Dinah undermined the social order of the Hebrews and initiated a chain reaction of violence from her brothers. Her human dignity and health were compromised and she was never the same. Dinah's family and her community were deprived of her talents and service. Schechem, like David with Bathsheba, tried to cover up his sin but Jacob refused to accept Schechem as his son-in-law; Samson was similarly found to be unacceptable to his father-in-law because of his brutality. Dinah's brothers do ask the right question: "Should our sister be treated like a whore?" The answer is a resounding, "No!" Sexual violence against a woman met its match on the day Schechem's men were all circumcised and in pain; for, at their weakest moment, Dinah's brothers took revenge. Violence against even one woman destroys the family, a community, and generations to come. Violence begets an endless cycle of violence.

*The Story of Mizpah and Jephthah:* Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, according to Judges 11. He enlisted to fight against the Ammonites and be the chief of Gilead. Jephthah however, appears to have been egotistical (like Samson) and he felt the need to make a bold and brash statement before his fellow soldiers to prove his worthiness. He made a vow with God that was ungodly; he said, “If you deliver the Ammonites into my grasp, *the first thing* to come out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from fighting the Ammonites shall belong to YHVH, *and I shall sacrifice it as a burnt offering.*” To be clear, the Hebrew people were told not to make vows; they were simply to do something or not do it. So, of course, upon his return, the first “thing” to come through his doors was his only daughter named Mizpah. She asked to be free for two months to wander the mountains with her friends and bewail her fate. We are told that “he treated her as the vow that he had uttered bound him,” and by that we are left to assume Jephthah was too arrogant to back down and admit his error.

*The Story of the Benjamites and the Concubine:* Judges 19:11-30, 20:1-11 and 21 contain, by far, the worst story of abuse toward a woman in the Bible ever told. It is horrific. A man on his way home with his concubine could not find a person to take him in for the night. Eventually he was offered shelter, but men from the tribe of Benjamin arrived soon after and wanted to sexually molest the man; the man offered them his *concubine instead* and she was found the next morning lying near the door of the house—dead. He *dismembered her* and sent the twelve pieces to the twelve tribes of Israel *as a judgment against them*, and the Benjamites found themselves amputated from the twelve tribes, who made a pact to never give their daughters in marriage to a Benjamite again. *Benjamites had to capture women in war thereafter if they wanted to preserve their name.* Keep this story in mind as we go into the New Testament, for I believe it’s possible Mary Magdalene was from the *tribe of Benjamin*, exiled in Arcadia!



## SOCIAL JUSTICE WAS ALWAYS REQUIRED OF BELIEVERS: Old Testament Quotes

The Prophets had the daunting task of softening the hearts of the hardhearted. Here are a few sharply worded Old Testament passages that prove that caring for orphans, widows, foreigners, aliens, the poor and needy is an essential part of what the faithful are called to do while on earth.

To remind Jews of the social justice mandate, I turn to The New Jerusalem Bible:

- “You will not ill-treat widows or orphans...or I shall put you to the sword. Then *your* wives will be widows and *your* children orphans” (Exodus 22:22).
- “If your brother becomes impoverished and cannot support himself in the community, you will assist him *as you would a stranger or guest*, so that he can go on living with you. You will not lend him money on interest or give him food to make a profit out of it. ...and he will work for you until the jubilee year (Leviticus 25:25, 35, 41).
- “He it is who sees justice done for the orphan and the widow, who loves the stranger and gives him food and clothing. Love the stranger then, you were once strangers in Egypt” (Deuteronomy 10:18).
- “He raises the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the dunghill to give them a place with princes” (1 Samuel 2:8).
- “He therefore told them to keep these as days of festivity and gladness when they were to exchange presents and make gifts to the poor” (Esther 9:22).
- “Have I not wept for those whose life is hard, felt pity for the penniless?” (Job 30:25)
- “How much longer will you give unjust judgments and uphold the prestige of the wicked? Let the weak and the orphan have justice, be fair to the wretched and the destitute. Rescue the weak and the needy, save them from the clutches of the wicked” (Psalm 82:2-4).

- “To oppress the weak insults the Creator, kindness to the needy honors the Creator” (Proverbs 14:31).
- “Is not this the sort of fast that pleases me? To break unjust fetters, to undo the throngs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break all yokes? Is it not sharing your food with the hungry and shelter with the homeless poor; if you see someone lack clothes, to clothe him, and not to turn away from your own kin?” (Isaiah 58:6-7)
- “If you *deprive yourself for the hungry* and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, your light will rise in the darkness” (Isaiah 5:10).
- YHVH says: “They are fat; they are sleek. In wickedness they go to any lengths: they have no respect for rights, for orphans’ rights, and yet they succeed! They have not upheld the cause of the needy. Shall I fail to punish this? Horrible, disgusting things are happening...*and the people love it*. But when the end comes, what will they do?” (Jeremiah 5:2-29).
- “The people of the land practice extortion and commit robbery; they oppress the poor and needy and mistreat the alien, denying them justice” (Ezekiel 22:29). To show the defiled people they were “full of it” Ezekiel cooked his barley cakes with excrement as fuel and *ate religious scrolls* (Ezekiel 3:3, 4:12, 4:15). He was struck dumb and tied up in his house to demonstrate to the people their hardheartedness to prophets. (Ezekiel 3:25-26).
- The prophet Hosea married a whore to call attention to rampant hedonism (Hosea 3:2).
- “Spare me the din of your chanting, let me hear none of your strumming on lyres, but let justice flow like a river...” (Amos 5:23)
- “Lying on ivory beds and sprawling on their divans, they dine on lambs from the flock and stall-fattened veal...the sprawlers’ revelry is over” (Amos 6:6-7).

## SOCIAL JUSTICE WAS ALWAYS REQUIRED OF BELIEVERS: New Testament Quotes

As we enter the New Testament, it is valuable to note that the message doesn't change. In fact, "feed the poor, take care of the sick, care for the widows and needy in your family" widens to include those on the far side of our planet. I would encourage the reader not to take my word for it, however; purchase a copy of the *The Poverty and Social Justice Bible* which has highlighted all 2,000 social justice passages. To remind Christians of the social justice mandate, I turn to the oft-quoted, traditional KJV:

- "Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, 'Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels. For I hungered, and you gave Me no meat; I was thirsty and ye gave Me no drink; I was a stranger, and ye took Me not in; naked, and ye clothed Me not; sick and in prison, and ye visited Me not.' Then shall they also answer Him, saying 'Lord when saw we Thee hungering or athirst or a stranger, or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister unto Thee? Then shall he answer them, saying, 'Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye did it not to one of the least of these, ye did it not to me'" (Matthew 25:41-45).
- "Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him and said unto him, "One thing thou lackest: Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in Heaven; and come, take up the cross, and follow Me" (Mark 10:21).
- "Give, and it shall be given unto you: good measure, pressed down and shaken together and running over, shall men give into your bosom. For with the same that ye mete, therewith it shall be measured to you again" (Luke 6:38).
- "As every man purposeth *in his heart*, so let him give, not grudgingly or out of compulsion; for God loveth the cheerful giver" (2 Corinthians 9:7).

- “...and be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- “Be not forgetful to entertain strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Hebrews 13:2).
- “Therefore, holy and beloved, as the elect of God, put on hearts of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, longsuffering” (Colossians 3:12).
- “Charge those who are rich in this world that they be not haughty, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy; that they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate, laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold of eternal life” (1 Timothy 6:17-19).
- “Pure religion, undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world” (James 1:27).
- “But whoso hath this world’s goods and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up the compassion of his heart from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him? My little children, let us not love in world, neither in tongue, but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:17-18).

When Jesus said, “You will always have the poor among you” (John 12:8), he was definitely not condoning it. He was referencing Deuteronomy 15, which says both “you should have no poor among you” (verse 4) and “there will always be poor in the land” (verse 11). God devised a plan that made poverty obsolete, but the people refused to comply due to their intractable hard heartedness. Poverty was never meant to be tolerated or, worse yet, *created by Christian greed!*

## The New Testament



*The women who announce  
the Good News  
are a “large army.”  
(Psalm 68:11)*



## ESTIMATED CHRONOLOGY FOR THE LIFE & MINISTRY OF JESUS

43 BC: Jesus' father, Joseph, was born.

26 BC: Jesus' mother, Mary, was born.

7 BC: Jesus was born.

1 AD: Birth of James, brother of Jesus.

6 AD: Jesus was found as a young boy in the temple arguing law with the learned rabbis.

26 AD: Pontius Pilate was made Governor of Judea.

27 AD: John the Baptist acknowledged that Jesus was the messiah.

28 AD: Jesus condemned corruption in the temple.

Jesus cured Peter's mother; Jesus healed a paralyzed man lowered from a hole in the roof.

Jesus selected his inner circle: Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James, Thaddeus, Simon, Judas, Mary Magdalene aka Mara the Master, Susanna and Joanna.

The Beatitudes were recited and reversed the worldly order. Parables were used by Jesus to teach lessons only the willing could understand.

Jesus proved his power over storms.

Jesus healed a man from demons.

Jesus raised the daughter of Jairus from the dead.

29 AD: Jesus sent out disciples without money or food to spread the "good news."

Jesus fed 5000 with an insufficient number of loaves and fishes by transmutation/sharing.

Jesus healed a Greek-speaking woman asking for "crumbs."

Jesus prepared his disciples for his death and rebuked Peter, who wanted him to take an easier path.

Jesus was transfigured and spoke directly to Moses and Elijah.

Jesus arrived in Jerusalem for the Feast of Tabernacles.

Jesus healed a blind man.

Jesus restored Lazarus to life, after he has been pronounced dead for four days.

30 AD: The first anointing of Jesus with oil took place.

At a wedding in Cana [possibly that of Jesus and Mary Magdalene aka Mariamne] Jesus changed water into wine.

31 AD: John the Baptist was put to death.

32 AD: Simon led a Zealot revolt against Pontius Pilate.

36 AD: The second anointing of Jesus with oil took place.

At the Last Supper, the meaning of servant was demonstrated by Jesus with foot washing.

“Those that live by the sword, die by the sword,” Jesus said in the garden of Gethsemane.

Three women were at the foot of the cross during the crucifixion, suffering with Jesus.

Unnatural darkness occurred for three hours; Jesus said: “It is finished” (from Psalm 22).

Mary Magdalene was the first to discover Jesus had arisen. She became the apostle to the apostles. No person believes in Jesus’ resurrection *without first* believing her testimony!

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit filled both male and female disciples equally.

Communal sharing of all property and goods *was required* of followers of The Way.

44 AD: Jesus’ family escaped to Britain by, according to legend.

48 AD: Mother Mary aka Maria died in Jerusalem and was placed in the family tomb.

50 AD: A written collection of Jesus’ teachings and sayings were compiled.

51 AD: Paul spread the gospel with his parents Priscilla and Aquila; all were Romans citizens.

58 AD: James, the brother of Jesus, became the leader of the Judeo-Christian community.

Paul was put in charge of evangelizing Greeks; Peter was put in charge of evangelizing Jews.

64 AD: Nero persecuted Christians, burning them as “human candles.”

69 AD: The Gospel of Mark was completed.

73 AD: Jewish Sadducees and Essenes died at Masada rather than be taken captive by Romans.

75 AD: Letter to the Hebrews was completed [possibly composed by Priscilla].

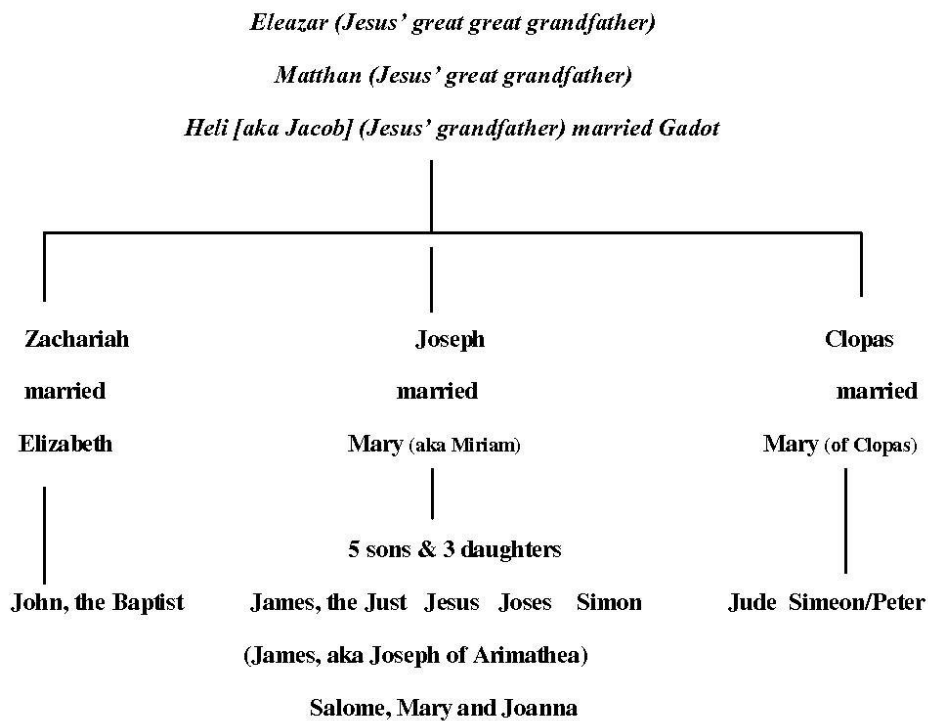
85 AD: The Gospel of Matthew was completed.

90 AD: The Gospel of John [or possibly Mary Magdalene aka Mara, the Master] was completed.



## Jesus & His Family

### Paternal Side of the Tree\*



*Jesus' brothers are named in Matthew 13:55.*

*Jesus' sisters are named in Mark 6:3.*

#### Jesus & Mary Magdalene

**It is quite probable they were married in 30 AD.**

**33A: Mary gave birth to a daughter named Sarah.**

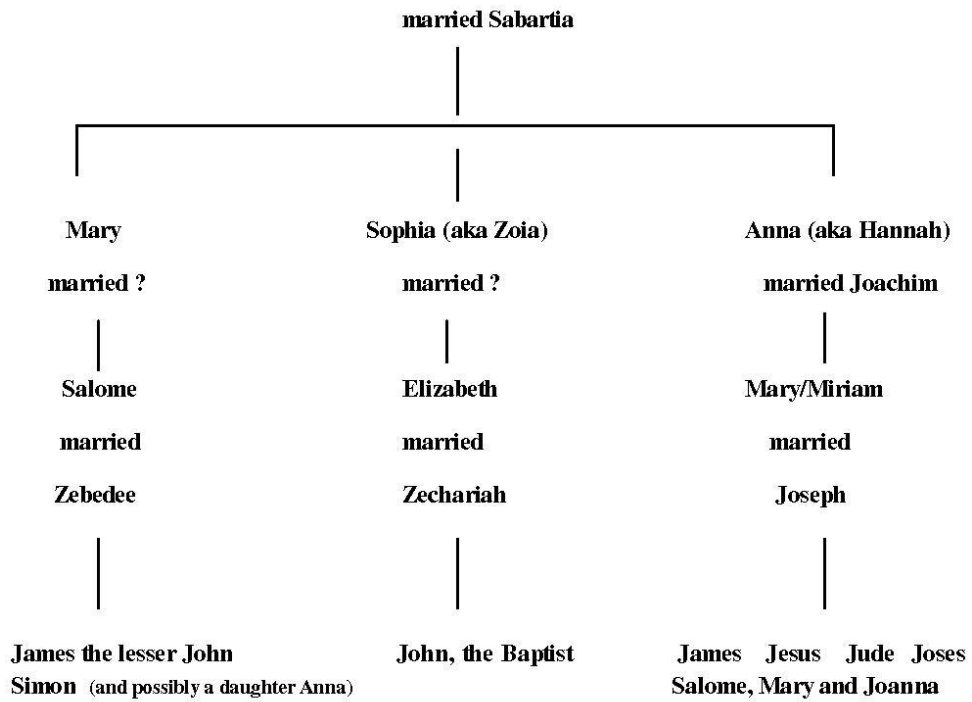
Mary gave birth to a son named Judah.

\*Caveat: His family tree, as best I understand it *at this time!*

## Maternal Side of the Tree\*

*Hezekiah (Miriam's great grandfather)*

*Matthat (aka Nathan or Phanuel) Miriam's grandfather was a priest.*



\*Caveat: His family tree, as best I understand it *at this time!*

ANNA, MARY (mother of Jesus), MARY CLOPAS & MARY SALOME, and ELIZABETH

Anna whose name means “filled with grace” was a prophetess, devout Jew and the daughter of Matthat, a priest from the tribe of Levi. Matthat had three daughters: Mary, Zoia and Anna. Mary married and bore Salome; Zoia married and bore Elizabeth, and Anna married and bore Mary/Miriam. According to the *Infancy Gospel of James* written in 150 AD, Mary had a remarkable birth, akin to that of Jesus. She was dedicated by Anna to the temple at the age of three, like Samuel was, and she was given to a bachelor named Joseph when she reached puberty. Unable to have a child, Anna and her husband fasted until God heard their prayer. While praying, an angel of the Lord stood by, saying “Anna, Anna, the Lord has heard your prayer, and you shall conceive, and your seed will be spoken of in all the world.” According to the *Infancy Gospel* (v. 1628-1629) Mary at age three spoke so perfectly she was taken for an adult of 30; she also received food from the “hand of an angel.”<sup>11</sup> When Joachim was told by an Angel of the Lord that his wife would bear a son, he wisely accepted the news. To remove the story of Mary’s birth from the Bible leaves students of the gospel without a frame of reference for Mary’s childhood; it’s as if she simply sprang fully grown from the head of Jupiter, like Minerva! The name Mary comes from the word *ma’or*, meaning to be like a star, filled with light. Mary is both illuminated and illuminator. The Angel of the Lord appeared to Mary directly to ask her if she would be willing to bear a child from God (Luke 1:46-55). Elizabeth, which means “God’s promise,” spoke prophetically about the relationship between her son, John, and Jesus; it is important to note that Zechariah, as well as Clopas, were Joseph’s brothers. Joseph and Zechariah accepted the news of their wives’ impending pregnancies with mixed feelings. They questioned the veracity of their wives’ testimony. Joseph succumbed to fears about how others would perceive Mary’s pregnancy and, though a priest, Zechariah was struck mute by an Angel

of the Lord for his disbelief: “Since you did not believe my words which will come at their appointed time, you will be silenced and have no power of speech until this has happened” (Luke 1:20). When Joseph died, Mary of Clopas and Clopas became foster parents to Mary’s sons: James (the Just), Jude, Joses, Simon and Jesus. Jesus also had half-sisters, and Epiphanius (Pan 78.8.1 and 78.9.6 cf. Ancoratus 60.1)<sup>12</sup> tells us their names are Salome and Mary. Salome married Zebedee and they had two sons, James, the Lesser and John. Peter and Andrew were fishing partners of the Zebedee brothers. The people Jesus chose to be in his inner circle were not randomly called from their work to follow him; he knew these people very well. *He selected the majority from within his own family.*

The Eastern Orthodox church prefers to make Jesus’ siblings Joseph’s children from another marriage; the Catholic church prefers to make Jesus’ siblings the children of his aunt Mary of Clopas. Unlike the early church fathers, I have never perceived women to be impure because they menstruate and give birth. I do not have to see Mary as a perpetual virgin to appreciate her. Denigrating the way a woman’s body works [and a large part of her life is spent menstruating] invalidates women; it does not respect what God has made! Miriam raised Jesus and taught him the values of mercy and justice, as she did with the rest of the “desposynoi”—the royal family of Jesus. Her authority comes not from men and the titles and crowns they’ve given her, *but from God*, who selected her from among all of the women of the time to bear one of the greatest teachers about what the kingdom of heaven really looks like and our purpose on earth. Perhaps it is no accident movies like *Bloodline* have undertaken research about the desposynoi in Rennes-le-Chateau and spent much time researching a priest named Saunier [see Resources]; many yearn to fill in missing blanks. The time to heal the divisions caused by man-made doctrines and traditions that have *oppressed women* may finally have arrived. *That’s good news!*

## THE GIFTS of MARY

In addition to the gift of life and the gift of mercy that led to Jesus' focus on social justice, Mary also gave her son other gifts that are rarely mentioned. She taught him to love women; he surrounded himself with women as he traveled, who supported him out of their means. Had Jesus been like other rabbis, women would not been able to sit at his feet or become his disciples. Clearly, Mary taught Jesus not to be dismissive and condescending to women. For that, all women should be grateful. Mary demonstrated sensitivity to the needs of others; when she noted the absence of wine at a wedding [possibly Jesus' own marriage to Mary Magdalene], she required Jesus to act in advance of his preferred timing. If it hasn't happen to you yet, know that there will be a time when you will be thrust into the middle of a conflict to see where your values lie, and you will not always be fully armed emotionally or physically to handle the onslaught of violent words that will come your way. *You might have to do things before your time too.* Jesus obeyed his mother in the small things, like turning water into wine. He didn't have to do it. He did it to honor the one making the request—his mother.

Mary aka Maria did not run from the difficult; she went with Joseph into Egypt for the census; she found Jesus at the temple when he'd run off to be with learned rabbis; she located him again as an adult, when he wasn't eating and didn't take offense at what must have seemed like a hurtful comment: "Who is my mother? Who is my brother and sister?" Mary aka Maria was a mother; she didn't turn her back on him, malign him, disown him, turn him in to the authorities, or *call for his stoning* due to familial disobedience. No, she loved him even when he made remarks that put the family in danger, like calling the high priests "vipers" and saying "you are freed from your affliction" on the Sabbath. She practiced what he preached and he preached what she practiced—like mother, like son.

*Mary's Magnificat*  
*(Luke 1:46-55)*

*And Mary said:*

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord

And my spirit *rejoices in God my Saviour;*

*Because he has looked upon the humiliation of his servant.*

Yes, from now onwards all generations will call me blessed,

For the Almighty has done great things for me.

*Holy is his name,*

*And his faithful love extends age after age to those who fear him.*

He has used the power of his arm,

He has routed the arrogant of heart.

*He has pulled down princes from their thrones and raised high the lowly.*

*He has filled the starving with good things, sent the rich away empty.*

*He has come to the help of Israel his servant, mindful of his faithful love*

—according to the promise he made our ancestors—

Of his mercy to Abraham

and to his descendents for ever.

## ARISTOTLE VS. CHRIST: A RADICAL SHIFT IN THINKING WAS SUPPOSED TO HAPPEN

To truly understand the origin of the *egregious lie* that women are inferior to men, we must look to Aristotle (384 BC-322 BC), founder of Western ideas on morality, government, ethics, biology and zoology. Forgive my being so blunt, but Aristotle had one overriding fear—that women would be able to have abundant sex since they did not require an erection. This led to the false belief that women were predatory sexual animals who could never be satisfied. Years later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas kept Aristotle's lie alive:

“In term of nature's own operation, a woman is inferior, a mistake. The agent cause that is the male seed tries to produce something complete in itself, a male in gender. But when a female is produced, this is because the agent cause is thwarted, either because of the unsuitability of the receiving matter (the mother) itself or because of some deforming interference, as from *south winds, that are too wet*, as we read in *Aristotle's Animal Conception*.”<sup>13</sup>

Given that Aristotle believed that male semen contained *all of the genetic information needed for child creation*; women were thought to be either willing vessels for a man to carry on his legacy or sexual deviants. The reasons given for disqualifying women from the priesthood have their origin in the fear of wombs and “menstrual pollution” (Leviticus 18:19). Women were thought to be “inconstant,” having “more liquid than the man.”<sup>14</sup> For this reason, women were kept outside the temple in a courtyard, and later outside the altar railing of Catholic churches, due to “ritual impurity.” In Leviticus 12:1-4 we are told women were not allowed to even *touch* anything consecrated until *33 days had passed* after childbirth. In the medieval period, “an all-male choir became the rule, leading to the acquisition of sopranos in the form of castrati. Males, even when mutilated, were less unclean than women.”<sup>15</sup> There can be no denying that the Catholic church has promoted the views of Aristotle over that of Jesus Christ using poor scientific data.

## JESUS PREACHES GOOD NEWS TO THE OUTCASTS

“Unrolling the scroll he [Jesus] found the place where it was written:

‘The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
for he has anointed me to bring the good news to the afflicted,  
He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives,  
Sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free,  
To proclaim a year of favor from the Lord.’

He then rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the assistant and sat down.

And all eyes in the synagogue were fixed on him.

Then he began to speak to them,

‘This text is being fulfilled today  
even while you are listening.’”

(Luke 4:18-21)

It is a fact that in the New Testament, the most devout men understood Jesus the least, while the women, the poor and disabled accepted and understood his message the most. There were four notable categories of religious men: the Sadducees were the religious aristocracy; they relied upon the written law (Torah) and rejected the oral law (Mishnah). The Pharisees thought purity of the law was the highest mission; worship was transferred from the temple to the home and synagogue, along with purification rites, by them. Pharisees were scholars who used both the written and oral law. Rabbi Judah the Prince compiled and published the Mishnah around 200 AD. Two commentaries on the Mishnah followed in 400 AD called the Jerusalem Talmud (Yerushalmi) and the Babylonian Talmud (Bavli). The Essenes sought to separate themselves from urban sinfulness; their writings, buried in caves near Qumran, are just now being unearthed as the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Zealots were Maccabeans who believed that military revolt was the



only answer. Jesus was unlike the Zealots who felt Jews were oppressed because they were not violent enough; he was unlike the Sadducees who wanted to assimilate and not cause trouble; he was unlike the Essenes who chose to flee into the desert and start a new society, and he was unlike the Pharisees who thought ever-closer adherence to purity laws was the golden key. Jesus read aloud the scroll and said, to the amazement of all of the above, the kingdom of God is “at hand.” Fighting, blending in, fleeing and purity laws were insufficient to halt evil and corrupt systems. Jesus advised people to be inclusive, peacemakers, and pacifists with a purpose—bringing heaven to earth, *right now*.

Women were nearly invisible to the men in all four religious groups. Rabbis avoided having conversations with women or even making eye contact with them, for fear of having sexual thoughts. Yosi ben Yochanan of Jerusalem said talking to a woman would “cause a man to go idle from the study of the *Torah*, so that his end will be that he will inherit Gehenna (hell)” (Mishna Tractate Avot, 1: 5). The “blind/bruised and bleeding Pharisees” were so named because they frequently walked off into ditches and into sharp objects to avoid seeing women who might be in the middle of their menstrual cycle. But Jesus, *used his eyes to see women*. He looked at women, stopped to acknowledge their touch, validated their lives, intervened to prevent violence against them, and praised their acts of generosity. Where did he get the ability to see the other sex as made in the image of God?

We certainly have to credit his mother and father for teaching him discernment and mercy. Joseph practiced mercy when he found out Mary was pregnant; he did not want her to be exposed to public disgrace, which would have led to her being stoned to death for adultery. Mary discerned the need for wine at a wedding in Cana. Thirty years after his birth, Jesus was faced with a situation that put both values to the test. A woman, caught in the act of adultery had her

life held in the balance by rabbis eager to enforce a sex-biased law. Jesus used discernment to extend mercy, just as Joseph did. It is Joseph and Mary who taught Jesus to follow God's laws first and Caesar's laws second. *Mercy* became the hallmark of Jesus' ministry, not judgment. The only people who heard words of condemnation from Jesus *were rabbis*, whom he proclaimed to be "like whitewashed tombs that look handsome on the outside, but inside are full of the bones of the dead and every kind of corruption" (Matthew 23:27). These men he called "vipers" and "extortionists" to their face. Every idea people had about the following terms—king, servant, weakness, strength, male and female—was about to be turned on its head by one man who redefined what "made in God's image" meant.

When Caesar wanted to announce a victory in battle, he sent out his army with "good news." Jesus used this same term for a new battle of the heart and mind that would lead to a radical change in worldview. He dedicated himself to an all out assault on the traditional concepts of family, wealth, honor, status, religiosity, and gender roles. His parables exposed the powerful, arrogant and impatient and drew near the powerless, meek and long-suffering. He proved that no human system could be trusted and all government systems were idolatrous with their own graven images and nationalistic aims that often generated violence. In his new kingdom, it was wrong to be patriotic, focused on self-interest, biased against the disabled, preferential to the rich, ritualistic versus compassionate, oppressive to women, hostile to people of other cultures, and uncaring toward the poor and widows. He mocked the religious establishment, whom he held directly responsible for adding burdens to an already suffering people. He mocked the scribes for arguing day and night over the intricacies of rituals and rules. He reminded people of the many prophets before him who had exhorted Israel to repent of their hard heartedness and were all harshly rejected.

Jesus knew that the solution to the Hebrew's oppression wasn't the violent overthrow of the Romans by a comparable military force; he knew that idea was doomed from the start, despite the call from his disciples to become their military leader. Jesus also knew making a scapegoat of sinners and prostitutes would not bring about the kingdom. He proved that the more radical way of exposing injustice—*by bringing it into the light where it could not hide*—was the answer. From the very start of his mission, it was clear that cultural identities and false world-views were about to collide on a trajectory with a new commandment that would *replace the old*. The clergy would no longer have control of the message, for the message would be put within people's hearts, giving them direct access to God. In this new kingdom where “the first will be last,” Jesus promised, “the last shall be first.” A person's status would be determined by how one treated the “least of these”: the poor, the needy, the disabled, children, and outcasts. Those who were outcasts would be blessed; those in power would become outcasts. This message must have had a *chilling effect* on those living a comfortable life without concern for any but themselves!

*The Beatitudes*  
(*Matthew 5:1-10*)

How blessed are the poor in spirit:

The kingdom of Heaven is theirs

Blessed are the gentle:

They shall have the earth as inheritance

Blessed are those who mourn:

They shall be comforted.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for uprightness:

They shall have their fill.

Blessed are the merciful:

They will have mercy shown them.

Blessed are the pure in heart:

They shall see God.

Blessed are the peacemakers:

They shall be recognized as children of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted in

The cause of uprightness:

The kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

Jesus described a new worldview where “nations will not lift sword against nation; no longer will they learn how to make war” (Isaiah 2:4). As Brian McLaren beautifully lays out in *The Secret Message of Jesus*, the concept of “at hand” removes all doubt as to *when* to begin to bring heaven to earth.<sup>16</sup> When are we to eradicate poverty—right now! When are we to stop the rape of mother earth for resources—right now! When is it time to provide the necessities of life to all people on this planet—right now! When is it time for equity in taxation so the middle and lower classes are not oppressed—right now! When is it time for a jubilee, a forgiveness of foreign debt, so aliens are not made into indentured servants for life—right now! When is it time to put more money into education than into our prison system—right now! Jesus’ indictment of his apostles—“Are you still so dull?”—still makes for an appropriate sermon topic. Women, in particular, have forgotten that Jesus came to set them and their daughters free from having only one identity—a vessel for a male heir—at the expense of soul building. Jesus said “what God

has loosed, do not bind up again” but we are still binding our hands and feet with false notions about what is “women’s work,” often vexed like Martha.

Jesus broke frequently with legalism with this provocative statement: “You’ve heard how it was said...*but I say this to you*” (Matthew 5:38-42) or “I say to you *who are listening*” (Luke 6:27-35). Jesus made clear that truth was to be taken for authority, not authority for truth. He broke with the Pharisees’ purity laws almost daily. He didn’t wash his hands; he ate with “outcasts.” He healed on the Sabbath. He did not avoid talking to women; he did not avoid those with menstrual blood issues; he did not avoid those dead or dying, and he definitely did not rise in the morning and offend his mother by saying the Talmud berakot/prayer: “*Praise YHVH who has not made me a woman.*” Unlike rabbis who devoured the property of widows, Jesus collected money on their behalf and assured their survival. According to most rabbis, bleeding women could not be touched by their husbands, nor could they attend annual celebrations, or even light the Sabbath candles. Jesus never considered these women “nidah” (outcasts), as this story shows:

“Now there was a woman who had suffered for twelve years; after long and painful treatment under various doctors, she had spent all she had without being any the better for it; in fact, she was getting worse. She had heard about Jesus and she came up through the crowd and touched his cloak from behind, thinking: ‘If I can just touch his clothes, I shall be saved.’ All at once the source of bleeding dried up, and she felt in herself that she was cured of her complaint. And at once aware of the power that had gone out of him, Jesus turned around in the crowd and said, ‘Who touched my clothes?’ His disciples said to him, ‘You see the crowd pressing in on you, how can you ask, who touched me?’ But, he continued to look all around to see who had done it. Then the woman came forward,

frightened and trembling [because of the purity laws upheld by most rabbis] and she fell at his feet. ‘My daughter,’ he said, ‘your faith has restored you to health; go in peace and be free of your complaint.’” (Mark 5:25-34)

Most rabbis considered the dead “unclean” but Jesus resurrected the dead before unbelieving crowds. In John 11:35, Jesus arrived at Mary and Martha’s house four days after the death of Lazarus; all had lost hope, and Jesus wept when he saw Mary completely distraught. There was recrimination in her statement: “Lord, if you had been here my brother would not have died.” Even Martha’s comment—“by now he will smell”—did not give him pause, however; Jesus called Lazarus forth from the tomb and broke with purity laws to do so. The cures at Gennesaret were made to both men and women who were lying out in open spaces awaiting on stretchers the touch of Jesus (Mark 6:53-56); they were each healed according to their faith. Jesus healed the daughter of a Syrian-Phoenician woman in Tyre who was possessed by a neurological disease/devil. Jesus even cured those who were skeptical. When the twelve-year-old daughter of Jairus, president of the synagogue, was found dead, the townspeople ridiculed Jesus for saying she was merely “asleep.” Jesus simply took her hand and said, “Child, get up!” (Luke 8:40-52) and she came back to life. Jesus also healed Peter’s mother (a widow) who was ill with fever; when he touched her hand, she was so completely revived she got up and began to serve him (Matthew 8:14-15).

Jesus advised his disciples to have “compassion as God is compassionate.” It is important for us to understand what that word means. “Com” means with; “passionate” means to feel with; “racham” is translated as womb and “shad” is translated as breasts. So, in translation, what Jesus said is saying is this: God is like a womb, nurturing and caring. *Be womb-like*, like God. *Be motherly.*<sup>17</sup> Genesis 49:25 says: “El Shaddai [God with breasts] who blesses you, blessings of

heaven above; blessings of the breast and womb.” Jeremiah 31:20 says: “Therefore my *womb* trembles for him. I will show motherly compassion upon him” A womb protects, a womb nourishes; a womb loves male and female children *without deference for gender*.

As one sent by God to correct inaccurate interpretations of the law, Jesus broke with Mosaic law and healed an eighty-year-old crippled woman on the Sabbath. Jesus exposed the fact that church leaders would rather remove an ox from a ditch than heal an old woman on a holy day. Jesus made clear that “loving your neighbor” always took precedence over following purity laws and customs of habit (Luke 13:10-17). For men who had built their entire careers upon following exacting purity laws, this must have caused quite a furor.

Jesus was not pleased with the temple because it had become a profit-making venture—a “den of thieves” who questioned his authority. He did travel from town to town, speaking in synagogues but the most memorable of his sermons were delivered on hillsides, out near water, in the streets and in people’s homes. He went out among the people and ate with outcasts, tax collectors and prostitutes; he made them a part of his family. He did not toe the line with the Zealots, Sadducees, Essenes or Pharisees. What was set in stone was altered by parables, and a new law of social justice accompanied by mercy and compassion replaced “an eye for an eye.” He didn’t send people away hungry after they’d ventured far to hear him. He never said, “Go to some *social service agency* with a *tin cup in hand* and *beg for assistance*” as those who profess to have “family values” are apt to do today. A few fish fed thousands at his command; he taught his disciples to feed his flock with literal food, not just pious words.

Elderly women, who typically relied upon their sons to care for them in their old age, were not forgotten by Jesus. Without a husband or a son, widows were forced to “glean the corners of the fields” to survive, as we learned from the story of Ruth and Naomi. A woman’s

dowry represented a small sense of security, if the Levirate law were not obeyed. Jesus noticed these women, vulnerable in their plight for justice, just as he noticed his own widowed mother at the foot of the cross. Joseph was far older than Mary when they married; it is evident from scripture that Mary spent much of her adult life as a widow. This undeniably left an impression on Jesus who promised punishment to those who reneged on their promise to provide for widows:

“These are the men who devour the prosperity of widows and for show offer long prayers. The more severe will be the sentence they receive” (Mark 12:40).

Jesus started his ministry with the story of Elijah’s visit to the widow of Zarephath. This widow lived in Sidonia and was impoverished and without hope; she planned to eat one last meal with her son *and die*. Her story was told by Jesus to the men of Zarephath to confront their faithlessness. Jesus enraged and shocked the crowd by saying that the faithful one was not only *not a man*, but a woman from the city of Sidonia (the location of the Tower of Babel). The “I can assure you” speaks to the hard-heartedness of the Hebrews, who thereafter tried to throw Jesus off a cliff:

“There were many widows in Israel, *I can assure you*, in Elijah’s day, when heaven remained shut for three years and six months, and a great famine raged throughout the land, but Elijah was not sent to any of these; he was sent to a widow of Zarephath, a town in Sidonia” (Luke 4:25).

Jesus made clear that Elijah arrived just in time for this woman, who was given flour and oil without limit, when she did not withhold her final provisions (1 Kings 17:8-16).

The widow of Shunem was another of Jesus’ favorite parables to teach mercy; she sought first to serve, by creating for Elisha [successor to Elijah] a small walled room for his visits



through town; her simple faith was rewarded with the gift of a son to provide for her in her old age (2 Kings: 4:8-37, 8:1-6). When a brain aneurism killed the child, Elisha resurrected him by stretching himself out on the boy, mouth to mouth, eye to eye, and hands to hands, acting like a human bellows. Her simple story of faith was juxtaposed against that of Naaman, a proud and important military general with leprosy (2 Kings 5:1-9). Advised by his *female servant* to seek the healer, Elisha, Naaman traveled quite a distance and expected to be waited upon by the prophet. Elisha tested the general's faith by sending word that he was to bathe in the Jordan to cure his leprosy; Naaman failed to accept that a *Jewish river* could heal him and wanted the prophet to "come out to him" in the flesh before doing his will. A woman's testimony is proven to be the correct one [as we will see again in the New Testament in the stories of Zechariah and Elizabeth and Joseph and Mary].

In the story of the widow of Nain (Luke 7:11-17): Jesus takes pity upon a widow who has lost her only son:

"It happened that soon afterwards he went to a town called Nain, accompanied by his disciples and a great number of people. Now when he was near the gate of the town there was a dead man being carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow. And a considerable number of the townspeople was with her. When the Lord saw her he felt sorry for her and said to her, 'Don't cry.' Then he went up and touched the bier and the bearers stood still, and he said, 'Young man, I tell you: get up!' And the dead young man sat up and began to talk, and Jesus *gave him to his mother*. Everyone was filled with awe and glorified God saying, 'A great prophet has risen among us; God has visited his people.' And this view of him spread throughout Judea and all over the countryside."

The story of the Widow's Mite (Luke 21:1-4) has been used far too often on "pledge Sunday" to

increase tithing potential, rather than to teach a lesson on compassion toward widows. We meet the widow right after Jesus has condemned the scribes who “walk about in long robes and love to be greeted respectfully in the market square, to take the front seats in the synagogues and the places of honor at banquets” (Luke 20:45-47). She was one of many whose property had been “devoured” by the scribes. Jesus was not glad, but saddened, to see her “put all she had to live on” into the treasury, *when the temple had done nothing to help her*. He took great offense to the use of tithes to support fancy architecture, rather than people. We can discern that Jesus felt this way because this story was placed between the description of the faux holy men and a disciple’s startling comment about *glorious buildings*. Jesus reprimanded his disciple, stating: “All these things you are staring at now—the time will come when not a single stone will be left on another; everything will be destroyed” (Luke 21:6). A more accurate interpretation of the Widow’s Mite’s story is this: do not be absorbed with building edifices to God. It’s helping people—like widows in desperate need—that truly glorifies the creator. Widows were told to persevere despite outer appearances; “knock and the door shall be opened,” Jesus said (Matthew 7:7). In his parable of the widow in Luke 18:1-8, women were taught to be persistent, *even obnoxious if need be*, in the pursuit of justice. *Let all who have ears hear!*

“‘There was a judge in a certain town,’ he said, ‘who had neither fear of God nor respect for anyone. In the same town there was also a widow who kept on coming to him and saying, ‘I want justice from you against my enemy!’ For a long time he refused, but at last he said to himself, ‘Even though I have neither fear of God nor respect for any human person, I must give this widow her just rights since she keeps pestering me, or she will come and slap me in the face.’ And the Lord said, ‘you notice what the unjust judge has to say? Now, will not God see justice done to his elect if they keep calling him day and

night even though he still delays to help them? I promise you, he will see justice done to them and done speedily. But when the Son of man comes, will he find any faith on earth?””

Widows were not his only concern, however. Jesus assisted those who were being divorced for frivolous reasons, like their age or the way they cooked last night’s dinner, or their inability to have children. Given Jesus’ unusual birth and his illegitimacy by Jewish standards, divorce was an issue he took seriously:

“Have you not read that the Creator from the beginning made them male and female and that he said: ‘This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh. They are no longer two, therefore, but one flesh. So then, what God has united, human beings must not divide’” (Matthew 19:4-5, Mark 10:2-12).

Even his own disciples revolted at the concept that divorce wasn’t a man’s prerogative: “Then, why did Moses command that a writ of dismissal should be given in cases of divorce?” they proclaimed. Jesus chipped away at patriarchy with this statement:

“It was because you were so hard-hearted that he Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but it was not like this from the beginning (Matthew 19:8). But from the beginning he made them male and female” (Mark 10:6). Back in the house the disciples questioned him again about this, and he said to them: “Whoever divorces his wife and marries another is guilty of adultery against her. And if a woman divorces her husband and marries another, she is guilty of adultery too” (Matthew 10:9-12).

The phrase “not like this from the beginning” refers to Eden where the Mother and Father in YHVH co-designed the first earthling and separated it into two co-equal human beings; Jesus

restored to women the dignity they deserved as creatures made in God's image, much to men's dismay. While the four rabbinical groups kept women hidden and veiled from the world to live out their lives in separate apartments, Jesus sought women out in public places, engaged them in conversation, and told one woman his most important secret:

*"That [the messiah] is who I am, I who speak to you"* (John 4:25–26).

The city of Samaria was an Old Testament capital. Samaritans were despised by the Israelites due to their intermarriage with gentiles and their belief that Mount Gerizim (versus Jerusalem) was the appointed place for sacrifice. Jesus taught that the kingdom of God advanced by reconciling enemies. When he stopped to speak to an outcast at a well in the heat of the noon sun, he was not doing so by accident. He made a deliberate choice to go through Samaria and address one particular Samaritan woman who became an apostle to the Samaritans about a God who gives living water that heals the soul. Her story was placed right after the story of Nicodemus, a Pharisee who was unable [or unwilling] to comprehend what Jesus meant when he said: "You must be born again." Nicodemus thought that he had to literally go back into his mother's womb (action), when Jesus was talking about a change of attitude. The woman at the well, however, accepted the idea of living water without argument. A well was a place used for weddings, and it was no mistake that a well was chosen by Jesus, the bridegroom (Genesis 24:10-16, Genesis 29:9-11). [It is to be noted that Miriam also celebrated passage of the Sea of Reeds with dancing on the other side of the "living" water's edge (Exodus 15:21).]

What Jesus told the woman at the well was against the teachings of the Zealots, Saducees, Essenes, and Pharisees, as well as the false religions of "alien gods" that required child sacrifice and cultic sexuality. He stated: "Believe me, woman, the time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor Jerusalem" (John 4:21).

In Hebrews 8:10-12, we read of a *new covenant within that replaces the old which is external*:

*“In their minds I shall plant my laws, writing them on their hearts.*

*Then I shall be their God, and they shall be my people.*

*There shall be no further need for each to teach his neighbor,*

*And each his brother, saying ‘Learn to know the Lord!’*

*No, they will all know me, from the least to the greatest,*

*Since I shall forgive their guilt*

*and never more call their sins to mind.”*

Just imagine how the thought of a “god within” threatened the temple leaders...*as it continues to do today*. One minute people were arguing over which place was better for worship, and then God in the flesh corrected them and stated that location was irrelevant; God was to be found *within*. The need for sin offerings would soon be eradicated with his singular sacrifice on the cross; priests would no longer have to sacrifice small and big animals on altars to absolve people from their sins; people would be able to go directly to God and confess their needs. What was accomplished by priests behind closed doors, with their backs to their congregants, was changed into face-forward communion, shared without distinction by sex. In return, Jesus asked his disciples to remember what he’d accomplished and further his mission to help the “least of these”—the widows, the poor, and the needy. No longer was God accessible only to the Levites, but as near as our next breath and directly accessible by all. This new priesthood of all believers could not be confined to a building and disciples set forth to spread *that message* like wildfire.

The word “gnosis” continues to be feared by the religious establishment like “meditation” and “chakras” because these words change the locus of control from an external priest who

intercedes on your behalf to a fully accessible God within and written on your heart. To be certain, the early Gnostics did not get every idea about God correct, but let's be honest...*neither has the traditional church* which has justified and tolerated both slavery and segregation! We are not to go on auto-pilot and unquestioningly ingest information about God from the pulpit [or books], but to know God as an intimate companion in our heart. In fact, we are told that if we do not know God intimately, we do not know God at all. Jesus hinted at the possibilities, if we do this inner soul work: "Is it not written in your Law: *I said, you are gods?*" (John 10:34).

He said we would be capable of the same (or greater) miracles than he with the help of direct wisdom gleaned from the Holy Spirit:

"In all truth I tell you, whoever believes in me will perform the same works as I do myself, and will perform even greater works, because I am going to the Father" (John 14:12).

There are too many top-selling books in Christian bookstores today that continue to promote the egregious lie that "male headship" is God's design, instead of egalitarianism. Every year new books [propaganda] are published to tell a woman to be subservient to a man *as if he is God*. Jesus was painfully aware that the men he chose for his inner circle were not God with a capital "G." Jesus reminded his disciples, however, that they were made in God's image and that holy scripture used the word "gods" of those people "*to whom the word of God was addressed.*" He even went further saying, "*Scripture cannot be set aside*" (John 10:35). Therefore, both women and men are capable of doing great things when they become conduits for God's will to be done on earth. The charge in Acts to make "disciples of all nations" was undoubtedly painful to the ears of the Hebrews who believed separation was a requirement for purity. Jesus upset their views on identity and family. The kingdom of heaven was "at hand" and the former traditions

laid out in Leviticus were shown to be a stumbling block. Jesus was correct when he anticipated a clash between family members, some of whom would choose to be inclusive and others, like the “good son” in the parable of prodigal son, would prefer to remain intolerant and not enter a kingdom where the playing field was leveled. There are many today who feel the same and call such egalitarianism “socialism,” despising even the words “and justice for all.” Jesus made allowances for those who yet value possessions with this promise: "And everyone who has left houses, brothers, sisters, father, mother, children or land for the sake of my name, will receive a hundred times as much, and also inherit eternal life" (Matthew 19:29).

The violent practice of “an eye for an eye” condoned by the priests was replaced with “love your neighbor as yourself” (Mark 12:30-31), walk an extra mile (Matthew 5:41-42), and stand bare before your enemy to teach him/her empathy (Matthew 5:40). [FYI: The legend of the Lady of Godiva in 1040 AD proves this tactic works; it is said that she stripped naked and rode her horse through town to make her husband rescind oppressive tax laws. *She shamed him into making needed change.*] Jesus’ disapproval of the zealots’ call to warfare was apparent in his refusal to tolerate violence in the Garden of Gethsemane. “All who live by the sword, die by the sword,” he said (Matthew 26:52). Centuries of ethnic cleansing were called into question with that one statement. Far from accepting Jesus’ call to pacifism, the Zealots engaged in a final battle in 73 AD on a hill known as Masada, a mountaintop fortress. Jesus made a fervent plea: “Jerusalem! Jerusalem! If *only you knew what makes for peace*” (Luke 19:42) which fell on deaf ears. Nine hundred and sixty-seven men, women, and children committed mass suicide rather than be captured by the Romans. The prophet Hosea scandalized society by marrying a prostitute at God’s command (Hosea 1:3); Isaiah preached for three years in the nude (Isaiah 20). The words of the prophets cannot be watered down; they stand as written to rankle the status quo!

## MARY MAGDALENE aka Miriamne, MARTHA and LAZARUS: SIBLINGS

Magdalene refers to the name of the town of Magdala, which is translated as “tower.” The Magdalene was a well-bred and wealthy woman; her father was Syrus; her mother was Eucharis and her siblings were Martha and Lazarus. Out of their substantial means, they supported Jesus’ ministry. Miriamne, the Master was conflated with other women in the Bible and made into a “sinner” by Pope Gregory in the 6<sup>th</sup> century to build a case for an all-male hierarchy. The masses relied upon their priest to interpret the word [as many do today], so errors of omission and inclusion *continued unchecked for centuries*. When Pope Gregory framed the Magdalene by saying she was a sinner and the oil used to anoint Jesus was also used for “forbidden acts” (Hom 33, Pl 76:1239), the masses believed him, and those that did not were called “heretics” and killed. Gregory lumped together all of the stories that included the name Mary with those named prostitutes and devised one person—Mary Magdalene. Not only has the Magdalene been deprived of her good name, but women throughout the world have been deprived of an exemplary disciple. *Three hundred and eighteen* church fathers were instrumental in the cover-up. The Council at Nicea removed all evidence that Mary Magdalene aka Miriamne was Jesus’ chosen successor and Peter and Paul were elevated instead. The Inquisition of 1229 AD ensured that newly written creeds were obeyed by force, and bonfires destroyed *nearly* all of the evidence, testifying to Mary’s ministry.

It is interesting to note that although there are many men who erred in the Bible, none of them have been denigrated with such ferocity as Mary Magdalene. The hatred of the Roman Catholic church for women in leadership roles continues to be palpable, and the denial of the existence of female priests is utterly unfounded; ancient murals, such as “Franco Panis” in the Catacomb of Priscilla, prove female priests existed in the 1<sup>st</sup> century [See appendix]. It was not



until 1969 that the Catholic church finally confessed that Mary Magdalene was not doing vile things with oil; she was, they admitted, the “apostle to the apostles.” Her good name has only been partially restored, however, since many of the “lost” books that include her name continue to be banned from their accepted reading list! In 2020, *without the fear of being burned at the stake looming large*, it is time to ask “Where is it written?” Finally free to learn about Mary Magdalene, we should do so unafraid to discover the truth about her. The aging male priesthood that has doggedly kept the role of this important disciple buried has its *own penance* to attend to for abusing their high seats of power and demonstrating callous disregard for the most vulnerable members of the flock—*innocent children*; Thekla and others fought for religious freedom on women’s behalf in the 1<sup>st</sup> century; *we should not be afraid to exercise it in the 21<sup>st</sup>*.

The term “the beloved disciple” was used eight times in the Gospel of John, but it’s only in the forbidden books that we learn the identity of the beloved disciple as *Mary Magdalene*. Many do not know that Mary Magdalene was a disciple of John the Baptist before she became a disciple of Jesus. There are two disciples of John who were present at Jesus’ baptism—Andrew and an “unnamed disciple”<sup>18</sup> who was Mary Magdalene/Miramne. Unlike the male disciples who were never clear about Jesus’ mission and fought over who would be seated next to him in heaven, Mary Magdalene was his disciple with greatest insight. Jesus helped Mary overcome the seven common venial sins or “demons” of greed, pride, sloth, anger, fear, pride, gluttony, and envy. She was not a schizophrenic or a whore, as she has been portrayed by the Catholic church. Jesus shocked other rabbis and men of the time by teaching women like the Magdalene about the kingdom of God. Jesus recognized that women needed to be elevated as persons made in the image and likeness of God, equal to men in the sight of God, for justice to be achieved.

Sister to Lazarus and Mary Magdalene, Martha also thirsted for living water from Jesus.

According to Luke (10:38-42), the three siblings offered their home for meals and instruction.

Jesus taught them equally about the kingdom of God and ignored his culture's biases:

“Martha, Martha,” the Lord answered, “you worry and fret about so many things and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her” (Luke 10:42).

Jesus' message to Martha should be shouted to 21<sup>st</sup> century women who weekly consume “women's magazines” that focus on minutia to make women unhappy and inspire conspicuous consumption. Jesus' message may have sounded brutal to Martha, but he was simply telling her not to degrade her soul by worrying about cultural minutia. By sitting at Jesus' feet, Mary demonstrated to Martha the more important work. Martha and Lazarus were present when “Mary took a pound of costly perfume made of pure nard, anointed Jesus' feet, and wiped them with her hair. The house was filled with the scent of the ointment” (John 12:3).

Jesus resurrected Lazarus to teach Mary, Martha and Lazarus to have faith beyond all reasonable understanding. He could have simply comforted the sisters over the loss of their brother, but his intent was to prove to these three disciples that he was Lord over both life and death (John 11:1-44). He didn't want these siblings to fear the future; he may even have been forewarning them of his own death and resurrection and comforting them with the knowledge of his return. Mary Magdalene, Martha and Lazarus, were more than friends to Jesus; they were witnesses to his message about an eternal soul that never dies and love which is at its core.

Oral tradition states that Lazarus, Martha and Mary Magdalene were thrown in prison after the execution of James (Jesus' brother) but escaped to the Britannic Isles.<sup>19</sup> According to Cardinal Baronius: this was the passenger list: “St. Mary, wife of Clopas, St. Eutoprius, St. Salome, St. Martial, St. Tophiumus, St. Cleon, St. Saturniunus, St. Maximin, St. Sidonius, St.

Joseph of Arimathea, Mary mother of Jesus, St. Mary Magdalene, St. Martha, St. Lazarus and Marcella, the Bethany sisters maid.”<sup>20</sup>

The British historian, Gildas, said of their escape:

“Meanwhile, these islands received the beams of light—that is the holy precepts of Christ, the True Son, at the latter part, as we know of the reign of Tiberius Caesar, in whose time this religion was propagated without impediment and death threatened to those who interfered with its professors.” Four years after Christ’s crucifixion, around AD 37, Joseph [of Arimathea] and his companions built of wood or “withies and reeds” a circular church. This was the first in Britain and perhaps the first above-ground church in all Christendom.”<sup>21</sup>

Mary Magdalene/Miriamne is said to have lived her remaining years as a healer, residing in a cave at Saint Baume, until she died. She is often pictured wearing green, the color of the heart chakra and heart energy field in the Tree of Life. She is remembered on July 22 for a pogrom that occurred at the behest of the Catholic Church on that same date in 1209. On that horrible day, all of the inhabitants of Beziers—20,000 in all—were killed for their devotion to Mary Magdalene.<sup>22</sup> “Notre Dame” means “Our Lady” in French and refers to Miramne, not the mother of Jesus, as is often thought. The French town of Les-Saintes-Mer in southern France celebrates an annual festival in honor of Saint Sarah, the *daughter of Mary Magdalene/Miramne and Jesus*. Sarah is called the Egyptian because she was born in Alexandria. A stained glass window in Kilmore church at Dervaig on the Scottish Isle of Mull depicts a *pregnant Mary* holding Jesus’ hand<sup>23</sup> [see appendix]. There are also stained glass windows at the church of Saint Martin in Limoux, France that depict their *marriage ceremony in royal garb*; at the same church, men in another panel are attacking with spears *spiritually-advanced women in halos* [view these online].

## MARY SALOME

Mary Salome had two sons with Zebedee, named James and John, who were in the fishing business with Andrew and Peter. All were disciples of Jesus. It is to be remembered that Salome was the one who checked Mary digitally to see if she was a virgin or had committed adultery against Joseph. Salome also acted as a midwife to Mary in the *Protoevangelion of James*. Mary Salome asked Jesus directly on behalf of her sons, if they could sit on either side of him in paradise (Matthew 20:20-23); that petition was mercifully not granted. In Mark 15:40-41, Mary Salome was named as one of the women present at the crucifixion:

“There were some women watching from a distance. Among them were Mary of Magdala, Mary who was the mother of James and Joset, and Salome. These used to follow him and look after him when he was in Galilee.”

The parallel passage in Matthew 27:56 reads as follows: “Among them was Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses (aka Joseph), and the mother of Zebedee’s children.” In the *Gospel of Mary*, Mary Salome was one of the women who went to the tomb to anoint Jesus for burial. She is remembered as a good servant. In the *Gospel of Thomas*, she vowed to Jesus: “I am your disciple.” *The Gospel of Bartholemew*, also called *The Book of the Resurrection of Christ*, states the following about Salome; notice redacted women’s names in italics, as well:

“Early in the morning of the Lord’s day, the women went to the tomb. They were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James whom Jesus delivered out the hand of Satan, Salome who tempted him, Mary who ministered to him and Martha her sister, Joanna (al. Susanna) the wife of Chuza who had renounced the marriage bed, *Bernice* who was healed of an issue of blood in Capernaum, *Lia (Leah)* the widow whose son he raised at Nain, and the woman to whom he said, ‘Thy sins which are many are forgiven thee.’”<sup>24</sup>

## MARY “of CLOPAS”

There isn't much information known about this Mary. Her husband was either the brother of Joseph, or she was the sister of Joseph. There is much mystery that surrounds her identity. The term “of Clopas” can mean “of the family of Clopas” in addition to “wife of Clopas” or “sibling of Clopas.” She is most often believed to have been the sister of Miriam, mother of Jesus, when she is not being thought of as her sister-in-law. She is one of the many Mary's who were constantly found by Jesus' side throughout his ministry.

The term “Alphaeus” is also often found in conjunction with her name. “Adelphe” means sister in Greek. Was she Mary's sister or her sister-in-law? We do not have enough information at this point to conclusively know either way. She is very hard to place in the family tree for this reason.

From the *Apocryphal Gospel of Philip*, we do know that Mary was one of the ardent followers of Jesus:

“There were three who always walked with the Lord, Mary, his mother, and his sister, and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion. His sister, his mother, and his companion were all Mary.”<sup>25</sup>

Mary of Clopas has also been called “the other Mary” and her son was Simeon. Mary Clopas may have also been like a stepmother to the children of Miriam after Joseph died; they may all have considered themselves to be *like brothers*, for this reason. Clopas may have been a Zadokite high priest like Zechariah. A document found in the archive of Genizah in the main synagogue of Cairo called the “Zadokite Document” which dates back to the first century AD may, in the future, shed more light upon the role of the high priest and the followers of “The Way.”

## GENDER EQUALITY, AS JESUS TAUGHT IT

It is not discussed often in sermon topics, but early Christians used to rescue and care for babies that were "turned out" for the sin of being born a girl. Aristotle's belief that women were "failed men" led to sex-selective genocide. In this letter from a Roman citizen to his wife, dated from 1 BC, we can see how female babies were treated:

"I am still in Alexandria. I beg and plead with you to take care of our little child, and as soon as we receive wages, I will send them to you. In the meantime, if you give birth, if it is a boy, let it live; if it is a girl, *expose it*."<sup>26</sup>

Jesus wanted discrimination that exposed female children to be eradicated. Egalitarianism was his final goal; feminism was his first, necessary step in that direction. Jesus said this transition from patriarchy to egalitarianism was imperative for his second coming. Breaking with a *tradition* focused on the "sons of Abraham," Jesus used the term "daughter of Abraham" (Luke 13:16) and "daughters of Jerusalem" on the way to the cross (Luke 23:28) and whenever he healed and preached to specifically elevate women and make them men's equal. When Martha was upset with Mary for not helping with *traditional* women's work, Jesus made it quite clear that daughters of Abraham were to practice discipleship first. Jesus' inclusion of women as disciples was shocking to his male disciples and caused a stir as he travelled the countryside with single women and widows, who provided for him out of their own finances. He took a position in stark contrast to Rabbi Eleizer, member of the Sanhedrin in the 1<sup>st</sup> century who was famously known for saying, "Let the law be burned rather than entrusted to a woman."

[In my opinion, women were to some extent vindicated when Eleizer's fiery views led to his being *excommunicated* over the issue of whether a traditional *oven* used to bake *bread*—both part of women's identity according to rabbis of the time—could become *ritually unclean*.]

In Mark 7:8-9, Jesus' made known his low opinion of man-made traditions:

“How ingeniously you get around the commandment of God to preserve your own tradition!”

Unlike other rabbis who avoided women for fear of being contaminated, Jesus saw them, spoke to them, healed them, raised them from the dead, and promised them that his kingdom would include them. Jesus valued what was hidden in a woman's heart, not her ability to procreate. His parables used examples familiar to women: a field (as in Proverbs Noble Woman), yeast, pearls and coins/drachmas in Matthew 13:33, 13:44-48 and Luke 15:8. Keep in mind that in the last story, Jesus *projected the image of God onto the woman looking for a drachma*, proving that Jesus was an unabashed feminist.<sup>27</sup>

- “The kingdom is like the yeast a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour till it was leavened all through.” What was formerly used to describe the inflated egos of priests is used as the source of salvation, at the hands of a woman!
- “The kingdom is like a treasure hidden in a field which someone has found, he hides it gain, goes off in joy, sells everything he owns and buys the field.”
- “The kingdom is like a merchant looking for fine pearls; when he finds one of great value, he goes and sells everything he owns and buys it.”
- “What woman with ten drachmas would not, if she lost one, light a lamp and sweep out the house, and search thoroughly till she found it? And then, when she had found it, call together her friends and neighbors, saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found the drachma I lost.’”

Jesus changed the covenant of male circumcision to water baptism to include women:

“Every one of you that has been baptized has been clothed in Christ. There can be neither

Jew nor Greek, there can be neither slave nor freeman, there can be neither male nor female—for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:27-28).

James 3:13-18 speaks of the same evil of disharmony which is spoken of in the Kabbalah:

“Where there is jealousy and ambition, there are also *disharmony and wickedness* of every kind, whereas the wisdom that comes *down from above* is essentially something *pure*; it is also peaceable, kindly and considerate; it is full of mercy and shows itself by doing good; nor is there any trace of partiality or hypocrisy in it. The peace sown by peacemakers brings a harvest of *justice*.”

The redacted *Gospel of Thomas 22:5* speaks in an even more direct way about balancing female and male energies to eradicate sexism:

“When you make the two one, and when you make the inside like the outside and the outside like the inside, and the above like the below, and when you make the male and the female *one and the same*...”<sup>28</sup>

Even in the *Nicene Creed*, it says “et homo factus est” which is translated as “and he became human.” It does not say, “and he became male” [virile].<sup>29</sup>

When Jesus was asked when his kingdom would come, he replied that it would arrive when sexism, racism and cultural biases no longer existed. When men stop exalting macho, violent behavior and women stop exalting weakness and pleasing men, then heaven will come down to earth. The macho man is prone to dominate by force; the passive woman never works up the courage to confront injustice; both are out of step with heaven’s plan. The 21<sup>st</sup> century church could do far more to assist in the overthrow of gender biases that keep people from knowing God as both masculine and feminine if it were not so worried about the handful of Pharisees who yet move in lockstep to enforce man-made traditions, crying: “We’ve always done it this way!”



Egalitarianism was always Jesus' intention. In Matthew 19:10-12, Jesus held a discussion with his disciples about marriage. As I mentioned earlier, he advised them not to marry unless they were willing to cleave to just one woman for their entire life. Realizing the loss of freedom that was implied, one of the disciples asked him if it was better still not to marry at all. Jesus replied as follows: "There are eunuchs born so from their mother's womb...there are eunuchs made so by human agency, and there are eunuchs *who have made themselves so* for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven." Note the phrase "born so," indicating *God created them so*. Note also they "have made themselves so for the sake of the Kingdom of God." Now turn to Acts 8:26-40 where Philip is told by the Holy Spirit to join the eunuch's chariot and baptize him. It may be shocking to some, but it is clear from this passage that the kingdom's inclusivity includes those caught between two worlds—those men who act like women, and women who act like men—our modern gays and lesbians. Many men apparently interpreted Jesus instruction literally and made themselves a eunuch to avoid being consumed with lust. "The criminalization of eunuchs in the church at the council of Nicea is testimony to the degree to which castration was practiced."<sup>30</sup> The call to become like Jesus attacked at the very core of a patriarchal society and a man's physical identity, along with the Aristotelic vision:

"The taunt of eunuch was meant to accuse him and his disciples of not conforming to the social expectation, indeed the social demand to be married and produce children. But what was meant as a jeer was transformed into something to be admired."<sup>31</sup>

However it was a change of heart Jesus was *really after*; he never made becoming a eunuch a requirement. Actual emasculation was only suggested for men *without any self control*. [It is interesting that so many priests felt they were incapable of controlling their lustful thoughts and feared acting on them that castration became necessary.] Jesus made the same extreme point in

Matthew 5:27-30; in sum, if a man cannot leave his eyes and hands where they belong, Jesus states, it would be better for him to “lose one part” of himself than to have his “whole body go to hell.”

Jesus said small children who were pure of heart would enter heaven: “Let the little children alone, and do not stop them from coming to me, for it is to such as these that the kingdom of heaven belongs” (Matthew 19:14). Barren women would enter heaven, as well: “Blessed are those who are barren, the wombs that have never borne children, the breasts that have never suckled!” (Luke 23:29). Jesus said widows who did not remarry and devoted their lives to God would enter heaven: “Those who are judged worthy of a place in the other world and in the resurrection from the dead do not marry because they can no longer die” (Luke 20:35). All three groups contain individuals outside the power strata who are teachable and focused on inner change and soul development, rather than on material or social success. Jesus taught that the intellectual and spiritual life should be a woman’s highest aim in Luke 11:27:

“Blessed is the womb that bore you and the breasts that you sucked,” shouted a woman from the crowd. Her image of a woman was sexually reductionist in the extreme—female genitals and breasts<sup>32</sup> Jesus response was just as startling as when he told Mary and Martha about choosing “the better part” that was non-traditional and outside the kitchen:

*“Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and keep it!”*

Jesus explained to his disciples that life in heaven was free of gender-related issues, much as it was in Eden for Adam and Eve who also couldn’t die and had no need for successors. In sum, Jesus’ kingdom completely reversed the established societal order. Jesus even took what was a despised name like “eunuch” and gave these outcasts a new purpose and status. [Although the Roman Catholic church eventually eliminated castration, it is interesting to note that they made celibacy a firm requirement...despite the obvious fact that the first priest, Aaron, was married to Elisheba and had four children with her and Huldah was married to Shallum *and a prophetess!*]

In the redacted *Gospel of Mary*, we are shown a side of Peter that proves Jesus' teachings were hard for traditionalists to accept. Peter fought against listening to Mary's insights because she was *a woman*. We should clear away the confusion, however, and remember that it is Jesus who is the ultimate authority on God's ways, not hot-tempered Peter or self-appointed apostle, Paul:

“Did he really speak privately with *a woman* and not openly with us? Are we to turn about and all listen *to her*? Did he *prefer her* to us?’ Then Mary wept and answered him, ‘My brother Peter, what can you be thinking? Do you believe that this is just my own imagination, that I invented this version? Or do you believe I would lie about our teacher?’ At this Levi spoke up: ‘Peter, you have always been *hot-tempered, and now we see you repudiating a woman, just as our adversaries do*. Yet, if the Teacher held her worthy, who are you to reject her? Surely the Teacher knew her very well, for *he loved her more than us*. Therefore, let us atone, and *become fully human* [anthropos, meaning unification of male and female] so that the Teacher can take root in us. Let us grow as he commanded of us.’”<sup>33</sup>

*Pistis Sophia* which means *Faith Wisdom*, has been redacted and banned for putting Peter in a negative light; Mary spoke to Jesus directly about Peter's hatred of women in this passage:

“My mind is ever understanding, at every time to come forward and set forth the solution of the words which she hath uttered, *but I am afraid of Peter*, because he *threatened me and hateth my sex*.’ Jesus replied: ‘Any of those filled with the spirit of light will come forward to interpret what I say; no one will be able to oppose them.’”<sup>34</sup>

In the redacted *Dialogue of the Savior* and *Gospel of Philip*, it is apparent that Mary had greater insight than the rest of the disciples. Jesus explained that he loved her most because her heart

was set on heaven's kingdom:

*“Why do I not love you like her? If a blind person and one who can see are both in darkness, they are the same. When the light comes, one who can see will see the light, the blind person will stay in darkness”* (Gospel of Philip 63:32-64:9).<sup>35</sup>

In other words, the light is in your midst and Mary has seen it; but you [men] remain far from the source of love even though it sits plainly in front of you. Jesus ended her recitation of insight by saying: “Blessed Mary, you whom I shall complete with all the mysteries on high...speak openly, for *you are one* whose heart is set on the heaven's kingdom, *more than all your brothers.*”

Hanging on the cross, Jesus knew that his male disciples had fled and only three women remained; these same three women had been by his side throughout his ministry: Mary (Miriam) his mother, Mary Magdalene, and Mary Salome. Even as he died, Jesus symbolically recognized and elevated women by saying to his mother about Mary Magdalene, “Woman, this is *your son.*” To the “disciple he loved” (Mary Magdalene/Miriamne) he said: “This is your mother.” Mary was no longer a passive, traditional woman; she had rid herself of the seven venial sins, accepted the kingdom, and balanced her male and female energies; she was now a *protector of women, equal to any male.*

When Clopas was met on the road by Jesus in disguise after his resurrection, the male disciples were still in a state of confusion about Jesus' mission on earth; this must have been the final insult to Jesus and the reason he called his men “foolish” in this passage:

[Clopas said to Jesus] “*Our own hope* had always been that he would be the one to set Israel free. And this is not all; two whole days have now gone by since it all happened and some of the *women* from our group have *astounded* us. They went to the tomb in the

early morning, and when they could not find the body, they came back to tell us they had seen a vision of angels who declared he was alive. Some of our own friends went to the tomb, and found everything as the women had reported, but of him they saw nothing.” Jesus responded in anger: “*You foolish men! So slow to believe all that the prophets have said.*” Jesus reproached them for their incredulity and obstinacy, because they had refused to believe those who had seen him after he had risen” (Luke 24:21-25).

From the *Letter to the Apostles* written in the early 2<sup>nd</sup> century, we learn the true depth of the male disciples’ confusion:

“And thither went three women, Mary, she that was kin to Martha, and Mary Magdalene and took ointments to pour upon the body, weeping and mourning over that which had come to pass. And when they drew near to the sepulcher, they looked in and found not the body. And as they mourned and wept, the Lord showed himself unto them and said to them: ‘For whom weep ye? Weep no more. I am he whom ye seek. But let one of you go to your brethren and say: Come ye, the Master is risen from the dead.’ Then she [Mary Magdalene/Miriamne] returned unto the Lord and said unto him: ‘*None of them hath believed me, that thou livest.*’ Then said the Lord unto Mary and her sisters: ‘Let us go unto them.’ And he came and found us within, and called us out; *but we thought that it was a phantom and believed not* that it was the Lord. Then said he unto us: ‘Come, fear ye not. I am your master; even he, Oh Peter, whom thou didst deny thrice; and *dost thou now deny again?*’ And we came unto him, *doubting in our hearts whether it were he.* Then said he unto us: ‘*Wherefore doubt ye still, and are unbelieving?* I am he that spake unto you of my flesh and my death and my resurrection. But that ye may know that I am he, do thou, *Peter, put thy finger into the print of the nails in mine hands,* and thou also,

*Thomas, put thy finger into the wound of the spear in my side; but thou, Andrew, look on my feet and see whether they press the earth; for it is written in the prophet: A phantom of a devil maketh no footprint on the earth”*<sup>36</sup>

According to the *Gospel of Sophia (Wisdom) of Jesus Christ*:

“After he rose from the dead, his twelve disciples *and seven women continued to be his followers*, and went to Galilee...”<sup>37</sup>

There is no basis for men’s claim to spiritual superiority which leads to the denigration of women, upon closer inspection of these stories about the male disciples:

- When Jesus walked across the raging water, Peter asked to join him. As Peter was approaching Jesus, his courage flagged and he began to sink. Jesus responded: “You have so little faith. Why did you doubt?” (Matthew 14:31) Mark 6:52 adds this phrase: “When Jesus walked across the water, they were utterly and completely dumbfounded, because they had not seen what the miracle of the loaves meant; *their minds were closed.*”
- Jesus had just finished feeding 5,000 people with five fishes and had used seven loaves to feed 4,000 when he had told the disciples to beware of the yeast of the Pharisees. The men responded by saying *they haven’t brought any bread...*(Matthew 16:5-12)
- When Jesus described his death and resurrection to his disciples, it was Peter who refused to accept it and Jesus rebuked him saying, “*Get behind me Satan! You are an obstacle in my path* because you are thinking not as God thinks, but as humans do” (Matthew 16:23).
- Unable to drive out demons, the disciples asked why they were so ineffective, and Jesus responded: “Because you have so little faith. In truth, I tell *you if your faith is the size of a mustard seed*, you will say to the mountain, ‘Move from here to there’ and it will move; nothing will be impossible for you” (Matthew 17:19-20).

- Agitated about where Jesus was leading them and what was *in it for him*, Peter stated, “Look, we have left everything and followed you. *What are we to have then?*” (Matthew 19:27)
- The *sons of Zebedee demanded seats of honor* on the right and left sides of Jesus in heaven, not realizing that suffering was required. Jesus chastised the brothers saying, “You know that among the gentiles the rulers lord it over them, and great men make their authority felt. Among you, this is not to happen” (Matthew 20:24-25).
- A humble donkey was chosen in Matthew 21 to show the unpretentious, peaceful nature of Jesus’ kingdom, but the disciples continued to expect Jesus to overcome with *violence*.
- Peter’s *denial was foretold* in Matthew 26:34: “In truth I tell you this very night before the cock crows you will have disowned me three times.”
- Peter and the disciples were aware that Jesus wanted them to stay awake with him while he was in the Garden of Gethsemane, but they did not obey his directive. Jesus looked upon them with dismay and said: “So you had not the strength to stay awake with me for *one hour*... You can sleep now and have your rest. Look the hour has come when the Son of man is to be betrayed into the hands of sinners” (Matthew 26:40-46).
- When the guards came to take Jesus away, one of the disciples resorted to violence and cut off the ear of a guard. Jesus, on the way to the cross, had to chastise his disciples for a final time: “*Put your sword back, for all who live by the sword die by the sword*” (Matthew 26:52).
- I have already mentioned Clopas’ meeting with Jesus after his resurrection, but Mark 16:14 additionally states: “He reproached them for their *incredulity and obstinacy*, because they had *refused to believe those who had seen him* after he had risen.”

- When Jesus was asleep in a boat, the weather took a turn for the worse and rather than trusting in Jesus' presence, they panicked and cried out, "We are lost!" Jesus rebuked the wind and then rebuked his apostles, "*Where is your faith?*"(Luke 8:25)
- After feeding the people with spiritual food, Jesus noted their physical needs, as well. The disciples wanted to send the people away hungry, but Jesus replied "Give them something to eat yourselves." They responded by asking if they *should go shopping for food* (Luke 9:13-17).
- Jesus was transfigured and Peter was present to witness the unity of Jesus, Moses and Elijah. Peter's first response was this: "It is wonderful for us to be here, so let us make *three shelters...one for you, one for Moses and one for Elijah.*" *He did not know what he was saying*, comments the writer (Luke 9:33).
- When Jesus was ill-received by townspeople, the disciples' first inclination was violence: "Lord, do you want to call fire down from heaven to burn them?" *Jesus turned and rebuked them* (Luke 9:54-56).
- After his resurrection, the male disciples wanted to know the time of restoration: "Lord has the time come for you to restore the kingdom of Israel?" He has to clarify once more to his closest friends: "*It is not for you to know the times and dates that the Father has decided by his own authority*" (Acts 1:6).
- When Peter learned about his future death, he asked about the disciple Jesus loved. Jesus reply was stern, "If I want *that disciple* to stay behind till I come, *what is it to you?* *You are to follow me*" (John 21:25).
- It was Peter who refused to have his feet washed by Jesus in John 13:8, not realizing that he was to be a servant. When he finally understood the requirement, he erred on the side



of excess and demanded to be washed head to toe.

- Thomas required a “sign” to believe: “But he [Thomas] said to them, 'Unless I see the nail marks in his hands and put my finger where the nails were, and put my hand into his side, *I will not believe it*'” (John 20:25).
- In the *Apocryphal Book of Peter*, we are told that Paul escaped from Rome [and left the church built in the home of Pudens] when he was stopped by a vision of Jesus. When Paul asked Jesus where he was going, Jesus replied: “To Rome to be crucified a second time.” Humiliated for his weakness, Peter returned to Rome to be a martyr for Jesus. Pope John Paul II also included this story in his homily made on October 22, 1978.<sup>38</sup>

The Song of Songs speaks of a bride waiting eagerly for her bridegroom’s return; she is Mary Magdalene/Miramne, the companion of Christ, and every woman by extension. Faith is the marriage tie; the soul is the bride. The bridal party is comprised of the members of the body of Christ, the saints who have been martyred, and the angels who rejoice when the union takes place. The story of the foolish virgins who do not cultivate self-understanding and self-reliance (symbolized in the keeping of one’s lamps filled with oil with properly trimmed wicks) is an important one for today’s woman. No man on a white horse will arrive with oil to save you from impending darkness. You have a duty to work on self-development, which is more important than having a perfect house, a perfect family, or a perfect career. When the women saw the risen Christ they acted properly: “They came up to Jesus and, clasping his feet, *they did him homage*” (Matthew 28:9-10). It is clear that as we study the Bible, stories about women are invaluable to understanding faith and true discipleship; in fact, the story is only half told without their inclusion for mentoring. It is women who mourned the death of Jesus along the Via Dolorosa and at the foot of the cross. *Even Pilate’s wife*, Claudia, did not want Jesus killed. She said,

“Have nothing to do with that upright man” (Matthew 27:19). Let the record show the following:

“Nowhere in any of the Gospels is there a similar report of a group of male followers of Yeshua lamenting for him publicly or risking their limbs and lives by meeting and mourning for him in the open. There is additionally no record of any woman seeking the death of Yeshua.”<sup>39</sup>

Exalting only the male disciples reinforces confusion and rejection and we are bereft of the key witnesses to the life of Jesus Christ—the many women who served him out of their own resources and followed him unto death and beyond, setting up home churches. In Jesus’ rebuke to his male disciples, we should hear an identical rebuke to modern churches that yet keep women from using the gifts they’ve been given by God. Jesus was, in fact, *bested* on only one occasion, and that was by *a woman* who had such faith she refused to be left out of his new kingdom.<sup>40</sup> This story from Matthew 15:21-28 and Mark 7:24-30 sums up Jesus’ message of inclusivity which makes gender and cultural identity moot:

“And suddenly out came a Canaanite woman from that district [Tyre and Sidon] and started shouting, ‘Lord, Son of David, take pity on me. My daughter is tormented by a devil. But he said not a word in answer to her. And his disciples went and pleaded with him, saying, ‘Give her what she wants, because she keeps shouting after us. He said in reply, ‘I was only sent to the lost sheep of the House of Israel.’ But the woman had come up and was bowing low before him. ‘Lord,’ she said, ‘help me.’ He replied, ‘It is not fair to take the children’s food and throw it to the dogs.’ She retorted, ‘Ah yes, Lord; but even little dogs eat the scraps that fall from their masters’ table.’ Then Jesus answered her, ‘Woman you have great faith. Let your desire be granted.’”

## SHEEP IN ANOTHER FOLD

“The genealogy of Jesus embraces Canaanites from the line of Ham, progenitor of the black races; Terah, a Chaldean, of Japhetic origin and Bathsheba, a Caucasian. Jesus thus united in himself the three great races of mankind—black, yellow, and white.”<sup>41</sup>

This is why Jesus stated: “And there are sheep I have that are *not of this fold*, and I must lead these too; they will listen to my voice, and there will be only one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16). An Armenian tradition identifies the Magi as Balthasar of Arabia, Melchior of Persia and Gasper of India.<sup>42</sup> The intense phobia over all things Eastern by the Christian church cannot be justified, for it is three Eastern princes who came to honor Jesus with gold, frankincense as a symbol for crucifixion and myrrh as a symbol for resurrection; Joseph of Arimathea also had family connections in Britain [which will be discussed later in this book].

People often wonder why the fig tree is destroyed in Mark 11:13. Sacred places were often torn down and replaced by the dominant religion.<sup>43</sup> The fig was a symbol for the priesthood, which was not producing any fruit (good works), just leaves (fine talk):

“When they were near Jerusalem and had come to Bethphage [house of unripe figs] on the Mount of Olives, then Jesus sent two disciples... (Matthew 21:1). He left them and went out of the city to Bethany [house of misery], where he spent the night” (Matthew 21:17).

It is during this time that Jesus caused the fig tree to wither. Jesus intended to replace the unfruitful priesthood with a better plan, one that brought truly good news for it would give everyone direct access to God. In sum, the world doesn't need more leaves (churches) or regulations; it needs people who bear fruit and walk the godly talk, helping the disenfranchised.

## BEATRICE (aka VERONICA in Latin) and the VIA DOLOROSA

The Bible does not mention Beatrice/Veronica on the Via Dolorosa, but according to a medieval legend based on Luke 23:27, she was among the women who mourned and lamented as Jesus passed by. Moved by his agony, she gave him her veil to wipe his face. When she received it back, Jesus' face was imprinted upon it. Much like with the shroud of Turin, it became known as a sacred relic. In the *Acts of Pilate* from 100-125 AD, Veronica/Beatrice is identified as the woman who hemorrhaged for twelve years; this is confirmed in Matthew 9:20-22 and Mark 5:25-34.

Legend states that Veronica gave the fabric to Roman Emperor Tiberius, healing him from a severe illness. Another forgotten book, *Avenging the Savior*, also mentions the story of Veronica's veil. Google has many images of the cloth online for you to view and medieval artwork related to this story, along with videos of the veil in Rome. The video titled "The Veil of Veronica—The Face of Jesus" on youtube gives a fascinating overview of Veronica's life. Here is an excerpt from the *Acts of Pilate*, proving her existence and the difficulties women faced sharing the truth:

"And also a certain woman, Veronica by name, from afar off cried out to the governor: I was flowing with blood for twelve years; and I touched the fringe of his garment, and immediately the flowing of my blood stopped. The Jews say: We have a law that a woman does not come to bear witness."<sup>44</sup>

The Veil of Veronica, a "volto santo" [meaning holy face/holy image], is currently located at St. Peter's Basilica, where it is shown once a year on the 5<sup>th</sup> Sunday of Lent. It is mentioned in Dante Alighieri's *The Divine Comedy*, "Paradiso" (Canto 31:103-108) as an object of veneration by pilgrims.

*Jesus said on the cross...*

*(Psalm 22)*

My God, my God, *why have you forsaken me?*  
The words of my groaning do nothing to save me.  
My God, I call by day but you do not answer,  
At night, but I find no respite. (1-2)

*My strength is trickling away...*  
*My bones are all disjointed...* (14)

*My mouth is as dry as earthenware...* (15)

*While they look on and gloat,*  
*They divide my garments among them*  
*And cast lots for my clothing.* (17-18)

The whole wide world will remember and turn to YHVH,  
All the families of nations bow down before him.  
For to YHVH, ruler of the nations, belongs kingly power!  
*All who prosper on earth will bow before him,*  
*All who go down to the dust will do reverence before him.*  
And those who are dead, their descendents will serve him,  
Will proclaim his name to generations still to come;  
And these will tell of his saving justice  
To a people yet unborn.” (27-31)

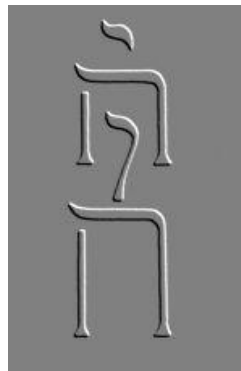
*He has fulfilled it.*

ABBA (FATHER) or AB-BA (FATHER MOTHER)?

While many believe Jesus' cry of "Abba" was a term of endearment to Father God, there is also the fact that in the Hebrew alphabet the first two letters are the aleph and the bet. The Aleph is considered to be a male ox plowing the earth [female]; the Bet is considered to be female resembling house, dwelling womb, or sanctuary. From aleph and bet we get the word "alphabet," integral to our society's existence. Think about this for a moment: what would we do without the ability to communicate and "the word"?

If we follow this reasoning, we see that a cry to "ab-ba" is a cry to both Father and Mother God, represented in the Tree of Life and in the name YHVH. In fact, if we look at just the "AB" we see both Father and Mother represented side by side—as if to say "as above, so below on earth." In the *Zohar* it is stated "the beings who live below, say that God is on high; while the angels in heaven, say that God is on earth," a concept reinforced in the design of the Tree of Life.

The following diagram, often called the "Divine Human," arranges the Hebrew letters YHVH as anthropos. Yod is at the head, the first Heh is upper body with the Vav at the heart moving down the spine; the second Heh forms the legs to do God's work on earth. If you go to [jewfaq.org/alephbet.htm](http://jewfaq.org/alephbet.htm) [Judaism 101] you will see how the letters correspond to YHVH:



Y (head)

H (arms, hands)

V (spine)

H (legs)

## THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

The Ten Commandments dovetail into the Tree of Life and have an esoteric meaning.

(Keter)

- #1. You shall have no other gods before me.  
Do not turn to other people (even ministers) for all of the answers; turn to God first.

(Chokmah)

- #2. You shall not make for yourself any carved image of God and bow down to it.  
Do not become rigid in your thinking about God and cease to learn and question.

(Binah)

- #3. You shall not take the name of the great "I AM" in vain.  
Do not use the phrase "I am..." in a negative way; use it only to make positive statements.

(Chesed)

- #4. Remember the Sabbath day and keep it holy.  
Do not forget to take a break and recharge with meditation, prayer, and edifying texts.

(Gevurah)

- #5. Honor your father and mother.  
Do not forget your roots, even if you have forged your own path, different from your family's traditions.

(Tifereth)

- #6. You shall not murder.  
Do not slash and burn the hopes and dreams of others.

(Netzach)

- #7. You shall not commit adultery.  
Do not do things that go against your conscience, for it tears down your spirit.

(Hod)

- #8. You shall not steal.  
Do not waste a precious moment of your life reliving the mistakes you've made.

(Yesod)

- #9. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.  
Do not pretend to be someone you aren't; don't make promises you cannot keep.

(Malchut)

- #10. You shall not covet your neighbor's house, wife, servants, or animals.  
Don't feel jealous about what other people have. Choose what you want and obtain it honestly.

## THE ORDER OF VIRGINS, WIDOWS and DEACONESSES: BRIDES OF CHRIST

One of the most "revolutionary" aspects of the advent of Christianity was its emphasis on celibacy versus childrearing. Clement of Alexandria made clear in *Stomata* 3.6.53 that the married apostles "took their wives with them not as women with whom they had marital relations, *but as sisters*, that they might be their *fellow-ministers* in dealing with housewives."<sup>45</sup> In addition to the married women who chose continence, "there may have been a particularly adventurous fraction of the virginal community who sought boldly to alter their condition by living like men among men."<sup>46</sup> "These women forced the social structure of antiquity to incorporate celibate women in a secure and even superior stratum."<sup>47</sup> Inscriptions in the synagogue show that "women held the offices of 'ruler of the synagogue,' 'elder priest,' and 'mother of the synagogue,'" states Karen Jo Torjesen, author of *When Women Were Priests*.<sup>48</sup>

The *Acts of Thekla*, widely circulated in the second half of the 2nd century, was not only translated into Greek, but into Syriac, Armenian, Slavonic and Arabic.<sup>49</sup> The following passage from the *Acts of Thekla*, paragraph 12 may also explain why celibacy was so attractive to young women in their twenties; in this passage Demas and Hermogenes are speaking to Thamyris [Thekla's fiancé] about Paul:

"We do not know who he is. But he is depriving young men of their wives and virgins of husbands, by saying that you will not be raised from the dead unless you remain chaste, abstain from polluting the flesh, and guard your chastity."<sup>50</sup>

Church leaders like Irenaeus [and especially the woman-hater, Tertullian] reacted violently to the idea that these women were ordained to *teach and baptize*. Clement of Alexandria, however, said in his work titled *Instructor* that women and men had the same essential natures and that it was



possible for them to share power equally.<sup>51</sup> The truth remains that women were put on the payroll to provide *liturgical services*, including assistance with baptisms. The *Arabic Canons Attributed to the Council of Nicea* states in Canon XXII on sponsors of baptism: “Men shall not hold females at the font, neither women males; but women females, and men males.”<sup>52</sup> John Chrysostom took the time to recount a story of a woman who *baptized her own children* in his writings on 1<sup>st</sup> Timothy 3:11:

“It was the mother that baptized them. You may ask, ‘What are you saying? That a woman baptizes? Yes, such baptism women also administer. Just so, this woman also then baptized and *became a priest*. Indeed, she brought spiritual offerings, and her resolution substituted in her hands for the laying on of hands.’”<sup>53</sup>

The Order of Deaconesses became a distinct group with defined responsibilities. These women served communion to other women, ministered to the sick and needy, and provided religious instruction. According to *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* of 325 AD, high status was conferred upon female deacons: “Let also the deaconess be honored by you *in the place of the Holy Ghost*...let not any woman address herself to the deacon or bishop *without the deaconess*.”<sup>54</sup> Chapter 16 of the *Syrian Didascalia* of 250 AD further explains that because Mary Magdalene was a *minister*, female deacons are uniquely suited to serve, as well:

“And when she who is being baptized has come up from the water, let the deaconess receive her, and teach and instruct her how the seal of baptism ought to be (kept) unbroken in purity and holiness. For this cause we say that the ministry of a woman deacon is especially needful and important. For our Lord and Saviour also was ministered unto by *women ministers, Mary Magdalene, and Mary the daughter of James and*

*mother of Jose, and the mother of the sons of Zebedee, with other women beside. And thou also hast need of the ministry of a deaconess for many things; for a deaconess is required to go into the houses of the heathen where there are believing women, and to visit those who are sick, and to minister to them in that of which they have need, and to bathe those who have begun to recover from sickness.”*<sup>55</sup>

As Karen Jo Torjesen states, “women’s work” included leadership in ministry and none found it “unnatural” for her to apply the skills she used at home as a manager:

“First and second century Christians, familiar with the authority and leadership of the female head of household would have perceived women’s leadership within the church as not only acceptable but natural. The early church’s specific leadership functions posed no barrier to women, whose skills and experiences as managers amply prepared them to assume the duties of teaching, disciplining, nurturing and administering material resources.”<sup>56</sup>

It was considered improper for a man to enter the inner rooms of a home that were reserved for women alone, so deaconesses played a vital role in ministering to other women during this time period. Deaconesses were publicly announced in the “Divine Grace” statement, their ordination took place before an altar during the liturgy of the Eucharist, the Holy Spirit was invoked on their behalf, and a deaconess received a stole as a sign of ecclesiastical rank.<sup>57</sup> In *Revolt of the Widows: The Social World of the Apocryphal Acts*, Stevan L. Davis makes a powerful case for the women in Acts being continent [refraining from all sexual activity]:

“If one’s religious life is predicted on the notion that one is related to Christ as a bride is related to her bridegroom, then one must oppose the advances of all other suitors, even those with whom one has contracted an earthly marriage. Marital and extramarital inter-

course become equally adulterous.”<sup>58</sup>

Ignatius was born in Syria around the year 50 AD and died in 117; he is often thought of in the Catholic church as the third bishop of Antioch, St. Paul being the first. Ignatius was sent for by Trajan to go to Rome where he was persecuted and killed by wild beasts in a Roman amphitheatre. [Even women nursing like Perpetua were sent into the amphitheatre.] Saint Prassede and St. Pudenziana cared for the often-severed bodies of those martyred for their faith. In his letter to Emperor Trajan (98-117 AD), Pliny states that there was a pogrom against Christians in Bithynia and Pontus: “I believed it was necessary to find out from two slaves (ex duabus ancillis) who were called deacons (ministrae), what was true—and to find out *by torture* (per tormenta).<sup>59</sup> The accounts of Pliny and Ignatius provide first-hand evidence that men and women who followed Jesus were doing so at great risk to life and limb. Knowing this, we can look at what Ignatius says about deaconesses with awe for their courage:

“I salute the holy presbytery. I salute the sacred deacons, and that person most dear to me, whom may I behold, through the Holy Spirit, occupying my place when I shall attain to Christ... I salute the keepers of the holy gates, the deaconesses in Christ. I salute the *virgins betrothed to Christ*, of whom may I have joy in the Lord Jesus. I salute the people of the Lord, from the smallest to the greatest, and all my sisters in the Lord.”<sup>60</sup>

Constance Parvey in “The Theology and Leadership of Women” goes even further to elevate continence as a means to egalitarianism, which was hinted at when Jesus commended Mary for sitting at his feet doing the “better part” that was non-traditional:

“For women, celibacy was revolutionary, legitimizing an independent vocational status.

They could choose not to raise families and have husbands. They could choose from a variety of leadership positions within the Christian community and yet remain celibate.”<sup>61</sup>

Sadly, their independence did not last more than two centuries. “Many widows may have found themselves in a position of tension; in becoming Christian they had rebelled against their larger society but, having rebelled, they were given little option but to become again subservient to the male hierarchy of the church.”<sup>62</sup> By the year 200 AD, all writings by these women had been suppressed; the *male hierarchy* won out and feminine imagery disappeared from the orthodox Christian traditions.<sup>63</sup> Keep in mind, however, that we do have an example of a female bishop in *Bishop Theodora*. Bishops presided over their congregation as one honored with the authority of God.<sup>64</sup> We know that Bishop Theodora existed because of a mosaic in the Chapel of Zeno, which was placed on the site of a second-century church; it depicts Theodora with a rectangle around her head meaning she was alive at the time of its creation! [See Appendix.] *According to the Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* part XXVI: “The bishop is the minister of the word, the keeper of knowledge, the mediator between God and you in the several parts of your divine worship”; it is the bishop who pronounces, ‘Ye are gods; and ye are all children of the Most High’ and, ‘Ye shall not speak evil of the gods.’” A bishop exercised power over the clergy. Section VII says the bishop is the “commander” and section XXVI last sentence states: “virgins are to be honored as representing the altar of incense, and the incense itself.”<sup>65</sup> Between the *Didascalia* and the *Constitutions of the Holy Apostles* and the writings of Pliny, Ignatius and Saint Chrysostom, I believe it is clear that women did hold roles of high ecclesiastical prestige, but like the labor struggle of midwives, a relentless propaganda campaign was launched to unseat them and denigrate the “wise women” who walked in the shoes of Puah and Shiprah in favor of an all-male club of doctors. Let’s call it what it is—the same old patriarchal *misogyny!*

## THE WOMEN OF ACTS

Tabitha, Rhoda, Mary (mother of Mark), Thekla, Lydia, Women of Thessalonica, Greek women, Damarius, Priscilla and the four unmarried daughters of Philip are the notable women of Acts who deserve our recognition. Acts 1:14 tells a story that is all-inclusive:

“With one heart all these joined constantly in prayer, together with some women, including Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers.”

Women were undeniably present in the Upper Room and received the gift of speech from the Holy Spirit, we are told in Acts 2. Peter quoted from the Book of Joel in the Upper Room:

The Lord declared: “And in the last days I will pour out my spirit on all humanity. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old people dream dreams, your young people see visions. Even on slaves, men and women, shall I pour out my spirit in those days” (Joel 3:1-2).

Identified by Peter as a deaconess, Tabitha (also known as Dorcas) was so valuable to the early church, where she has been doing good works and providing clothing, she was resurrected when she died unexpectedly in Acts 9:36-42. Luke provides a description of her ministry; she was held up as a model disciple—a servant leader—for she not only had faith, but she *put it into action*: “At Jaffa there was a disciple named Dorcas, who never tired of doing good or giving to those in need.”

Acts 11:19-20 tells us clearly who was being preached to during this time period:

“Those who had scattered because of the persecution that arose over Stephen travelled as far as Phoenicia and Cyprus and Antioch, but they proclaimed the message only to Jews.

Some, however, who came from Cyprus and Cyrene went to Antioch where they started preaching also to the Greeks.”

Rhoda was the first to witness Peter’s escape from prison and it was she who announced his deliverance (like an apostle) to all convening at the home of Mary for evening worship (Acts 12:12-17). Mary (Mother of John Mark) opened her home for church meetings, despite the rise in persecution against followers of Jesus, and she should be applauded for her bravery. It is also believed that Mary’s home was the chosen location for the Last Supper. It is interesting to note that Rhoda was accused of being insane by the men, an unbelievable witness [“You are out of your mind,” they said in Acts 12:15], just as were the women at the tomb, but *she too* was telling the truth! When Paul fled from Antioch to Iconium in Acts 14, Titus advised Onesiphorus to provide lodging to Paul. All traditional Bibles have redacted the story of Thekla in Iconium *but left her name behind* [which is a blessing] for we can now connect the dots and see where her story inserts into Acts to give a fuller picture of women’s involvement and leadership roles. The *Apocryphal Acts*, written between 160 and 225 AD, were composed by Christian women for Christian women about how to live a pious life. The men in these stories were portrayed drunk on power, subject to temptation, and weak in faith. These unique women valued purity and continence, even between married people, which made them an anomaly in a society focused on male heirs. The story of Thekla may include hyperbole [or miracles], but its goal was to provide an exemplary role model during times of persecution. Here is the redacted story of Thekla and Paul in Iconium,<sup>66</sup> paraphrased for brevity:

As Paul preached the word, an eighteen-year-old woman named Thekla heard it and vowed not to marry to become a follower. Her fiancé refused to accept her rejection and her own mother wanted her immolated for refusing to marry, *but Thekla did not cave in to their demands.*

Paul was soon after put in prison for preaching abstention from sex to married and single women, and Thekla visited him there to kiss his chains. On the day she was supposed to be immolated, Thekla's body refused to burn, so she was set free. When she passed through Antioch, the chief magistrate set eyes on her and tried to force her into marriage, but she removed his crown and tore his coat in refusal. For this, she was stripped and put into an amphitheatre with wild beasts. Paul utterly deserted her in her time of need; Thekla, like Eve, had to face her adversary alone. A she-lion was sent into the arena first, but it refused to kill her and lay at her feet. The women in the audience used their perfume to distract first a male lion, then a bear. Thekla remained untouched throughout her trial and, admired by the women; many abandoned the world's view of what was "natural" to emulate Thekla:

"The women cried out with a loud voice, and with one accord gave praise unto God and said: 'There is but one God, who is the God of Thekla.'"

Once freed, she appeared before Paul, who had given up his fast on her behalf *before her trial had even finished*. Unable to deny her faith any longer, he told her to "go and teach the word" (*Acts of Thekla*, paragraph #41). She immediately thereafter *baptized herself*...and set up a small church in Selucia, where she healed the sick. The doctors of Selucia, much like the wicked elders in the story of Susanna tried to take Thekla's purity away, even though she was 90 years old! God, however, provided an escape for this faithful servant, as he did for many others before her:

"The blessed Thekla observing, saw the rock opened to as large a degree that a man might enter in; she did as she was commanded, bravely fled from the vile crew, and went into the rock, which instantly closed, that there was not any crack visible where it had opened."

It is interesting to note that Tertullian railed against the *Acts of Thekla* because “therein women were assumed to have the *right to preach and to baptize*.”<sup>67</sup> Tertullian verifies the existence of the text and its unique message for women in that one statement.

Another faithful servant in Acts was Lydia, who was both wealthy and influential. We know that Lydia created a church in her home from Acts 16:14-15. Clearly Paul was not against women being pastors, because he did not follow the Judaic law which required ten men to form a quorum for a worship service and we’ve just learned that he specifically told Thekla to preach the word, as he told many other women to do in Acts. Paul started congregations headed and populated by women in major cities and Lydia was considered the *first convert in Europe*:

“One of these women was Lydia, a woman from the town of Thyatira who was in the purple-dye trade and who revered God. She listened to us and the Lord opened her heart.” She had her entire household baptized.”

Prominent women in Thessalonica were heads of home churches, according to Acts 17:4 in addition to “Greek women of high standing” who welcomed the itinerant apostles and accepted the concept of a bridegroom more worthy than a fleshly one. Damarius heard the gospel and responded, according to Acts 17:34-35: “there were some that attached themselves to him [Paul] and became believers, among them a woman named Damarius.” Named before her husband, Priscilla (aka Prisca) was the pastor of a church, according to Acts 18:18 and 18:26, Romans 16:3 and 2 Timothy 4:19. When Apollos incorrectly focused on the teachings of John instead of Jesus, Priscilla was the one who had the authority to correct him. Tyrian women disciples were among those who said farewell to Paul (Acts 21:5): they were “speaking in the spirit” and women and children were present. Electing to remain single, Philip’s four daughters were called prophets in Acts 21:9, *not helpers to prophets!*



The *Apocryphal Acts* includes three additional stories of Christian heroines that have been redacted from The Book of Acts in the King James Bible and The Jerusalem Bible. These women were integral to building up the faith of virgins and widows; their names were Iphidamia and Maximilla in the *Acts of Andrew*, Mygdonia in the *Acts of Thomas*, and Drusiana and Cleopatra in the *Acts of John*. Iphidamia was a Christian woman who was instrumental in the conversion of Maximilla. Even when the apostle Thomas tried to force her back into her husband's bed, Maximilla remained resolute in her determination to be chaste. Drusiana endured being locked in a tomb [the inner room of her house] by her husband when she made her vow to God; she prevailed to perform the resurrection [or baptism] of Fortunatus, whose name is mentioned in 1 Corinthians 16:17. Cleopatra believed in John's power to resurrect and *by faith* was brought back to life; when her husband died *from faithlessness*, she resurrected him like Drusiana did. Thekla, Iphadamia, Maximilla, Drusiana and Cleopatra are worthy of inclusion in any Bible study class focused on faith; their omission from the New Testament needs to be called what it is—unfair gender bias against strong women leaders whose stories shame men.

In first and second century catacombs that are just now being unearthed, there is proof that early Christian women preached, converted, baptized and dispensed the sacraments. It is time we took note of a particular fresco in the Catacomb of Priscilla titled "Fractio Panis" which shows a group of female priests conducting a Eucharistic banquet. *Not all* iconographers and artists have omitted women! Giotto Di Bondone included women in his portrayal of Acts; Guilio Campi pictured Mary Magdalene at Jesus' side in his depiction of the Last Supper in the Chapel of Cremona in a far clearer manner than Leonard DaVinci did. In the Liebfraukirche church in Germany, women were definitely included in the depiction of the Last Supper. [See appendix for photos of murals, paintings and links mentioned above.] Perhaps the real reason a majority of

male artists pictured only twelve male apostles has more to do who hired them—male priests, male bishops or the male pope—than anything else! As recently as June 2010, additional murals have been discovered in the 4<sup>th</sup> century tomb of Saint Thekla, uncovered in Rome beneath layers of calcium carbonate. Unfortunately, all news reports on the topic chose to focus on the unearthed murals of the men—Paul, Peter, John and Andrew. Amazingly enough, not a single report mentioned the existence of a phenomenal female evangelist named Thekla! In addition to Tertullian’s comment there is *The Pilgrimage of Etheria* which supports the existence of a place called St. Thekla, a woman called St. Thekla, and *The Acts of Saint Thekla*, along with proof there were female deaconesses. Etheria traveled to the Holy Land from 381-384 AD:

“Setting out from Tarsus, I came to a certain city on the sea, still in Cilicia, which is called Pompeiopolis. Thence I entered the borders of Hisauria and stayed in a city called Coricus, and on the third day I arrived at a city which is called Seleucia in Hisauria; on my arrival I went to the bishop, a truly holy man, formerly a monk, and in that city I saw a very beautiful church. And as the distance thence to *Saint Thekla*, which is situated outside the city on a low eminence, was about fifteen hundred paces, I chose rather to go there in order to make the stay that I intended. There is nothing at the holy church in that place except numberless cells of men and of women. I found there a very dear friend of mine, to whose manner of life all in the East bore testimony, *a holy deaconess named Marthana*, whom I had known at Jerusalem, whither she had come for the sake of prayer; she was *ruling over the cells of apotactitae [monks] and virgins*... When I had arrived in the name of God, prayer was made at the memorial, and the whole of the *Acts of Saint Thekla having been read*, I gave endless thanks to Christ our God, who deigned to fulfill my desires in all things, unworthy and undeserving as I am.”<sup>68</sup>

## THE WOMEN OF ROMANS

Phoebe, Priscilla, Mary, Tryphena and Tryphosa, the mother of Rufus, Persis, Julia, and the sister of Nereus all deserve to be recognized as workers for the Lord. Phoebe was a key figure in the church of Cenchrea: “Phoebe, our sister, diakonos (deacon) of the church of Cenchrea” states Romans 16:1-2. Priscilla and her husband, Aquila, whom I’ve discussed already in the section “Women of Acts,” were additionally mentioned in Romans for saving the life of Paul (Romans 16:3). A Roman noblewoman, Mary, was mentioned in Romans 16:6 as one who “worked hard for you [the church].”

Paul identified Junia as a senior in the faith to himself, which was quite an admission, and he credited Junia and her husband Andronicus with being “outstanding apostles” (Romans 16:6). Take note that some Bibles call her Junias, hiding her identity as a woman, but *he was a she*, and women were imprisoned and martyred for their faith alongside men. This was the only time that Paul referred to anyone other than the twelve or himself as *apostles*. Even St. John Chrysostom, a 4<sup>th</sup> century bishop, recognized Junia as a member of the apostolic circle, in this passage from *Migne, Patrologia Graeca, vol 51*. First Chrysostom complained that women were again seen to have more faith than men; then he found them a credit and worthy to be praised:

*“How is this? A woman, again, is honored and proclaimed victorious! Again we men are put to shame...we men are left so far behind them...for the women of those days were more spirited than lions.”*<sup>69</sup>

Finally, Romans 16:12-16 lists Tryphena and Tryphosa who “worked hard in the Lord” and the mother of Rufus, who was like a mother to Paul; Persis was “beloved” by her congregation, and the sister of Nereus and Julia were to be greeted with a holy kiss.

## THE WOMEN OF CORINTHIANS

Corinth at the time of Paul had roughly 650,000 people and it was an integral commercial center due to its location on the southern part of the land bridge that connects northern Greece to southern Greece.<sup>70</sup> Most Greeks worshipped Aphrodite, goddess of love, along with Asclepius, god of healing and Apollo, god of the sun. Temple prostitution was so rampant Corinth became synonymous with immorality. Christian men and women who practiced chastity must have stood out as oddities to the promiscuous Corinthians. Chloe is one of the women in Corinth who appears to have been trusted by Paul to keep her people pure. He stated: “From what Chloe’s people have been telling me about you, brothers, it is clear there are serious differences among you” (1 Corinthians 1:11). Paul turned to Chloe for information; her testimony about the hearts of her people was considered authoritative. Paul also preached to many gatherings of women about continence during his nearly two years in Corinth, which did not win him any votes with married men or men betrothed to marry. “The unmarried women, and the virgin gives her mind to the Lord’s affairs and to being holy in body and spirit, but the married women gives her mind to the affairs of this world and to how she can please her husband” was part of a sermon delivered to a group of women by Paul (1 Corinthians 7:34). Yet, we know that *Paul had a wife* who was integral to his ministry because he insisted on her being allowed to accompany him, “like the other apostles, like the brothers of the Lord” (1 Corinthians 9:5). Jesus said celibacy was optional; *it is Paul who made it a requirement*. Christian women were prophets after Acts, as noted in 1 Corinthians 11:5, where the issue was over veiling *while prophesying* or not. Entire families were also accepted as missionaries: “The Stephanas family have been the first fruits of Achaia and have devoted themselves to the service of God’s holy people.” I think it’s safe to say this family included at least one woman or female child! (1 Corinthians 16:15-16)

## THE WOMEN OF PHILIPPIANS

Philippi had few Jewish inhabitants and no synagogue when Paul arrived. It was a Roman garrison encompassing 700 square miles in 1 BC. “Archaeological work has revealed a large and well-preserved forum, a theater, the alleged jail of Paul and several Byzantine churches, including one of the earliest churches known in Greece.”<sup>71</sup> Philippi was located along the important Via Egnatia, the Roman road from Asia Minor that traversed the Balkan Peninsula toward the Adriatic Sea to ports with direct passage to Italy.<sup>72</sup> Paul started a church with women by the side of the Gangitis River with Lydia, a maker of elegant, purple-dyed cloth as the leader; her business and the dye industry in general put Philippi on the map.

Much has been made of the argument between two women name Euodia and Syntyche who either had differences regarding how something should be done or who should do it. More should be made of the fact that they were women who worked tirelessly by Paul’s side. Paul stated: "I urge Euodia and I urge Syntyche to come to agreement with each other in the Lord and I ask you syzygus really to be a partner and help them. These women have struggled hard for the gospel with me” (Philippians 4:2-3). Early Christian communities had many issues related to unity, for Christianity was a new experiment that had only itinerant apostles as leaders; women had to discern between those practicing magic and those truly healing. Women also had to fight off unwanted suitors and parents that pressured them into being “normal” to survive as continent virgins and widows. Women had to teach in secret and behave like spirited lions!

It must have been a frightening time to be alive, but so is our current one! It is good to know that women did not wait for a quorum of ten males to begin doing the Lord’s work. They acted on faith, supported each other, risking life and limb to do so.

## THE WOMEN OF COLOSSIANS

Colossae was an ancient town of Phrygia (Greece) near the road from Ephesus to the Euphrates. Philemon and his wife, Apphia, were leaders of the key church at Colossae. They were wealthy, possessed slaves and their house was a place of meeting and worship (Philemon 1:2). Nympha also had a church in her home: "Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and the church in her house" (Colossians 4:15). The types of tasks they performed were outlined by Paul in Colossians 3:16:

"Let the Word of Christ in all its richness find a home in you. Teach each other, advise each other, in all wisdom. With gratitude in your hearts sing psalms and hymns and inspired songs to God, and whatever you do, let it be in the name of the Lord Jesus."

"Sister Apphia" was Philemon's wife and Achippus was their son; all three, along with their slave, Onesimus, were martyred under Nero's reign of persecution. Slavery was an integral part of life in Rome and Greece, but Paul's *Letter to Philemon* and Appia, encouraging them to set Onesimus free, proves that Paul was against slavery. Each line of his sermon amplifies the teachings of Jesus about egalitarianism, peace and unity in the Kingdom of God:

"You have stripped off your old behavior with your new self and you have put on a new self which will progress towards true knowledge, the more it is renewed in the image of the creator; and in that image there is no room for distinction between Greek and Jew, between the circumcised and the uncircumcised, or between Scythian, slave and free. There is only Christ: he is everything and he is in everything (Colossians 3:10-11). Paul continued in Colossians 12: "The Lord has forgiven you; now you must do the same. Over all these clothes, put on love, the perfect bond. And may the peace of Christ reign in your hearts, because it is *for this* that you were called together in one body."

## THE WOMEN of FIRST TIMOTHY: WIDOWS

“The widows revolted against their marriages, against marriage in general, and against the basic social patterns of the non-Christian world. In composing *Apocryphal Acts*, they became teachers, creative ministers within the church.” Stevan Davies, *The Revolt of the Widows*<sup>73</sup>

Communities of sexually continent women were common in the early Christian church; these women had to be cared for by the apostles, since their families frequently disowned them for refusing to marry. They were subject to immolation for disobedience (like Thekla) or were shut away in a “tomb” [an interior room of their house] by an angry spouse (like Drusiana). Widows that put their last coin into the temple treasury [and had their homes cannibalized] found refuge within the early Christian community. Christ followers were told they were responsible for caring for their elderly parents and should not give gifts to the church at the expense of caring for the elderly: “Anyone who does not look after his own relations, especially if they are living with him, has rejected the faith and is worse than an unbeliever” (1 Timothy 5:8). The story of fraud by Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5, proves sharing was *not optional*, but mandatory. Acts 4:32-34 states: “No one claimed private ownership of any possessions, as everything they owned was held in common. None of their members were ever in want as all those who owned land or houses would sell them and bring the money from the sale to present to the apostles.” Widows were made priests (presbyters) to other women; to participate in leadership, they had to be known by their good works (1 Timothy 5:9-10). Diakanos means deacon; but, to be clear, many women functioned as a presbyter, which means priest; they baptized and dispensed sacraments: “Treat *women presbyters* like mothers, younger women like a sister,” says 1 Timothy 5:1-2. The term “widow” referred to women who were part of this “semi-clerical corporation.”<sup>74</sup>

## THE WOMEN OF SECOND TIMOTHY

A godly mother named Eunice raised Timothy: “Then he came to Derbe and Lystra. And behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timothy, the son of a certain Jewish woman who believed, but his father was a Greek” (Acts 16:1-3). His mother, Eunice, and grandmother, Lois, were given credit in this letter for instructing Timothy in scripture: “I also remember your sincere faith, a faith which dwelt in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice, and I am sure dwells also in you” (2 Timothy 1:5).

Claudia, greeted in 2 Timothy 4:22, was the wife of Senator Pudens, and the mother of Pudentiana (aka Pudenziana), Praexedes (aka Prassede) and Novatus.<sup>75</sup> Priscilla is considered to be the mother of both St. Paul and Senator Pudens; they were half brothers. When Paul was under house arrest, he stayed with the Pudens rather than in prison, which shows how influential this family must have been.

Ancient murals at Santa Prassede and Santa Pudenziana in Rome prove that these two sisters did exist. [See photos in appendix and numerous online photographs and videos about Prassede and Pudenziana. These sisters are pictured in the mosaic on the apse—that part of the church where the clergy are seated or the altar is placed—of St. Pudenziana church]; they cared for the martyrs in prison and faithfully collecting relics. It is known that Paul and Stephan used the house of Pudens as a church; Pope Pius is said to have designed the baptistry.<sup>76</sup> This church is often referred to in documents as “Titulus Pastoris”; Titulus means consecrated parish church. Prassede and Pudenziana were buried in the nearby cemetery of Priscilla.



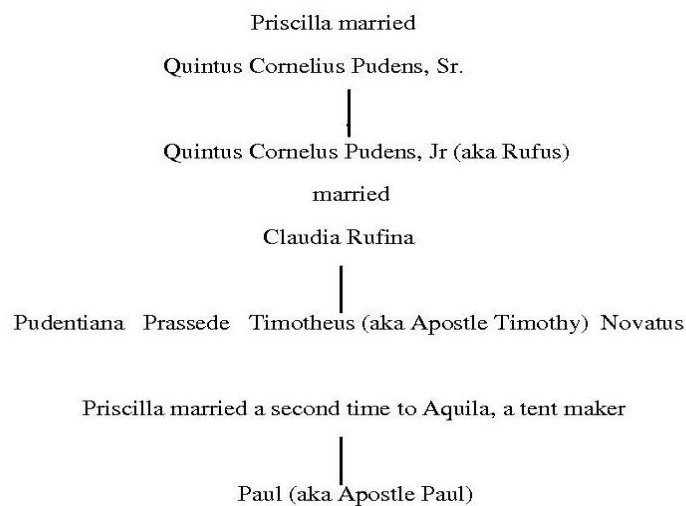
THE BRITISH-ROMAN CONNECTION according to John Williams, Archdeacon of Cartigan

The Pudens family mentioned in 2 Timothy 4:22 may not have been Roman but British citizens. Legend has it that Joseph of Arimathea [aka James, Jesus' brother] was a wealthy merchant with a fleet of ships who delivered tin from the mines in Cornwall, England to Phoenicia, and converted several British people to Christianity on his travels. We do know that Saint Paul went to Britain and appointed the same Aristobulus mentioned in Romans 16:10 first Bishop of Britain. Aristobulus was Saint Peter's father-in-law, one of the seventy disciples; "Ebulus" is short for Aristobulus (2 Timothy 4:21).

Claudia Rufina, a woman of British descent, married Cornelius Pudens in Rome; she was mentioned by the poet Martial in *Epigrams XI.53*.<sup>77</sup> Paul preached "under house arrest" at the Pudens home for two years, before being executed by Nero in 68 AD.<sup>78</sup> John Williams, Archdeacon of Cartigan, wrote in his book, *Claudia and Pudens: An Attempt to Show Claudia was a British Princess* that a Roman noble named Pudens married the daughter of a British king named Tiberius Claudius Cogidubnus:

"In the year AD 67, there were at Rome two citizens, named Claudia and Pudens. That a Roman, illustrious by birth and position, married Claudia, a "stranger" and "foreigner" who was also a British maiden; that an inscription was found in the year 1723 in Chester, testifying that the supreme ruler of that place was Tiberius Claudius Cogidunus; that a Roman by the name of "Pudens, the son of Pudentinus, was a land-holder under this ruler;" that it is impossible to account for such facts, without supposing a very close connection between this British Chief and his Roman subject; that the supposition that Claudia of Martial, a British maiden, married to a Roman Pudens, was a daughter of this British chief would clear all difficulties."<sup>79</sup>

John Williams goes even further, in his historic 1848 book, *Claudia and Pudens*, to state that Claudia was accused of being under a “foreign superstition” (supposed to be Christianity by all commentators) and was sent to live under the protection of a Roman noble lady named Pomponia until she was made an eligible match for Rufus; Williams goes on to explain that Timothy “was an important instrument in converting the Britons to the faith in Christ” and considered a holy man and saint, and “the *return of the Caractacus into Britain* was rendered famous by the fact that it brought with it into our island a *band of Christian missionaries*, of which Aristobulus was the leader.”<sup>80</sup>



[Timothy was Priscilla’s grandson! Furthermore, Priscilla was both Paul and Rufus’ mother! This is verified by Romans 16:13: “Salute Rufus, chosen in the Lord and his mother—a mother to me too,” says Paul. It is undoubtedly Aquila who taught Paul the craft of tent making.]

## THE WOMEN of TITUS

The writer of the Letter of Titus is Paul. Paul held a warm affection for Titus. He called him, “a true child of mine in the faith that we share” (Titus 1:4). Paul also called Titus “my partner and fellow worker” (2 Corinthians 8:23). Titus was a Greek gentile whom Paul put in charge of ministering to new Christians in Crete; Titus was given specific instructions to keep the people away from false teachers and false religions (Titus 1:5-6, 10, 11; 2:1-10). The older women were given the command to be “teachers of right behavior” to the younger women (Titus 2:3-5).

## WHO WROTE HEBREWS?

According to Ruth Hoppin (1997) and an earlier Adolph Von Harnack (1900), it is entirely possible the Epistle to the Hebrews was written by the preacher named Priscilla [mother to Paul]. Hoppin’s work, *Priscilla’s Letter: Finding the Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews* was briefly suppressed by those who could not handle the idea that a woman authored Hebrews. *Hebrews* was too critical a book for the early patriarchs to redact entirely, as they did with the *Acts of Thekla*. The Epistle of Hebrews presents the core tenets of faith! The salutation in this letter is conspicuously absent, however, while the italicized words *of the order of Melchizadek* are too frequent to be missed. Every other letter by Paul is clearly attributed to him within the first paragraph; he took credit for his work. The order of Melchizadek pre-dated Aaron’s priesthood by *five generations*. Psalm 110:4 states that Jesus was a priest “after the order of Melchizadek,” Both believed in uniting the sephirah to balance the male and female within to bring about personal and world peace. Melchizadek undoubtedly prayed to God as the feminine *El Shaddai* [God with breasts]. Jesus prayed to Father-Mother God, AB-BA. Melchizadek offered a sacrifice of bread and wine (Genesis 14:18) as Jesus did at the Last Supper. Abraham offered one-tenth of everything he owned to Mechizadek (Hebrews 7:2); Jesus applauded Zacchaeus who gave away

*half his wealth* and promised to repay those he's cheated by 400% (Luke 19). Melchizadek united Binah with Malchut—the *doubly feminine Shekinah force*—which travelled with the Israelites for forty years. When the ten sephirah of the *kingdom of the heart and mind* are mastered, the *internal war* is won and male and female energies are at peace. Go back to the page on the Tree of Life printed earlier in this book and see it with fresh eyes; then, read the new commandment of Luke 25-28. Melchizadek is a virtuous woman seeking expression in you so you can “have life and have it more abundantly.” It is noteworthy that Priscilla reached back to a concept from the Kabbalah to teach us about a new temple not on a hill, but in our hearts and minds. The following words; “In their *minds* I shall plant my laws, writing them on their *hearts*....there shall be *no need for each to teach his neighbor*, and each his brother...” makes even more sense when “ala the order of Melchizadek” is added. The Epistle of Priscilla [as it should be called, in my opinion] states that the former sanctuary of bricks and mortar is “aging and ready to disappear’ (Hebrews 8:13); it has served its purpose, but was *never designed to last*.

#### THE WOMEN OF SECOND JOHN

It is believed by many that elect Cyria was a Christian woman and a good friend to John, who was known for her acts of charity and piety.<sup>81</sup> We do not know very much about her, but these simple facts: she was a mother, her children were also believers and John hoped to come see her: “My greetings to the Lady, *the chosen one*, and to her children whom I love in truth—and I am not the only one, for so do all who have come to know the Truth” (2 John: 1-2). If this letter had been addressed to a particular church, as other letters were, then that information would have been included. I do not believe “the Lady” refers to the Christian church in general either; that simply takes away from the good works of Cyria. Elect means “chosen of God.”<sup>82</sup>

## THE WIFE OF PETER

“When he returned to Capernaum some time later, word went round that he was in the house; and so many people collected that there was no room left, even in front of the door. He was preaching the word to them when some people came bringing him a paralytic carried by four men, but as they could not get the man to him through the crowd, they stripped the roof over the place where Jesus was, and when they had made an opening, they lowered the stretcher on which the paralytic lay. Seeing their faith, Jesus said to the paralytic, ‘My child, your sins are forgiven’” (Mark 2:1-5).

The house in Capernaum belonged to Peter’s wife and it is her hospitality to Jesus and all who seek him that is the untold story behind this story. Women not only supported Jesus out of their means, but they gave up their homes to be used for healing and ministry. We know for certain Peter had a wife because he had a mother-in-law who was healed by Jesus, mentioned in Matthew 8:14 and Mark 1:30-31. It is unfortunate that Peter’s wife continues to be nameless, for she appears to have been quite a heroic woman. Petronilla is, however, rumored to be the name of their daughter [See artwork in appendix]. Like the other disciples, Peter’s wife traveled with her husband and participated in ministry even unto her own death by martyrdom. In one of the diatribes of Eusebius—who took the time to quote Clement of Alexandria (150-215 AD) and discredit women who followed the practice of continence and separation from their husbands—*useful information* on Peter’s wife can be found, absent her name: “We are told that when blessed Peter saw his wife led away to death he was glad that her call had come and that she was returning home, and spoke to her in the most encouraging and comforting tones, addressing her by name: ‘My dear, remember the Lord.’ Such was the marriage of the blessed, and their consummate feeling towards their dearest.”<sup>77</sup>

## THE WIFE OF PAUL

Saint Paul's tomb has been located in a crypt under the Basilica of Rome. The inscription on the top of his sarcophagus simply states: "Paul Apostle Martyr." He was born in Tarsus of Cilicia and was a Roman citizen by birthright; by trade, he was a tentmaker. According to Acts 22:3, he attended the school of Gamaliel in Jerusalem and we know that he was a Pharisee (Philippians 3:6). He was present at Stephan's stoning (Acts 7:59, 8:1) and approved the executions of Christians (Acts 8:1, 8:3, 9:1) before being converted on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3-6). Clement stated that Paul did not take his wife with him on his travels for this reason:

"Paul does not hesitate, in one of his epistles, to greet his wife, whom he did not take about with him, that he might not be inconvenienced in his ministry."<sup>84</sup>

Given that Paul was frequently thrown in prison for preaching continence to married women and women betrothed to be married, it is possible that Paul's wife did not accompany him due to the danger involved. It should be noted, however, that Paul inquired about his right to have a sister or wife travel with him [or, as he crudely says in the KJV, "lead about"] in 1 Corinthians 9:5:

"Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as the other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord and Peter [aka Cephas]?"

Clement is the only Father who reported that Paul was married; Tertullian and Jerome denied it, *but remember...they resented all women who played a leadership role in the early church.* The gnostic term used in Philippians 4:3 of "yokefellow" (or syzygus) refers to a wife who is a fellow worker with her husband, it is defined as "the one whom one is connected with." If Paul was married, I think we can safely call his wife...*a saint!*

## HIDDEN WOMEN, HIDDEN PURPOSE

The writer of the *Epistle to Diognetus* said this about Christians of the 1<sup>st</sup> century:

"They marry as do all; they beget children, but they do not destroy their offspring. They have a common table, but not a common bed. They are in the flesh, but they do not live after the flesh. They pass their days on earth, but they are citizens of heaven. They obey the prescribed laws, and at the same time surpass the laws by their lives. They love all men, and are persecuted by all."<sup>85</sup>

When women were necessary to create a backlash against other Christians who made celibacy a requirement, the wives of the apostles were miraculously found by Clement of Alexandria. It is interesting to note that the names of the numerous women and women's stories disappeared just as fast, when the church patriarchs decided to create a male-only priesthood. Clement makes an ardent case for the disciples not only being married but having wives who were co-missionaries, in his book *Miscellanies*:

"Clement states that Peter was married and that he (along with the Philip of Acts, an apostle also in Clement's view) made children. After quoting 1 Corinthians 9:5, he notes of the other apostles that they devoted themselves without distraction to the proclamation and around other women, not as wives, but as sisters to be ministers to household managing women. Through these women, the teaching of the Lord was introduced into the women's quarters without slander."<sup>86</sup>

Clement said in *Miscellanies, Book III* that refusing to have sex with one's married partner and refusing to marry the person destined by your parents was not only going against God's plan but a condemnation of the disciples:

“Will they condemn the disciples? For *Peter and Philip had children...*”<sup>87</sup>

Not only did women provide material support to Jesus and his ministry, they ministered to Greek and Roman women hidden in “women’s quarters.” Even Tertullian the woman-hater, Jerome and Augustine believed independent women, not wives, provided material support and ministered to Greek and Roman women.<sup>88</sup> Cornelius Nepos in 1 BC made plain in his writings the customs that made women servants of the Lord, deacons and priests, essential:

“No Roman would hesitate to take his wife to a dinner party, or to allow the mother of his family to occupy the first rooms in his house and to walk about in public. The custom of Greece was completely different; a woman cannot appear at a party unless it is among her relations; she can only sit in the interior of the house, which is called the “women’s quarters”; this no male can enter unless he is a close relation.”<sup>89</sup>

The more important point I wish to make is that Jesus called himself and his followers “servants.” Matthew in 12:18 states: “Here is my servant, whom I have chosen, the one I love, in whom I delight.” Jesus is called the “suffering servant.” Jesus said in Matthew 22:3 that “he sent his servants to those who had been invited [to the banquet].” Jesus stated that anyone who wanted to be first, must be last, and “servant of all.” He spoke of the humility required for leadership by washing the feet of his disciples, and said: “The greatest among you must be your servant” (Matthew 23:11). The story of the good and faithful man who is faithful in small things, so he is given more, is about a “servant” (Matthew 25:21). At harvest time, Jesus said he would send out “a servant to the tenants to collect from them his share of the produce” (Mark 12:2-3).

Jesus likened his apostles to that of a master who puts his “servants in charge, each with his assigned task, and tells the one at the door to keep watch.” In Acts 2:18, it is stated, “even on



my *servants, both men and women*, I will pour out my Spirit in these days and they will prophecy.” The word “servant” is used continually by Jesus and his followers to indicate followers of the way who do not seek fame and fortune. Moses is called a servant in Malachi 3:22; David is deemed a servant in 2 Chronicles 6:6 and Acts 4:25, Mary says, “I am the Lord’s servant” in Luke 1:38; Phoebe is called a servant in Romans 16:1-2; Priscilla is called a fellow-worker/servant in Romans 16:3; Paul and Timothy call themselves servants in Philippians 1:1; Simon Peter calls himself a servant in 2 Peter 1:1; James is called a servant in James 1:1; Jude is called a servant in Jude 1:1. An entire book could be dedicated to just the use of “servant” in the Old and New Testament as a symbol for godliness, there are so many passages. Women were missionaries; they worked hard doing the Lord’s work and they often died a martyr’s death to prove they were servants. These facts *deserve their day* in the sunlight.

To the best of our ability, we must seek out the names and genealogy of women in the Bible. For too long, women have been nameless “wives of so and so”—nearly superfluous, unless justification were required to promote a particular church doctrine. There is a part of me that cannot bear their anonymity. Their births, deaths and lives are worthy of being investigated further until we can truly say we know them, as well as we know the men of the Bible who are spoken about from the pulpit so often people have memorized their names and stories. Let me reassert that not only women need to memorize stories about the women leaders, but men as well, along with sons and daughters...until the lesson of egalitarianism is accepted and *patriarchy is set aside, like some ancient, odd mythology*. If there are books being withheld in the Vatican library that shed light on the identity of women in the Bible beyond or including those I’ve mentioned, it’s time they were shared with the world. We cannot continue to hide the stories of one half of our population and expect the kingdom of heaven to come to earth!

## JAMES, PAUL & PETER & MARY: THE INTERNAL POWER STRUGGLE

After Jesus' crucifixion, it was not Peter who was put in charge, nor was it Paul. Peter had denied Jesus not once, but three times; Paul had crucified Jews who believed in Jesus and had self-designated himself an apostle. As Jesus told Peter, "When you have recovered [from knowing you've denied me three times] you in your turn must strengthen [build up in faith] *your brothers* [who will have similarly fled the cross]" (Luke 22:31-32). It is entirely possible that there was a feminine priesthood in the early church of which Mary Magdalene/Miramne was the leader. James and Paul, according to R. W. Holmen's book, *A Wretched Man*, were in constant conflict. Peter worked primarily with Jews; Paul worked primarily with Greeks. The issue for the early church fathers was one of doctrine. James and Mary taught that justification required action. Both professed that faith without works was a shallow use of the Holy Spirit; a person had to demonstrate what s/he believed by working toward social justice for widows, feeding the hungry, visiting those in jail, and taking care of the ill. Paul, like Protestants of today, professed that justification was by faith alone. However, "faith without works is dead." A tree without fruit, we are shown in the story of the fig, is no tree at all. Undeniably, James and Mary were marginalized in favor of Peter and Paul; James was made into a cousin, losing his status as the brother of Jesus, and Mary/Miriamne [the companion of Christ] was denigrated into a whore.

Perhaps it is time that Jesus' humanity was acknowledged on both sides of his family tree, so that Jews and Christians can come together, along with Muslims (born of Hagar) and a unification of the family of God can begin. Denying Jesus his earthly family keeps us from doing as Jesus did "and more" in his name, and it keeps God in a tiny box that is aloof and inaccessible. Perhaps it's time we separated ritualistic differences from core lessons on love and unity.

## “SEXIST PASSAGES” WHEN PROPERLY READ...

### REVEAL A CALL TO EGALITARIANISM

#### *Women were deacons...*

1 Timothy 3:8-13 defines the qualifications for male deacons and then uses a word that has been much overlooked—“likewise” or “similarly.” The next word has been interpreted to mean "wives," but “gyne” actually means "women.” In other words, the qualifications for male deacons are to be likewise followed by women deacons. It is interesting to note that The New Jerusalem Bible, which is a direct translation from the Aramaic, says “similarly women” (v.11). [From gyne we derive gynecologist.] Isn't it amazing how *one word* can torque the entire meaning of a passage and be used to deny women the right to serve for centuries?

#### *Regarding 1 Corinthians 7:4...*

Unlike in Palestine, where men were able to visit a prostitute, yet have their wife stoned for doing the same, Paul states that men and women are subject *to one another*. Men submit to their wives, and women submit to their husbands. The heretical new model is one of equals, not male dominance.

#### *Regarding 1 Corinthians 11:2-16...*

The insistence on a head covering was not as a sign of submission to her husband (or other men), but to God. Similarly, the yarmulke is not an indication of a sign of submission to women, but God. You can also liken the head covering to circumcision for men. Women were elevated through having a physical sign of their covenant with God; they were formerly not even allowed to study religious matters, but the head covering put them on equal footing with men and was an *outward sign of an inward belief*. What was used for avoidance, became a positive sign, shattering the myth of Genesis where veils were required to prevent women from being carried off by their hair by fallen angels to give birth to giants called Nephilim (Genesis 6:1-4).

*Regarding 1 Corinthians 12:*

The analogy of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:12 shows that one part is not more important than another and there are no disagreements between parts in a healthy body: “if one part is honored, all parts share its joy” (v. 26). In Christ, women are given the same charge to use all of their spiritual gifts, and this includes preaching, teaching and evangelizing. The *Acts of Thekla* prove that women were in leadership roles, teaching both men and women in the early church and they are to do the same today.

*Regarding Ephesians 5:21-6:9:*

It's not that men should avoid women because women are less worthy, but women that are to remain single so they can dedicate more of their time to higher pursuits than pleasing men. Paul always addresses issues of marriage and divorce to both men and women, not men alone for a reason. Women were given a role other than fostering heirs by both Jesus and Paul. The sexes were to be subject to “one another” as equals (v. 21).

*Regarding Philippians 4:3:*

Paul's reference to his co-workers, in the passage "they labored with me in the Gospel," does not suggest women had a passive role. It would be better translated as "women fought and worked to spread the gospel with me, side by side," for that is the truth. They also suffered and died during persecution, side by side with men [*a fact men frequently forget when they discuss leadership*].

*Regarding gays, lesbians, the transgendered, and those who choose to be celibate:*

Acts 8:27 shows us that all people were set free by Christ. After Philip *sought out the eunuch* [despised for his lifestyle] *at God's direction*, the eunuch was converted and became an apostle to the Candace who converted those in her kingdom. The eunuch became the *Bishop of the first Christian church in Ethiopia*, not an insignificant position, when you think about it!

## HEAL the SINNER but DO NOT CONDONE the BEHAVIOR

The Greek word “pais” means lover. In the story of Matthew 8:5-13 we see quite clearly that Jesus’ kingdom is not closed to those who are gay. In this story, a Roman centurion begs Jesus to heal his male pais. Jesus did not berate the centurion or command him to leave his presence. He did not *evade the request*. The Centurion was apologetic and said to Jesus, “I am *not worthy* to have you under my roof” and requested that Jesus “just give the word” and his pais would be cured. What was Jesus response? “In truth, I tell you, *in no one in Israel* have I found faith *as great at this*.” In that instant, the pais was cured.

Jesus healed the pais, just as he saved the woman at the well. However, that does not mean he condones the sins of the flesh. We know that he said it would be better for a person to have a millstone around their neck than to destroy the innocence of child. The progressives are following a satanic modality that combines totalitarian lockstep with Sodom and Gomorrah immorality. Children have been made a commodity, not just for the sexual pleasure of men, but for the organs and blood used in sacrifices to Molech. In 2022, we see a complete circle back to the cautionary tales of the Old Testament. **In 4,000 years, men have learned absolutely nothing.** Women will have to be the ones to rise up and refuse to accept the “norms” set by men in high seats of power or it will not happen. That is what these stories of the Bible actually tell us. Jesus refused to accept that women and children were secondary citizens in the kingdom destined to suffer. That is the secret hidden in the Gospel of Christ.



## **WE HAVE A GOD THAT SEES WOMEN & REFUSES TO LET THEM SUFFER**

God sees Jochebed and ensures that she is able to nurse her own son, Moses.

God sees Sarah and blesses her to lead.

God sees Rebekah and blesses her favorite son, Jacob.

God sees Rachel use the “ritual impurity laws” to her benefit and blesses her audacity.

God sees Dinah suffer and renders perfect justice on those who abuse women.

God sees Tamar’s desire for security in a family and gives it to her.

God sees Zipporah, rushing to obey the commandment to circumcise.

God sees the women making unleavened bread to escape tyranny in Egypt.

God sees women needing food and provides ample daily manna and quail.

God sees women giving up their jewelry to beautify the tabernacle.

God sees Miriam leading the women in song and dance to worship YHVH.

God sees Rahab protecting the spies from violence up on a roof.

God sees the Daughters of Zelophad unabashedly asking for their inheritance.

God sees women making a Nazirite vow of discipleship.

God sees Deborah leading Barak into battle and winning.

God sees Jael removing an unjust leader named Sisera.

God sees Delilah using the necessary means to disarm her town’s Goliath—Samson.

God sees Ruth making a vow to Naomi and gleaning the field to care for her.

God sees Hannah requesting a place and purpose in society.

God sees Abigail using her negotiating skills with David to avert violence.

God sees Michal exhorting a king to behave like one.

God sees a slave girl moving mighty men like Naaman into a better understand of true power.

God sees Judith protecting women and children from a murderous despot named Holofernes.

God sees Lia [aka the widow of Nain] and the widow of Zarephath and meets their daily needs.

God sees Vashti have self-respect as she refuses to come when called to parade herself before the King and his drunken men.

God sees Esther saving the Jews from a mass murderer named Haman.

God sees Hannah, the mother of Maccabees, suffering for truth's sake.

God sees Susanna defying elders who abuse their positions of power *and doesn't stand for it!*

God sees Mary agreeing to be the mother of Jesus.

God sees Elizabeth agreeing to be the mother of John, the Baptist.

God sees a bride without wine and a wedding that could end in embarrassment and abundantly provides.

God sees all women needing to be protected from financially and emotionally reckless husbands.

God sees Peter's mother and heals her so she can serve again.

God sees Beatrice, the "unclean" woman who is bleeding and restores her to full health.

God sees Jairus' daughter and raises her to new life.

God sees the hungry, physically and mentally ill and gives them the comfort of the Beatitudes.

God sees every woman caught in adultery and is still staying, "*Where are you...Adam?*"

God sees all widows who want justice and is urging, "Keep nagging until you are heard!"

God sees all Mary's who recognize the "better work" and do it.

God sees all Martha's who struggle with cultural "norms" and urges breaking the status quo.

God sees an eighty-year-old, crippled woman and says the Sabbath was meant for healing her.

God sees a woman finding her lost drachma and celebrates over her persistence.

God sees a widow putting in her last coin and reminds us to provide for the elderly.

God sees a woman at the well, thirsting for more...and ready for living water.

God sees Veronica wiping his face with her veil on the Via Dolorosa.

God sees three women at the cross, afraid of the future, and makes one the *protector of women!*

God sees Mary at the tomb and sends her out to be his first witness.

God sees women in the Upper Room who are eagerly receiving the Holy Spirit.

God sees Tabitha awakening from the dead to continue her good works.

God sees his apostle Rhoda running to open the door and bear witness to Peter's release.

God sees Thekla in Iconium making a vow to follow God, breaking her engagement off to preach.

God sees Lydia in royal purple taking risks to start a home church.

God sees the women of Thessalonica accepting the word and acting upon it.

God sees Greek women of high standing accepting the word in Beroea.

God sees Damarius accepting the word in Athens.

God sees Priscilla leading Apollos to better understanding and Philip's daughters prophesying.

God sees Phoebe becoming the Deaconess of Cenchrae.

God sees Mary working hard for social justice and Junia being given the title of apostle.

God sees Tryphaena and Tryphosa taking risks to start a home church.

God sees the mother of Rufus mothering apostles like Paul.

God sees Julia using her skills and abilities to spread the good news.

God sees the sister of Nereus fearlessly using her spiritual gifts.

God sees the wife of Peter cleaning up after a hole in the ceiling was made to heal a paraplegic.

God sees the Stephanas family being converted and doing good works.

God sees Lois and Eunice training Timothy in the proper ways to lead.

God sees Claudia, Pudenziana, and Prassede serving in their home church despite persecution.



**God has told women to SHAME GODLESS MEN and reject man-made laws that harm society and promised them GLORY and HONOR for doing so.**

**WOMEN WHO CARRIED THE TORCH**

.....

The role of an Abbess, according to church documents, was to  
*awaken a desire to learn scripture, preach, baptize, hear confessions and assign penance.*

Women also undeniably functioned as deacons, priests, and bishops  
based on ancient records, early murals and tombstone inscriptions.

.....

ST. PRASSEDE and ST. PUDENZIANA (140-154 AD): These two sisters were Roman Christians who cared for the often-severed bodies of those martyred for their faith. They built a baptistery in their father's home and baptized pagans, operating a "safe house" for the apostles. Both were martyred.

BLANDINA (died 177 AD): She was a slave woman who remained faithful under torture in the amphitheatre of Marcus Aurelius, saying, "I am a Christian, and we commit no wrongdoing."

PERPETUA and FELICITY (181-203 AD): According to the "*Passion of Perpetua, St. Felicitas and their Companions*," during the persecutions of the emperor Septimius Severus, people were arrested for being either Jews or Christians. Perpetua had a child she was still nursing at the time she was martyred and Felicitas was eight months pregnant.

CECELIA (200 AD): Following in the steps of Miriam, Cecelia is remembered for her many contributions of music to the early church.

POTAMIANA (died 205 AD): A martyr whose story turned people toward Christ, Potamiana converted her jailer (Basilides), when she appeared to him after her death with a crown in her hand and a pledge of glory for his conversion.

SAINT LUCIA (283-304 AD): Sicilian saint to the blind, legend says she removed her own eyes so as to be released from marriage to serve the poor; her entire dowry was dedicated to their welfare. Other stories say she was martyred by her fiancé for choosing a life of service.

ST. NONNA (290-374 AD): Wife to St. Gregory, she is an excellent example of a minister who also raised a family.

MACRINA the Younger (324-379 AD): Her father was Basil the Elder; her grandmother was St. Macrina the Elder; two of her three siblings were early church patriarchs in Turkey (then called Cappadocia); their names were Basil the Great, St. Gregory of Nyssa and Peter of Sebaste. She was known as a holy woman, a prominent nun, an ascetic, and a religious teacher. Her brother composed “Dialogue on the Soul and Resurrection” in her honor.

MARCELLA (325-410 AD): She used her Roman palace, Aventine Hill, as a safe haven for Christians who were persecuted. She remained celibate after the death of her husband and led Bible study classes for noble women. Jerome asked her to critique his work called the *Vulgate*.

ANTHUSA of Antioch (330-374 AD): Intelligent and attractive, Anthusa instructed her son in the Bible. He later became the Bishop of Constantinople.

DAUGHTERS OF COUNT TERENCE (372 AD): These women were deacons according to Basil of Caesarea’s writings.

DEACONESS OLYMPIAS (368-408 AD): She refused to marry and dedicated her life to using her considerable inheritance to taking care of the sick, widows, prisoners and orphans. She served as a deaconess of the church.

HELENA (400 AD): Following her husband’s death, her son (Constantine) became ruler of the western Roman Empire; Helena is credited with finding holy sites and building huge basilicas upon them for pilgrims to visit; the basilicas of St. Peter and St. Paul were erected in Rome due to her efforts. Helena is credited with finding the three crosses and resurrection cave and sharing parts with churches throughout Europe.

DEACON CELERINA (448 AD): She was a deacon in Constantinople.

BISHOP BRIGID OF IRELAND (450-523 AD): She started Ireland's first nunnery and she appointed her own bishops to the cities of Kildare. The *Book of Lismore* describes Brigid as a "prophetess of Christ" and a woman of action.

SAINT CLOTILDE (474-545 AD): Daughter of King Chilperic II, Clotilde converted her husband, King Clovis I, to Christianity which spread the gospel throughout France. She built the Abbey of St Genevieve in Paris, where she is buried.

HILDA OF WHITBY (614-680 AD): Hilda ruled both men and women as abbess of a monastery; she also trained bishops and hosted the Synod of Whitby in 663.

PRIEST FARA (600 AD): Burgundofara (Fara) was the daughter of Count Agneric, courtier of King Theodebert II. She refused her father's demand that she marry and became Abbess of Evoriacum, which she convinced him to build. She ruled there for thirty-seven years.

[Ordination rites for women deacons were committed to paper between the 7<sup>th</sup>—8<sup>th</sup> century in the Bessarion/Grotta Ferrata Codex.]

LIOBGETHA (700-780 AD) A relative of St. Boniface, she worked to convert the Germans to Christianity; she was the abbess of Bischofheim Monastery in Mainz, Germany for 28 years.

BISHOP THEODORA (820 AD): "Episcopa" means Bishop. The square halo around Bishop Theodora's head means she was still alive when her mosaic was created [see appendix] at the Chapel of Zeno.

[Bishop Atto of Vercelli, Italy proves the existence of female priests in his 10<sup>th</sup> century letters: "Ad adjumentum virorum etiam religiosae mulieres in sancta ecclesia cultrices ordinabantur," "For the helping of men, even religious women were ordained caretakers in the holy church," Atto wrote, "not only men but also women were in charge of the churches for greater efficiency."]

HROTSVIT VON GANDERSHIEM (932-1002 AD): Abbess of the Imperial Saxon Abbey of Gandershiem, Hrotsvitvon was the first Christian dramatist and poet. Her plays featured the

themes of chastity and perseverance of widows, which stood in stark contrast to plays of the time written in Latin which portrayed women as weak and irrational. Her name means “strong voice.”

ANNA COMNENA (1083-1146 AD): Daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius I, the eldest of nine children, Anna was famous for her book the *Alexiad*, the foremost political and military account of the Byzantine period of the late 11th and early 12th century. Anna’s grandmother, Anna Dalassena, ensured that Anna studied mathematics, science, philosophy, and history. Bishop of Ephesus hailed Anna as someone who had attained "the highest summit of wisdom, both secular and divine." She is considered the world’s first historian.

HILDEGARD OF BINGEN (1098-1179 AD): Founder of the Benedictine community in Bingen, Germany, Hildegard was a prolific writer and musician; she wrote 100 letters, 72 songs, 70 poems and 9 books. Hildegard was herself offered as a “tithe” to her parents’ church at the age of fourteen. She received many visions which were used in her books; the most famous was *Scivius* (Know the Way). She also wrote *Physica*, a text on the natural sciences, and a book on natural cures. She stated that “woman may be made from man, but no man can be made without a woman.” She began public preaching at the age of 60, breaking with all bans on women speaking in public.

BEGUINES (1101-1300 AD): Beguines were religious women who took temporary vows to help the poor, sick and homeless. The appeal of this order was that it released those who changed their mind and chose to marry; they were allowed to live in the outside world. This order was in stark contrast to that of the anchoress (1200 AD), which required living in a solitary cell with only three windows.

QUEEN ELEANOR OF AQUITAINE (1122-1204 AD): Married to Louis VII, King of France, and a wealthy woman in her own right from the age of 15 with the lands of Aquitaine at her full disposal, she offered thousands of her followers to fight in the second crusade. Attended by 300 of her ladies, she tended to the fallen. These women dressed in armor and carried lances. Eleanor preferred her uncle’s military plan (capturing Edessa) to that of her husband (capturing Jerusalem). She was the first recorded woman to join in religious military combat expeditions.

[Sure enough, the pope forbade women to do so in the future.] Queen Eleanor was the patron of Fontevrault, a spiritual retreat for aristocratic women.

METHCHILD OF MAGDEBURG (1207-1282): She claimed to have her first vision of the Holy Spirit at the age of twelve and became a Beguine in her 20's. She wrote down many divine visions which were used by Dante in the *Divine Comedy*; Methchild is said to be the character of Matilda. Her book, *Flowing Light of the Godhead*, discussed the mystical union between the soul as bride and Christ as the bridegroom.

[From 1300-1600 an intense battle was waged to keep women out of church leadership roles. The Council of Trent (1545-1563) set in stone that men alone should be priests. Perhaps it was the abbesses questioning of church corruption that initiated the ban on all things female. The change was certainly not based on Jesus' teachings. The battle to restore women to their rightful position continues even today. Every book that put women in leadership roles was called "heretical." Seventy-five books in all were banned, many of which were known to be written by women.]

BRIDGET OF SWEDEN (1303-1373 AD): Bridget was said to have had visions directly from Christ, Mary and John the Baptist about Christ's suffering. She chastised the church for corruption and Gregory XI for his arrogance, unforgiveable stupidity, and gluttony.

CATHERINE BENICASA (1347-1380 AD): Born in Tuscany, Italy she refused to marry and entered the Third Order of the Dominicans. In 1366 she experienced a "mystical marriage with Jesus" who told her to go out into the world and heal the sick, feed the poor, and tell people to repent. Capable of reading both Latin and Italian, she wrote approximately 300 letters, one-third of which were to women; the majority of which were to various, kings, queens and a pope.

JULIAN OF NORWICH (1342-1416 AD): A mystic, Julian focused on the mother-like qualities of God in *Revelations of Divine Love*.

CHRISTINE PISAN (1365-1434 AD): Venetian born, Christine argued in *Epistre au Dieu D'amours* published in 1399 that the classical religious canon “presented a distorted image of female nature, produced by male arrogance and prejudice.” She further argued that had women written the books, blatant misogyny would not exist.

JOAN OF ARC (1412-1431 AD): She was a model of holy disobedience. When asked whether she was subject to church authorities she said, “Yes, but our Lord must be served first.”

MARGARET FELL (1614-1702 AD): A Quaker minister, she published *Women's Speaking Justified, Proved and Allowed by the Scriptures, All Such as Speak by the Spirit and Power of the Lord Jesus and How Women Were the First that Preached the Tidings of the Resurrection of Jesus, and Were Sent by Christ's Own Command Before He Ascended to the Father*—a title that really says it all.

[1600-1700 AD: The church fathers finally determined that Mary, Mother of Jesus was a spiritual high priestess filled with the Holy Spirit.]

[1700-1800 AD: Women’s Emancipation was the focus. *The Women’s Bible* was published by Elizabeth Cady Stanton in 1895 to rectify years of blaming women for the sins of the world.]

[1870 and 1882 AD: The *Married Women’s Property Act* finally affirmed rights given far earlier to the Daughters of Zelophehad.]

OLYMPIA BROWN (1863 AD): She was the first woman ordained as a Universalist minister. [The Salvation Army (1865) ordained both men and women.]

HELENOR ALTER DAVISSON (1866 AD): She was the first woman to be ordained in the Methodist denomination.

CELIA BURLEIGH (1971 AD): She was the first woman ordained as a Unitarian minister.

ANNA HASCOMBE (1892 AD): She was the first woman ordained in the Church of the Nazarene.

## 20th Century Light Bearers—the present

[1909: The Church of God in Cleveland, TN commenced to ordain women.]

ANN ALLEBACH (1911): Ann was the first Mennonite women to be ordained in PA.

[1914: The Assemblies of God ordained its first woman minister.]

[1917: The Congregationalist Church of England ordained women and made it a requirement that all applicants must agree that women are *capable of being ministers.*]

[1922: The Jewish reform movement stated that women cannot be justly denied ordination.]

REGINA JONAS (1935): Regina was privately ordained as a rabbi in Germany.

[1956: United Methodist Church approved of full clergy rights for women.]

[1958: Church of the Brethern gave full clergy rights to women.]

[1964: Southern Baptists worked to prevent future female ordinations, but interestingly approved of women as missionaries...]

ELIZABETH PLATZ (1970): Elizabeth became the 1st woman ordained by the Lutheran Church of America.

SALLY PRIESAND (1972): Sally became the 1st woman ordained by a seminary.

PAMELA MCGEE (1976): Pamela became the 1st woman ordained in the Lutheran church of Canada.

[1985: The governing body of Conservative Judaism agreed to admit women as rabbis.]

[1995: The Sligo Seventh-Day Adventists ordained three women, defying denomination rules.]

YASMIN SHADEER (2004): Yasmin led 'Isha Muslim prayer for mixed-gender group in a mosque.

[2007: The Worldwide Church of God approved of the concept of women ministers.]

When you hear in the news (or from your pastor) that it is “unnatural” for women to lead men, insert into the conversation the names of these women, who from 110 AD to present have never given up doing the Lord’s work and didn’t ask men’s permission to do so!

## END NOTES

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#### Battle Issues for 2020 and Beyond

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## RESOURCES

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Tony Campolo and Mary Albert Darling. *The God of Intimacy and Action: Reconnecting Ancient Spiritual Practices, Evangelism and Justice* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2007)

Paul Coughlin and Jennifer D. Degler, PhD. *No More Christian Nice Girl: When Just Being Nice—Instead of Good—Hurts You, Your Family, and Your Friends* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2010)

Elizabeth Clare Prophet, *Kabbalah: Key to Your Inner Power—Mystical Paths of the World's Religions* (Livingston, Montana: Summit University Press: 1997)

Brent Curtis and John Eldredge, *The Sacred Romance* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997)

Sarah Sentilles, *A Church of Her Own: What Happens When a Woman Takes the Pulpit* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2008)

### *Videos on Youtube I Would Recommend for Further Study*

- Maggie Whitehouse, “Kabbalah and the Ten Commandments” Parts 1, 2 and 3
- Jimmy Carter, Parliament of Religions, <http://vimeo.com/8051517>
- The National Geographic series: “Who was Jesus?”
- Frontline’s “From Jesus to Christ”
- A Woman in the “Last Supper” in Cremona: multiple panels depict *Mary Magdalene/Miriamne*
- Bloodline, an eleven-part video series
- Nova, The Bible’s Buried Secrets, “Did God Have a Wife?”
- In an Israeli warehouse, Clues bout Jesus’ Life and Death
- The Lost Gospel by Simcha Jacobovici

## *Photographs of Famous Artwork*

There is artwork that proves Mary Magdalene/Miriamne, Miriam and many others were part of Jesus' inner circle. Simply go to Superstock.com and type in "Last Supper" and "Fra Angelico"

The Last Supper by Barocci

The Stained Glass Window of the Last Supper, Saint Samson Cathedral, Dol De Bretagne, ille et Vilaine, Brittany, France

The Last Supper by Giovanni Garzanti

The Last Supper by Giotto Di Bondone

The Last Supper by Sassetta

Egypt, Wadi Natroun, The Last Supper

The Last Supper by Heinrich Hoffman

The Last Supper, France, Finistere, Sain Pol de Leon

The Last Supper, by the Perusa Master

St. Basil's Cathedral has a painting depicting Jesus surrounded by women disciples.

The Last Supper by Fra Angelico

Man of Sorrow with Saints Mary Magdalene and Miriam by Fra Angelico

Lamentation of Christ by Fra Angelico

The Descent of the Holy Ghost by Fra Angelico

The Forerunner of Christian Saints and Martyr by Fra Angelico

Communion of the Apostles by Fra Anglico

Numerous statues and stained glass windows at Chartres Cathedral in France include women disciples.

The Saint Etienne Cathedral in France includes a stained glass window showing Mary arriving *in a boat from France*.



*In the Temple of Lectures*  
*Conversations with*  
*Victorious Female Leaders in the Bible*  
*(A Comedy)*

by Rosanne Ferreri

## The Cast

### Grace: Mystical Traveler

#### Act One

Narrator  
Abigail  
Esther  
Vashti  
Proverbs Noble Woman  
Zipporah  
Lois  
Eunice  
Mary, Mother of Jesus

#### Act Two

Queen of Sheba  
Puah  
Shiprah  
Jochebed  
Rahab  
Miriam  
Daughters of Zelophad:  
Mallah, Noa,  
Hoglah, Milchah, Tirzah  
Bathsheba  
Huldah  
Deborah  
Bithiah

#### Act Three

Eve  
Thekla  
Lydia  
Maxilla  
Drusiana  
Martha  
Mary

#### Act Four

Deborah  
Judith  
Jael  
Phoebe  
Junia  
Tryphena  
Tryphosa

#### Act Four Cont.

Widow  
Philip's Four Daughters  
Tabitha  
Priscilla  
Claudia  
Mary Magdalene

#### Act Five

Mizpah  
Susanna  
Delilah  
Dinah  
Widow of Nain  
Widow's Mite  
80 Year Old Cripple

#### Act Six

Mary Magdalene  
Mother Mary  
Mary of Clopas  
Mary Salome

#### Act Seven

Narrator  
Ruach haKodesh  
Wisdom  
Baat-kol  
Sarai  
Rebekah  
Rachel  
Leah  
Tamar  
Puah and Shiprah  
Bithiah  
Miriam  
Zipporah  
Rahab  
Daughters of Zelophad  
Achsah  
Deborah  
Jael  
Delilah  
Ruth

#### Act Seven Cont.

Hannah  
Michal  
Bathsheba  
Abigail  
Huldah  
Judith  
Vashti  
Esther Proverbs Noble  
Woman  
Queen of Sheba  
Susanna  
Dinah  
Mizpah  
Anna  
Mary, Mother of Jesus  
Mary of Clopas  
Mary Salome  
Elizabeth  
Mary Magdalene  
Martha  
Beatrice  
Widow of Nain  
Widow's Mite  
Tabitha  
Rhoda  
Mary, Mother of Mark  
Thekla  
Drusiana  
Maximilla  
Lydia  
Priscilla  
Tryphena  
Tryphosa  
Eunice  
Lois  
Apphia  
Claudia  
Prassede  
Pudenziana  
Cyria  
Junia  
Wife of Peter  
Wife of Paul

## ACT ONE

**Narrator:** *[Side left in dark with spotlight]* There is a place in heaven called the Temple of Lectures where the great leaders of the past meet to teach and practice their public speaking skills. This multi-leveled building is surrounded by a golden gate and a fence. *[All objects are backlit.]* It's most striking feature is the orange dome. *[The dome glows brighter momentarily.]* That large gold obelisk represents the finger of God; it points upward to the source of knowledge. *[Spotlight on finger]* Victorious women of the Bible are regular speakers in this temple; others have been called from their daily tasks in the rose garden and other temples to meet today's mystical traveler. I sense she is very nearly here.

*[Grace closes her eyes after a long day's work creatively writing at the computer and relaxes into rapid eye movement, proceeds through a white tunnel with a very bright light into the Temple of Lectures. Narrator addresses audience warmly, as if telling a secret]*

She has attempted this trip many times before... We are all hoping the ideas she'll hear today will take root and bear fruit in her encounters with other women.

*[Grace opens her eyes in wonderment and approaches the Temple where Abigail, Esther, Vashti, Proverbs Noble Woman, Zipporah, Lois and Eunice, Mother Mary and Eve are seated.]*

**Abigail:** Come in, darling Grace! We have been waiting for you.

**Grace:** I can hardly believe I am here with all of you! The seventh try was the trick, I guess.

**Abigail:** Seven notes to the scale, seven wonders of the world, seven seas; it's a very *special* number with spiritual significance.

**Narrator:** Their topic today will be on the need for women to take the helm; we need to begin at the very beginning, at Genesis. Some of you may be surprised to learn that there are not just one but two stories that describe the creation of this world. The first, less told, starts off with Yahweh and his wife Asherah having a conversation with their son and daughter about creating an androgenous being in their image... In the beginning the earth was a formless void, there was darkness over the deep, with a divine wind sweeping over the water. Light was called into being first, and it divided light from darkness. A vault was made in the water to divide the earth from heaven. Then the waters were brought together into a single mass and dry land appeared. The earth was asked to bring forth vegetation and seed-bearing plants, each according to its own species. A greater light to govern the night was made along with the stars and a greater light to warm the earth was made called the sun. Wild animals and creeping things of all kinds were put on the earth so it would not be barren, and then...he created human life. I read [Narrator opens Bible]:

“God created man in the image of himself, in the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them. God blessed them, saying to them: ‘Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and be caretakers of it. Be masters of the fish of the sea, the birds of the heaven and all the living creatures that move on earth. I give all the seed-bearing plants everywhere on the surface of the earth and all the *trees with seed-bearing fruit; this will be your food.* And to all the wild animals, all the birds of the heaven and all the living creatures that creep along the ground, I give all the foliage of the plants as their food. And so it was. On the seventh day, YHVH rested.”

In the second version of Genesis, Genesis 2, God made man from the ground and blew the breath of life into his nostrils. Then, a garden was planted in Eden to grow every kind

of tree enticing to look at and to eat. The rivers Pishon, Gihon, the Tigris and the Euphrates flowed through it. God placed the man in the garden all by himself to cultivate and care for it and gave him a command, “You are free to eat of all the trees in the garden, except for the tree of knowledge of good and evil, for on that day you will die. Then, according to Genesis 2, woman was created, for it is not good that man be alone, but before that he made all the animals. No suitable helper was found among those, thankfully... God put man into a deep sleep and took one of his ribs and closed the flesh and from that rib, so close to his heart, he made a woman. His final product, and shall I dare say it.... His *masterpiece*! And Adam said, and I quote: “This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! This to be called wo-man.”

[Narrator closes book]

What do we learn here?

**Grace:** We should all be vegetarians eating the fruits of seed-bearing plants?

**Narrator:** Quite true, but more importantly...There is a feminine aspect of God, his wife in creation who assisted in both the creation of this world and of you. You are made in her image and so are all of your daughters. Whoever finds her, finds life. She directed human affairs and shared the secrets of God’s knowledge. She was with the master craftsman, delighting in him day after day, ever at play in his presence, at play everywhere on earth, and delighting to be with the children of men, so say Proverbs and the Book of Wisdom. [Narrator closes book.] If you are tempted to think in terms of seniority, then remember that Eve was God’s final accomplishment in that second version. She was Adam’s *ezer kenegdo*, his comparable part, not his inferior or subordinate. In the Old Testament, God is the “helper” who provides ethical, spiritual and

physical help to men; surely God is not subservient to humankind! Neither is Eve subordinate to Adam. It was not until God gave Adam an appropriate spouse not from the animal kingdom that he pronounced it all “very good.” Until there was separation into male and female, Adam was surrounded by animals, incomplete, unhappy and woefully unable to procreate!

When they chose to begin a family and not be immortal, their eyes were opened. The first sexual experience does that, does it not? They chose life and Eve the mother of life, began the human family and she wanted a large one... One woman changed the course of history, you could say and her name was Eve.

**Abigail:** There were many of us who changed history, dear narrator; the Bible is filled with women who passed the baton to the next generation, whispering: *Choose life!* My story is not pretty. My husband, Nabal [which means fool] nearly caused the death of our entire village. I brought out food and calmed David—this was before he became king—so he would not have blood on his hands. Like Eve, I had my snake to deal with all by myself.

**Esther:** Speaking of snakes, I had to deal with Haman. There was no rule against bowing; Joseph did as much in his coat of many colors in Pharaoh’s court, but Mordecai was a proud man. You know those alpha men, Abigail, constantly posturing for status. I planned a party that switched the tables and saved my people from death. Choose life!

**Vashti:** Daughters of Abraham do not appear before drunken men to unveil themselves like common prostitutes. I refused, as you all well know... Men learned to value Esther and me not only for our beauty, but for our brains. What I was asked to do was not safe; I too chose life and I hope all women respect themselves enough to do so too.

**Proverbs Noble Woman:** I have found that when you have the resources and are a woman of independent means...you do not get taken advantage of. I realize my sisters did not have that option, but Grace women of your time have it and should choose it!

**Zipporah:** Under stress, we sometimes find our strength. Who knew I could be a mohel! I surely did not! I had to practice on peeling leeks before I dared do the deed. But, did it I did, and I kept the commandment when others forgot!

**Eve:** And here I've been worrying for centuries...that I gave you all such a rough start!

**Lois and Eunice:** The woman who rocks the cradle prepares the next generation to lead. If they choose to be mothers, they have an awesome responsibility to carry on *despite all circumstances*, constantly choosing life over despair. You are our idol, Eve.

**Abigail:** *I don't blame you, Eve.*

**Esther:** Not I!

**Zipporah:** The mother of life? Never!

**Mary, Mother of Jesus:** Without you, *however would we all exist?*

*[Change of characters: Abigail, Esther, Vashti, Proverbs Noble Woman, Zipporah Lois and Eunice, Miriam and Eve all give Grace a hug and wave goodbye, walking off into the audience. Puah and Shiprah enter the Temple of Lectures with Jochebed, Rahab, Miriam, the Daughters of Zelophad, the Queen of Sheba, Bathsheba and Huldah.]*

## ACT TWO

**Narrator:** The Bible is filled with strong women who followed God instead of man; there's one in just about every book of the Bible, too often to be missed.

**Queen of Sheba:** I am here for all to see—a queen, a Candace! I came with my great retinue to *question Solomon!* Jesus mentioned me as one who will rise up to judge the world. Did he say that of any other living male? *He did not!*

**Grace:** In my country, women have only 17% representation in government; we've *never* had a female president, and a few go so far as to say *gender doesn't matter*.

**Queen of Sheba:** [Gasps] Have they gone backwards in time? Do they club her over the head and drag her back to their cave too? [She acts out clubbing on Puah who protects her head].

**Shiprah:** If Puah and I were able to stand up to the Pharaoh and defy man-made rules..

**Bithiah:** ...in 1393 BC, none the less, surely the women of your time can do the same!

**Jochebed:** It took *five women* to keep one boy alive! Miriam, Bithiah, Puah and Shiprah, and myself. Yes, there were risks and sacrifices to be made. But, *took them*, we did!

**Rahab:** I hid the Hebrew spies on the roof and altered the course of history for my family and the Hebrew people. Have you any idea how hard it is to hide *grown men* with size 13 feet under stalks of flax?

**Miriam:** For forty years I wandering with people who wanted manna, didn't want manna, wanted quail, refused to eat quail. Do you think that was easy? The people *did not leave my side*, when I got sick; It is to be remembered that Abraham and Aaron *did not make it into the*



*promised land either.* I was respected as a leader and, frankly, the only one who could carry a tune...and a beat...with my tambourine.

**Daughters of Zelophad:** Women had never owned property before *we asked* for our father's inheritance. It was a double portion we were owed...for he was the first-born. Being unmarried, we knew we had to secure our future or we'd have to glean the corners of the field. We all agreed amongst ourselves that we would not give up until we got justice, and in the end we got our property rights from Moses, *because we were persistent.*

**Bathsheba:** You stuck together and so did the wives of David. My first husband was sent away to the *front lines of war*, but I gave word to Nathan and a king was made to repent. [*She stands and touches the heads of each of the following women as she speaks.*] Michal went even further and denied David her marriage bed. Abigail united with us to inform our leaping master [she imitates comically] that we were to be treated like true Daughters of Abraham—not pawns.

**Huldah:** Josiah could have gotten any number of men to look at the *Lost Book*, but he called me away from the Jerusalem College of Law to interpret it. I worked hard to prepare myself to be a leader to be trusted; *that's so important, Grace.*

**Deborah:** They did not call me *honeybee* without just cause; I was a spirited and fiery woman in those days, which is what “*eshet lappidot*” means. What was it I said? The way you are going about it, Barak, *the glory will not be yours*, for Yahweh will deliver Sisera into the hands...

**Queen of Sheba:**...*of a victorious woman!* Nice touch, that last part! [*Bithiah, Huldah, Puah and Shiprah, Jochebed, Rahab, Miriam, the Daughters of Zelophad, Bathsheba and the Queen of Sheba each give Grace a kiss, and then walk off into the crowd, making small talk with the audience as they go about Deborah's victory: Wasn't she wonderful? What a role model! etc.*]

### ACT THREE

*[Enter Theka, Lydia, Maximilla, Drusiana, Mary Magdalene/Miriamne and Martha.]*

**Narrator** *[moves to gold finger prop]*: Contrary to what some believe, biology was not destiny for followers of The Way.

**Maximilla**: Quite a large number of widows and single women broke with the cultural norm. We chose a continent life unto death, or celibacy for just a few years to serve the poor.

**Thekla**: It wasn't easy...by any means! I was put in an amphitheatre to fight off lions and bears for the sin of desiring to preach. The women proclaimed from their seats: "There is but one God, who is the God of Thekla" and many saw my bravery and chose to believe. I am the first to have baptized myself!

**Drusiana**: Do they talk of us often and remember that we were more spirited than lions?

**Grace**: I am sorry to say your stories are *rarely told* from the pulpit...in favor of those about male leaders; even *weak ones* are preferred to stories about strong women!

**Thekla**: Well, the honest truth is that all of the early churches were in the homes of women who supported the fledgling church *out of their own funds*.

**Lydia**: I am considered to be the first European convert and everyone said I dyed cloth the most beautiful shade of purple...to support my ministry.

**Maximilla**: We were deacons, presbyters and even bishops; we proclaimed the gospel, dispensed the sacraments and baptized.

**Drusiana:** Above all, do not forsake *Wisdom*,” says Proverbs. *Wisdom* was not personified as a breeder!

**Martha:** I was taught that truth when I was preparing a meal and Jesus chided me with ‘Mary is doing the *better part sitting at my feet learning Torah*.’ He set all cultural norms on their head.

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** He also said to a woman who shouted out after him, “Blessed be the womb that bore you and the breasts that sucked...*better rather, are those who hear the word of God and keep it!*”

**Martha:** Grace, describe the women of your time. Are they living lives of quiet desperation or are they living fearlessly?

**Grace:** There are women like you called feminists who are denigrated for wanting women to have a seat at the tables where decisions are being made about their lives, their well-being and the well-being of the planet. There are yet some men who think if they give women equality *they are losing status*; these men say a woman’s duty is *to put the needs of men first* and bear children.

**Theka:** That belief in women *as breeders should have changed* by now...

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** *Marriage and motherhood is wonderful, but it should not be by force!*

**Grace:** There are many who yet use scripture to keep women passive and subservient. They redact all passages that show women in a powerful leadership role. I hate to say it, but all of your stories are on their *lost books and banned books list*.

**Thekla:** The truth cannot remain hidden forever, and there are always women who want more...

## ACT FOUR

*[Deborah, Judith, Jael, Phoebe, Junia, Tryphena and Tryphosa, Widow, Philip's Four Daughters, Tabitha, Priscilla, Claudia, and Mary Magdalene/Miramne enter to join Grace as the others depart.]*

**Narrator:** Since the days of Puah and Shiprah, women have had to turn the tide of impending disaster, not wait for those in power to have a change of heart. *By then, it may be too late!*

**Judith:** How well I know! The men of Bethulia wanted to give God an ultimatum of five days to save them from a battle with Nebuchadnezzar. That would have allowed Holofernes time to invade our camp, capture the virgins, destroy those married, and make off with our treasure. I couldn't stand by and let that happen.

**Jael:** You have to use whatever is at hand to protect yourself, when facing a violent foe.

**Phoebe:** We were a peculiar people who refused to engage in the sexual immorality of the Corinthians; we set a higher standard and did not back down.

**Junia:** Mary Magdalene/Miramne set the standard first, as the apostle to the apostles.

**Tryphena and Tryphosa:** So many of us worked hard in the Lord, following in her footsteps.

**Widow:** We became priests, for the men were forbidden to enter the inner rooms of the home reserved only for women. The title of "most honorable" speaks for itself. I blessed the communion chalice, ministered to the sick, and provide religious instruction. We were honored *in the place of the Holy Ghost.*"

**Philip's Four Daughters:** *[alternately speak sentences at // break.]* The Holy Spirit came upon us, men and women// and we all started prophesying// in languages many of us had never heard before...//Celibacy was revolutionary; it legitimized what we were doing. //No other women had as many options as we did, for we were not primarily concerned with how to cook goat!

**Tabitha:** I think we felt empowered too. My ministry was important to me and I am thankful to have been resurrected to continue my work until a ripe old age.

**Priscilla:** We did not wait for the usual quorum of ten men to start a church. A catacomb in my honor shows a group of women priests conducting a Eucharist banquet.

**Grace:** Women are still fighting for the right *to be priests*, unfortunately.

**Priscilla:** But, the right has already been won!

**Claudia:** It's a God-given right, a calling that cannot be denied!

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** The Holy Spirit selects leaders not based on gender but character! I had much difficulty with Peter, as I recall, but Jesus called me the disciple he loved: "Blessed Mary," he said, "You whom I shall complete with all the mysteries on high...speak openly, for you are one whose heart is set on heaven's kingdom, *more than all your brothers.*" Some in our group wanted priority seating in heaven, I recall; one feared walking on the water; none understood the foot washing metaphor; fewer understood his refusal to be moved to violence. But, *over time, Grace*, we figured it out...*and so will the women of your generation.*

**Grace:** I shall urge them not to delay in using their skills to further the kingdom of God on earth—to rectify *longstanding social injustices.*

## ACT FIVE

**Narrator:** How to deal with longstanding social injustices...these women know how it's done.

*[Enter Mizpah, Susanna, Delilah, Dinah, Widow of Nain, Widow's Mite and 80-year-old crippled woman]*

**Mizpah:** My cautionary tale remains *as a warning* to all men not to make *foolish vows* that impact the lives of women and children. Make certain men read my story *and learn from it!*

**Susanna:** There were two elders in my town who thought they could take advantage of me using the law for deceptive purposes; they took a dual vow to hide the truth...

**Grace:** But their watertight plan burst a leak when their testimony came under actual scrutiny!

**Susanna:** Wicked injustice only thrives in darkness, like mold.

**Delilah:** David may have caught his Goliath, but I had my Samson who caused our community endless grief. He endangered his bride and her family; he tied fox tails together and burned down a village—all over a silly riddle only he knew the answer to. I will warn you in advance, Grace, sometimes when you take down a bad male actor, you will get labeled a “bad girl of the Bible.” Be okay with that.

**Dinah:** Even the wealthy Schechem's of this world are not above the law!

**Widow's Mite:** And when those in power look the other way and give you nothing and you are an elderly woman...

**Widow of Nain:** Nag powerfully until the hardhearted one relents...

**80-year-old crippled woman:** Do not back down when you need *healthcare, food and housing!*

[*Mary Magdalene, Miriam, Mary Clopas and Salome enter and all of the others separate and go off stage right and left to wait for Act Seven.*]

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** Talk of injustice...we were there when he rose from the dead. We were witnesses to the miraculous. There were strips of cloth lying there, as well as the burial cloth that was on Jesus' head. It was folded up neatly and separate from the linen—a carpenter's tradition telling us: "It is finished."

**Salome:** But no one would believe us. All of those years we were inseparable from him, and still they would not believe us. We were considered lowly women and our testimony not credible.

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** But, *we have been vindicated...*

**Mother Mary:** Everyone that accepts Jesus has to accept *our testimony* to its occurrence.

**Mary Clopas:** We have noticed that there are many spired buildings down there on earth. Do they collect and share money to help the aliens, poor and widows or are they *towers of Babylon?*

**Grace:** There are still thousands of homeless in every major city who cannot find work or a place to live. Some churches take them in and feed them, but others do not want to get their carpet or sanctuary dirty. Too many of the poor have to sleep in tent cities...in winter.

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** Tell the people that when Jesus said, "You will always have the poor among you" he was *not condoning it*. He was referencing Deuteronomy 15, which says "you shall have no poor among you." God devised a plan to make poverty obsolete, but people refuse to follow it.

**Grace:** There is much greed caused from an endless race to make profit...

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** Well, know this; coins hold no value in heaven, nor do they bring one *any* special status.

## ACT SIX

**Narrator:** To truly understand the origin of women’s inferiority, which was later refuted entirely by the greatest feminist who walked the earth—Jesus, we must look to Aristotle, founder of Western ideas on morality, government, ethics, biology and zoology. Aristotle had one overriding fear—that women would be able to have *abundant sex* since they did not require an erection. This led to the false belief that women were predatory sexual animals who could never be satisfied. Years later in the 13<sup>th</sup> century, Thomas Aquinas kept Aristotle’s belief in women’s inferiority alive. *[Narrator opens book and reads.]*

“In term of nature’s own operation, a woman is inferior, a mistake. The agent cause that is the male seed tries to produce something complete in itself, a male in gender. But when a female is produced, this is because the agent cause is thwarted, either because of the unsuitability of the receiving matter (the mother) itself or because of some deforming interference, as from *south winds, that are too wet*, as we read in *Aristotle’s Animal Conception*.”

Given that Aristotle believed that male semen contained *all of the genetic information needed for child creation*; women were thought to be either willing vessels for a man to carry on his legacy or *sexual deviants*. The reasons given for disqualifying women from the priesthood have their origin in the fear of women’s wombs and menstruation. Women were thought to be *inconstant*, having more *liquid than men*. For this reason, women were kept outside the temple in a courtyard, and later outside the altar railing of Catholic churches, due to supposed “ritual impurity.”

*[Narrator snaps the book closed and with hands on hip states ...]*

***Don’t you think it’s time we put the silly notions of Aristotle to rest?***



**Narrator:** A better philosophy for life is found in this! *[Now holds up large gilded Bible] ...*

Women have a role to play in bringing about a milder, kinder kingdom:

- Blessed are the poor in spirit, for they turn to God, and the kingdom of heaven is theirs.
- Blessed are the gentle, not the competitive, for they shall have the earth as inheritance.
- Blessed are those who mourn over children with orphan diseases and those who've lost sons and daughters in acts of violence, for they shall be comforted.
- Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, who have been refused justice at the hands of the powerful by political decree, for they shall have their fill.
- Blessed are the merciful, not the ones who use their power to abuse the alien and deny him fair wages, for they shall have mercy shown to them.
- Blessed are the pure in heart, not the worldly wise who use their bodies to get up the corporate ladder, for they shall see God.
- Blessed are the peacemakers, not the ones taking the world by storm with guns and a space wars program, for they shall be recognized as the children of God.
- Blessed are those who are persecuted, who do not run from opportunities to be God's hands and feet to instead live a comfortable life, for the kingdom of Heaven is theirs.

## ACT SEVEN

*[Each woman enters, moves to center stage and gives her message, then remains on stage so the audience gets full effect of the number of women who are in the Bible to show them the way.]*

**Narrator:** The victorious women of the Bible have parting words for you before you return home, Grace. Heed them well!

**Binah:** I deliver blessing to all the sephirah. Seek their balance and you will be at peace; seek to teach others the same and you will bring about heaven on earth!

**Ruach HaKodesh** *[Enters in a cloud of smoke]*: The earth was without form and darkness was upon the face of the deep, and the Holy Spirit hovered over the face of the waters. Yahweh created me, *[She holds up her index finger.] first fruits of his fashioning.* Before the oldest of his works, from everlasting, I was set.

**Wisdom:** It is said whoever finds wisdom, finds life. I share the secrets of God's knowledge and choose what he will do. I am the personification of moral and cosmic order, truth and justice.

**Baat-kol:** I hovered as a cloud and said, "This is my son, the beloved. Listen to him.

**Eve:** The mother and father created an androgenous earth being; then we were separated with neither one of us being superior or inferior to the other.

**Ruach HaKodesh, Wisdom and Baat-kol** *[speak in unison]*: Where there is unbalanced force of the male and female within you and in society...*there* is the origin of evil.

**Sarai:** God said: "Whatever Sarah tells thee, Abraham, thou shalt harken unto her voice."

**Hagar:** And living water spring forth, even in the deserts of one's life, *when you ask for it.*

**Rebekah:** I was not without options. I was asked, "Will you go with that man?" It was my choice to go or stay. *And, I had to give it much thought after watering five camels.*

**Rachel:** "Are we still to inherit anything from our father's estate?" I inquired of Jacob.

**Leah:** Our husband asked our opinion before making major decisions, like moving...

**Tamar:** Sometimes you have to force the hand of those who owe you justice. It's the only way.

**Puah:** Little white lies done to save an entire people...

**Shiprah:** ...are entirely forgiven.

**Bithiah:** I raised a child not my own by birth...in defiance of Pharaoh's orders.

**Miriam:** Clement of Alexandria praised me as being on fire with the Wisdom of Sophia.

**Zipporah:** I broke known ideas about foreigners.

**Rahab:** The red cord became a symbol among women leaders from Genesis through Revelations who stood firm against all odds and won God's favor.

**Daughters of Zelophad:** We were not going to be refused our destiny.

**Achsah:** I asked for both the *upper and the lower springs* and got them.

**Deborah:** Hide not in quiet ports when there is important work to be done!

**Jael:** Strike once and do it right!

**Delilah:** If you are going to make a Nazirite vow, or any vow, you'd best prepared to keep it!

**Ruth:** Stick together with your best friend [she hugs Naomi].

**Hannah:** Exalt YHVH, for whence comes your strength to endure all things in life.

**Michal:** Leap publicly before the Lord, only *after* you have gotten your *own house* in order!

**Bathsheba:** Direct your children to leadership roles in the community, so they do not think only of their own welfare.

**Abigail:** Stop hot-headed fools ready to pick up guns and swords to win arguments.

**Huldah:** Study at college, women, so when called upon, you will be able to interpret correctly!

**Judith:** Don't give God five-day ultimatums.

**Vashi:** Do not denigrate yourself before men. You are God's holy temple.

**Esther:** Foil the plans that foment violence against women and children.

**Proverbs Noble Woman:** Be a woman to be reckoned with, skilled in many things! Motherhood is but one of the many roles you can play in life. Expand your territory!

**Queen of Sheba:** Question the experts in high seats. Evaluate their wisdom and see if it be wisdom or folly.

**Susanna:** Expose false leaders who use their positions of power to get sexual favors from you.

**Dinah:** Do not tolerate sexual abuse. Women are not merchandise exchanged between men.

**Mizpah:** Stop men from making rash vows and pledges that impact your life, your well-being and your planet adversely.

**Anna:** Pray with intention and expectation.

**Mary Mother of Jesus:** Say, “I will, Lord” to new adventures. Fear not!

**Mary Clopas and Mary Salome [together]:** Be a witness to the truth.

**Elizabeth:** Expect miracles at every age.

**Mary Magdalene/Miriamne:** Be resilient when men label you with names that denigrate women, for they surely will when you awaken and fulfill your destiny.

**Martha:** Do the “better work”...more often!

**Beatrice:** Do not accept long term illness as your fate.

**Widow of Nain:** Do not accept being alone in your elder years.

**Widow’s Mite:** Do not accept abject poverty as a widow.

**Tabitha:** Do good works unceasingly and put your faith into action.

**Rhoda:** Rush to open the door to opportunity when it is knocked.

**Mary Mother of John Mark:** And expect gifts to come through the roof, as well as through the door, from many sources.

**Thekla:** Choose when...

**Drusiana:** and when not...

**Maximilla:** to marry.

**Lydia:** Create beautiful things with your own hands to be proud of; share and sell them.

**Priscilla:** Learn about women of the early church who said: Where is it written? Show me!

**Trypena, Tryphosa, Eunice and Lois:** Be servant leaders!

**Apphia:** Strip off your old behavior and old self...

**Claudia, Prassede and Pudenziana:** Don't put new wine in old wineskins!

**Cyria:** Be elect, a chosen lady...

**Junia:** Be an apostle of light in a dark world.

**Wives of Peter and Paul:** Christ set us free so that we should remain free; do not let yourselves be fastened again to the yoke of slavery!

**Eve** [*Waves her hand across the stage*]: Grace, tell them to *remember us!* Tell the women to shout out loud:

I was set free by God and I *refuse to be shackled again!* Like you, I am made in the image and likeness of God to use the God-given gifts I have been given, which include leadership.

**Grace:** I will do my best, Eve. It's a tall order.

[*Eve brings Grace back to her chair, for she is far from ready for heaven yet. There is much activism waiting to be done on planet earth.*]

**Eve:** [final words to audience] And to think, *I'm the Mother of all of these strong women....*

I didn't do so badly after all, *did I?*

THE END

# ***Poetry***

*To Help You Memorize the  
Victorious Female Leaders in the Bible*

*by Rosanne Ferreri*

*Tree of Life*

.....

Tree of Life, your balance seeking

*Binah*, Chokmah—parents two

In your light, there is *no darkness*

I receive all gifts from you

Peace before me; peace behind me.

Peace above and peace below

Glowing flame sits above temple

Shining now with pure white glow

*Ruach HaKodesh*

.....

Holy Spirit, Cloud of Wisdom

Forty years, did not forsake

Stayed right by the Hebrew people

In their hearts, did God awake

*Wisdom*

.....  
Seek thee wisdom, who is calling  
At the gates, she is in sight  
Words addressed to fallen people...  
When she speaks, each word is right

*Baat-kol*

.....  
Dove descending, speaks in your ear  
Wisdom gained, dispels all fear  
Rise young woman, she is calling  
Earth's repair—your work—is clear

*Eve*

.....  
Eve, first mother, holy being  
You chose life, a family  
With your daughters, you now labor  
To bring peace and liberty



*Sarai*

.....  
Sarai laughed when told of baby  
Wish delayed for eighty years  
Why be shocked at fortune's entrance?  
Be delighted, have no fears

*Rebekah*

.....  
Willing worker, cared for camels  
Proved her worthiness to wed  
Jacob favored by this mother  
"Take my birthright," Esau said

*Rachel and Leah*

.....  
Fourteen years did Jacob labor  
For two daughters of Laban  
Hidden idols, claimed their dowry  
Turned the tables on one man

*Tamar*

.....  
Women without sons or husbands  
In the law—Levirate--trusting  
Owed from Judah, she got justice  
Showed his cord, his staff and ring

*Puah and Shiprah*

.....  
Pharoah feared a rival leader  
Told two midwives to take lives  
They defied man's laws destructive  
To this day, this faith survives

*Bithiah*

.....  
Pharoah's daughter, did defy him  
Took young Moses from the Nile  
Jochebed was brought to nurse him  
Miriam made mother smile

*Miram*

.....  
Miriam led women dancing  
Passed between the sea, the throng  
Pharoah's riders, dashed by current  
Marked the victory with song

*Zipporah*

.....  
Poor Zipporah, judged too foreign  
Kept arms' length and yet she won  
Did not sway in oath to Yahweh  
Was a mohel for her son

*Rahab*

.....  
Hide the spies in sheaves of flax  
On a roof from enemy  
Took a red cord, tied to window  
Save her life and family

*Daughters of Zelophad*

.....  
Daughters four of Zelophad  
Asked for their inheritance  
Kept pursuing, gender fairness  
Won respect, and their grievance

*Achsah*

.....  
If you ask, it will be given  
Achsah, in her heart, did know  
For her wedding, she did barter  
Springs above and springs below

*Deborah*

.....  
Deborah, bee, a light at full strength  
Proof that women strongly lead  
While the men did fear the future  
Jael finished off the deed

*Jael*

.....  
Jael took a peg to kill him  
Twas Sisera's awful fate  
Like Delilah. Like young Judith!  
Lulled him into trusting state

*Delilah*

.....  
Gone is Samson by Delilah  
Men who make vows, do take heed!  
For your bride deserves your honor  
Follow through in thought and deed

*Ruth and Naomi*

.....  
Ruth, Naomi stayed together  
Widows gleaned among the sheaves  
To her kinsman, home of Boaz  
Spread her cloak, he did redeem

*Hannah*

.....  
Years of waiting, not for nothing  
Fervent prayer, brought results true  
Times of trial, bore each burden  
Seven sons kept Sabbath too

*Michal*

.....  
Michal loved him, but was yet pawn  
Caught between two men with power  
Mocked her David for wild dancing  
Her respect for him did sour

*Bathsheba*

.....  
In the spring time, all men at war  
Bathed this beauty, on her own  
Turned misfortune to advantage  
Solomon reaped the seeds he'd sewn

*Abigail*

.....  
Abigail with skills of leader  
Stopped young king from deadly err  
Saved her village, by her actions  
Took one woman, who did care!

*Huldah*

.....  
Prophetess, she read the *Lost Book*  
Called from college by the king  
Such her knowledge trusted by all  
“Repent and end your vile glutting!”

*Judith*

.....  
Holofernes frightened her town  
Danger lurked in just five days  
Judith chastised men as cowards  
Took her sword, ruler did slay

*Vashti*

.....

“I will *not come*,” said this Persian

“I will *not unveil* thus for your men!”

Drunken kinsmen are a danger

Xerxes would not yield or bend

*Esther*

.....

Born for this day, to save people

From Haman, the enemy

She did not flee, from her hard task

Planned a banquet, set Jews free

*Proverbs Noble Woman*

.....

Who can find her? Like a white pearl!

Up at dawn, still works at night

Fields and vineyards, wool she spinneth

Honor her; she is a delight!



*Queen of Sheba*

.....  
Queen of Sheba, Judge of Wisdom  
Came from Kush, well-versed in lore  
Solomon did, assure wisely  
Gave her all she asked...*and more*

*Susanna*

.....  
Men with lustful ways are tragic  
Susanna, did us clearly show  
There's no way to hide from public  
Mastic? Oak? Their deeds were known

*Dinah*

.....  
Tale for men, oh tell it often  
Do not harm or take for toy  
girls or women to defile them  
Social order, you'll destroy!

*Mizpah*

.....  
When in ego, men make brash vows  
Some do lose their favorite child  
Admit errors, rethink action  
Do not harm those meek and mild

*Anna*

.....  
Filled with grace, a temple prophet  
Anna gave her child in love  
Just like Samuel, age of just three  
Angels fed her, as if dove

*Mother Mary*

.....  
Filled with light she was like bright star  
Part of larger, heavenly plan  
Visited by angel Gabriel  
Her young babe, both God and man  
Mother Mary, Chosen Lady  
Carried Jesus, taught him well  
He learned mercy, *he learned justice*  
At His word old cultures fell.

*Mary of Clopas & Mary Salome*

.....  
Family members, “desposynoi”

Were disciples of the Christ

Spread the GOOD NEWS to all nations

Women daring, risked their life

*Elizabeth*

.....  
Devout woman, called “God’s promise”

Bore a son who leapt in womb

John, the Baptist, prepared way for

Risen Savior, empty tomb

*Mary & Martha*

.....  
Mary, Martha—loving sisters

Lazarus, their fond sibling

Mary sat and learned the Torah

A new assignment Jesus did bring

*At the Cross*

.....  
Day of sadness, day of sorrow  
Three are standing at the cross  
Same three women, walked close by him  
Mourned his absence and their loss

*Acts*

.....  
Flames above them, shining brightly  
Powers imagined, now behold  
Women prophecy with power  
Tongues unbidden now take hold

*Easter*

.....  
Sing a new song, Christ has risen  
Women saw him. Bear the news!  
Carpenter's cloth, folded neatly  
Believe or not; it's you who choose!

*Followers of the Way*

.....  
Women widowed, and abandoned  
Now are bidden to take part  
Abstinence they found empowering  
Firm with purpose, churches start

*Tabitha (aka Dorcas)*

.....  
Tabitha, did good works galore  
Known in Jaffa to help poor  
Ministry, so highly valued  
God restored her, to do more

*Rhoda*

.....  
Heard the knocking, on that dark night.  
Who would think release he'd win?  
Witness to Paul's call for entrance  
Flung the door wide, to let in

*Mary, Mother of John Mark*

.....  
From the ceiling, lame descended  
Would not rest till healed that day  
Roof was broken, cleaned by woman  
Saw with her eyes, Jesus pray

*Thekla*

.....  
Thekla did defy her culture  
Norms for women tossed aside  
Fought off bears and fought off lions  
Baptized self, preached till she died

*Drusiana and Maximilla*

.....  
Brides of Christ, they left at altar  
men without strong faith or sense  
Female presbyters were priests for certain  
Baptized, dispensed sacraments

*Lydia*

.....  
Influential in the dye trade  
Purple linens, sought by all  
In her home church, women gathered  
There they worshiped, heard the call

*Priscilla*

.....  
Taught Apollo to awareness  
Pastor of a church was she  
Yoked in ministry with husband  
They led to Christ faithfully

*Tryphena and Tryphosa*

.....  
Roman women were disciples  
“Worked hard in the Lord,” each day  
Found the courage to be servants  
Coached young women in The Way

*Junia*

.....  
Paul did call her an Apostle  
Like the Magdalene, she preached  
Church did change her name with spelling  
Made her male...honesty breeched

*Apphia*

.....  
Apphia and mate, Philemon  
Leaders in first church in Greece  
“Teach each other, in all wisdom”  
Servant leaders mentor peace

*Eunice and Lois*

.....  
Women many, rock a cradle  
Shape a child in ways not few  
Faith was taught by godly women  
Take the helm, or you will rue



*Claudia*

.....  
British Princess, married Pudens

Home a parish, place of rest

Tit-u-las Pas-to-ris—it's name

Sheltered Paul in house arrest

*Prassede and Pudenziana*

.....  
Daughters of a British Princess

Martyrs did they faithfully tend

Prison angels, saving relics

Till their live on earth did end

*Cyria*

.....  
Cyria was sent fond greetings

Was Paul's trusted confidante

"Elect," she was termed, Chosen Lady

love commandment did not flaunt

*Wives of Peter and Paul*

.....  
Wife of Peter, Wife of Paul too  
Feared for spouses and their life  
Martyred ladies, sent to suffer.  
Female Christians endured strife

*Nameless Women*

.....  
Hidden women, now revealing  
You have names that we must know  
Show us now through Holy Spirit  
*Empower us, with deeds so bold.*

*Remember this...*

.....  
*“Christ set us free, so that we should remain free;  
then, do not let yourselves be fastened again  
to the yoke of slavery.” (Galatians 5:1)*  
.....

APPENDIX: Photo Gallery

Bishop Theodora

*St. Prassede*

*Mother Mary*  
*1<sup>st</sup> Apostolic Leader*

*St. Pudenciana*



Santa Prassede, the Chapel of Zeno, was founded by Pope Pascal II in the 9th century  
on the site of a 2nd-century church.

(Photographer: Adrian Fletcher: [www.paradoxplace.com](http://www.paradoxplace.com))



Basilica Santa Pudenziana: Notice Prassede and Pudenziana wearing golden robes.



Female Priests in “Franco Panis”: Ceremonial Breaking of the Eucharist Bread  
Catacomb of Priscilla in Rome (Wikipedia)



Veneranda introduced into paradise by Saint Petronilla (Peter's daughter): Wikipedia

Catcomb of Domitilla 4th century



Female Priest, Catacomb of San Callisto: Wikipedia.



The author of **Jesus Family Tomb** by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino tells us the young boy at Jesus side is *his son*, Judah, possibly mentioned in Mark 14:51; when the high priests came to arrest Jesus, a young lad followed him in a linen cloth. The authorities tried to sieze him, but he “fled from them naked.” Another possibility is that it is Sarah, his second child by Mary Magdalene/Miramne.

Liebfraukirche church, Oberwesel, Germany

(Photographer: Rosanne Ferreri)



Note that there are 13 disciples in this panel, one of whom is Mary Magdalene/Miriamne wearing her customary green; she is holding a baby and the disciple next to her is holding a V for Grail.

Liebfraukirche church, Oberwesel, Germany (Photographer: Rosanne Ferreri)



Liebfraukirche church, Oberwesel, Germany (Photographer: Rosanne Ferreri)

[Below: The artwork, *Shepherds of Arcadia*, points the way to where the royal family went: Rennes Le Chateau is located in Arcadia, the same area that the *tribe of Benjamin* settled when they were exiled from Israel.]





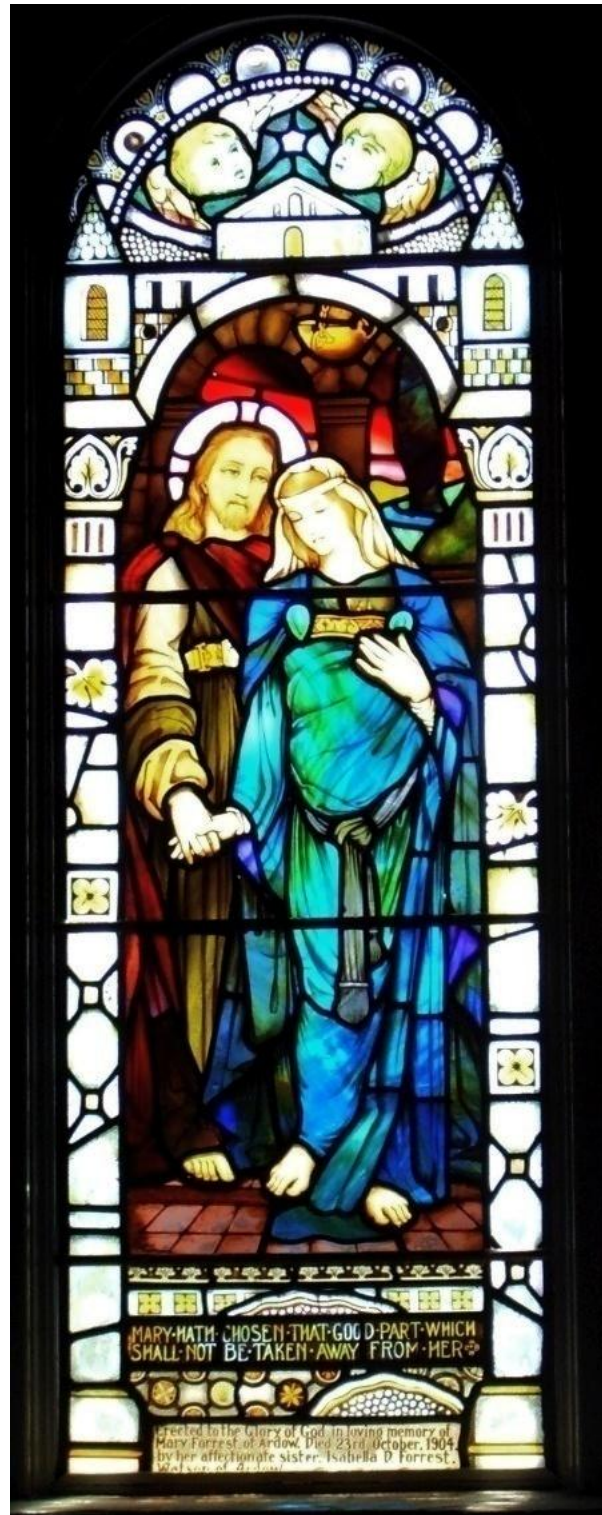


Compare these two murals from Peterskirche church in Lindau, Germany.

(Photographer: Rosanne Ferreri)

Above, Mary Magdalene/Miriamne is being crowned by Jesus, the Father and the Holy Spirit in the *egalitarian manner of the order of Melchizedek*. Below, Miriam is facing us with a covered head and the Magdalene is closest to Jesus with uncovered red hair, like above.





Stained-glass window in Kilmore Church, Scotland

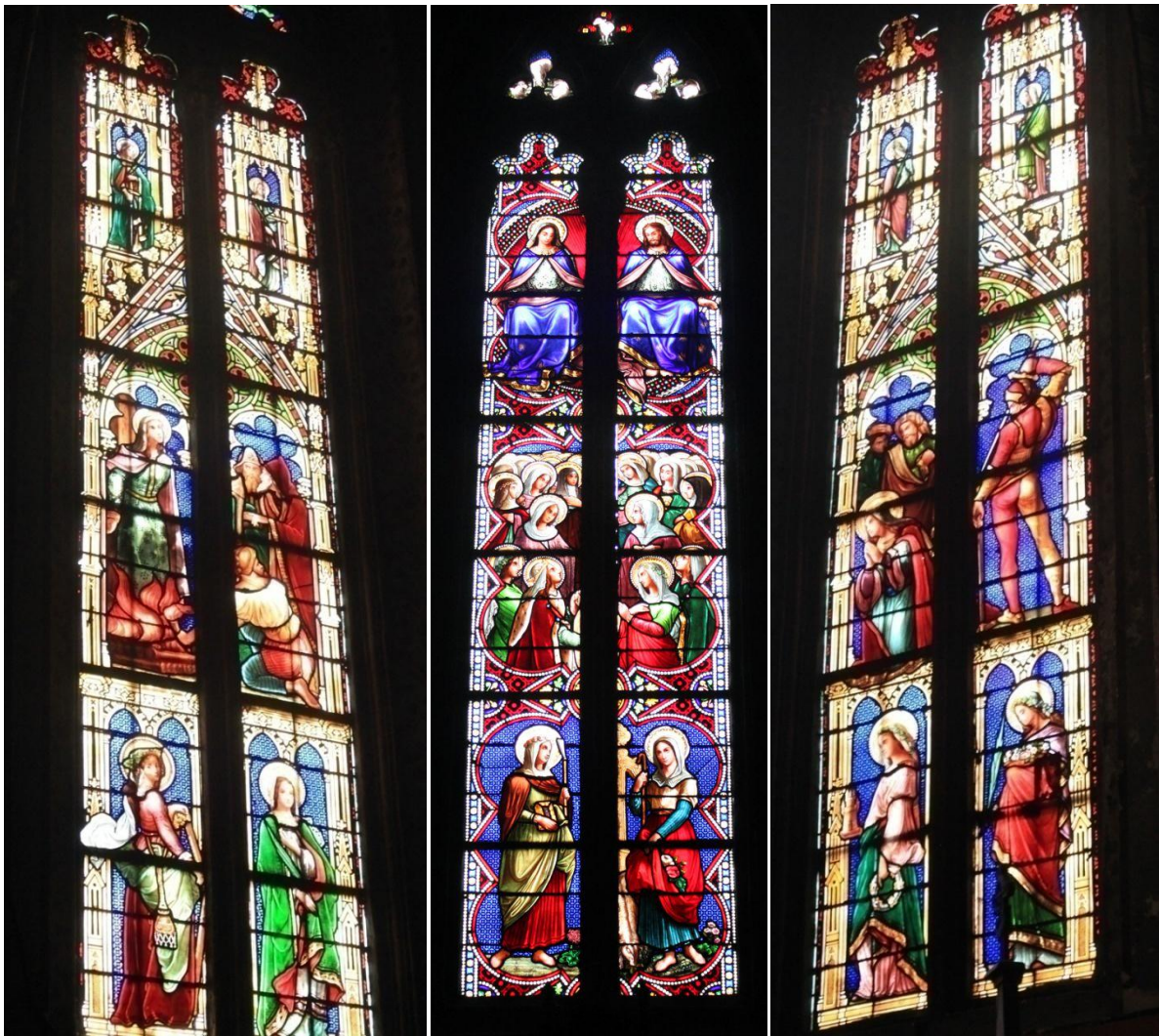
Jesus and the Magdalene/Miriamne are holding right hands [symbol for marriage].

(Photographer: Nigel Nessling)



Cologne Cathedral stained glass window depicts a red-headed Mary Magdalene/Miriamne who is holding Jesus' feet and Mother Mary with covered head holding his body.

(Photographer: Rosanne Ferreri)



St. Martin's Church, Liroux, France we see the marriage of Mary Magdalene/Miramne and Jesus. Note the many women in halos and in upper corner who are facing oppression by the sword. (Photographer: Stuart R. Whitelaw)

## THE JESUS FAMILY TOMB FOUND in TALPIOT, JERUSALEM in 1980



[Photo from Wikipedia]

On March 28, 1980 a bulldozer in Jerusalem exposed a family tomb that is more than noteworthy. It was not an ordinary cave, but one designed to connect worlds, the world of the physical and spiritual. The chevron over the door indicates that this is a place where worlds connect. It is a place of doubles: where couples that spent their lives together wish to spend eternity with each other. Chevron comes from the word “Chibur” or connection. Found in the tomb were ten ossuaries, six of which had their names carved into the stone in Hebrew and Greek; the ninth is believed to have been removed years earlier and was in the news as “found tomb of James, brother of Jesus.”

- Jesus, son of Joseph
- Maria, Jesus mother
- Jos’e, Joseph, Jesus father
- Mariamne, Mara, Master aka Mary Magdalene [Mary the Tower Lady]
- Matthew
- Judah, son of Jesus

The Acts of Philip tell us that Mariamne [Mary Magdalene] was commissioned by Jesus to evangelize various cities; she was sent out to with Philip and Bartholemew to preach throughout Syria into areas where Greek was spoken. Philip was distraught about his mission but Jesus told him not to be fainthearted and advised Mariame to go with him so he would not resort to violence. Mariamne was considered Mara or Master: she preached, performed baptisms, healings and called down miracles. It is to be noted that the Greek orthodox church honors Mariamne/Mary Magdalene every 22<sup>nd</sup> of July. After a lifetime of traveling, it is clear she returned to Jerusalem, after residing for a period of time in France, to be buried in the family tomb with her husband. It cannot be denied that the Judeo-Christians, born of the blending of Judaism and Jesus' new teachings believed in a resurrection of the soul, not the physical body.

I want to be clear: the fact that ossuaries for Jesus and Jesus family have been found in Jerusalem does not in any way change his message for me; his message was to *love as God loves, without qualifiers and to overcome evil with love*, nor does it change the fact that he came back in spirit after his death to speak and guide his disciples. Jesus' message that we were to continue to do as he did during his three years of ministry and do *even more* has not changed. The ossuaries do not alter the fact that the Holy Spirit is with us always and we have a direct line of communication with God. I have always felt Jesus would have been married and had a family; my faith is not shaken by this new discovery. An excellent book to read on this topic is by Simcha Jacobovi and Charles Pellegrino, *The Jesus Family Tomb*. There are numerous videos about the excavation of this tomb and these remarkable ossuaries online. The Rockefeller Museum is the headquarters of the Israeli Antiquities Authority; the *contents* of these ossuaries were removed and reburied or moved to an unknown location, but the boxes themselves have been in the keeping of the IAA warehouse as lots 80/500-509 ever since their discovery.

## Message for 2025

The “Great Reset” that we saw unfold starting in 2020 is not of God’s design. It is a man-made agenda that attempts to usurp God’s blueprint for humanity, replacing true life with artificial intelligence. Transgenderism is an attempt to undermine the two genders made by God—male and female. Transhumanism is an attempt to undermine the human body and hack the human genome. The values set down by God are being mocked daily in every industry and on every platform. Deviancy has been normalized in public schools, in churches by ministers who know better, and in our government. The consequence of giving us freewill is that some are choosing to dissemble our society and “build back better” to look like HELL. Do not participate; do not comply; do not attach your name to either political party for both have chosen mammon as their top priority. God has promised that those who harm children will receive a millstone around their necks and be tossed in the ocean. Do not “tolerate” the indefensible. I have written *The Terrible Great Reset* to help you stay safe in the coming End Times. You will find it on [StolenElectionNovella.com](http://StolenElectionNovella.com). Avoid all contact with those who worship the transgendered Baphomet and sacrifice their firstborn to Molech in abortion. Do not worship the serpent, tolerate witchcraft, or alter your body with “vaccines.” Pray daily for help to stay strong.





## About the Author:

Rosanne Ferreri is the author of three books--*Redacted, No Longer!* a work of non-fiction about the strong women of the Bible [2011], *Terrible Great Reset* [2021], and *Civil Disobedience for the Christian Woman* [2024]. She started her career in 1983 teaching literature, grammar, theatre and public speaking in grades 7-12; then, she segued into running her own marketing and PR agency in 1993 where she taught new start-ups to lift off. She can be reached using the contact page on [PublicistUSA.com](http://PublicistUSA.com).