

Learning From and About Some Bible Women

Part 1, Old Testament



Eve

'The Mother Of All Living' Genesis 3:20, NKJV

'For Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the LORD God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the LORD God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man.' Genesis 2:20-22, ESV

Sarah (originally Sarai)

The Only Wife Named in the Heroes of Faith

'More space is devoted to Sarah than to any other woman of the Bible. An entire chapter discusses her death and burial (Genesis 23). Both her husband and son grieved deeply when she died (Genesis 23:2, 24:67). Two New Testament citations commend Sarah (Hebrews 11:11 and 1 Peter 3:6). She is mentioned in Romans 4:19 and 9:9 as well. She is used to illustrate the differences between the bonded and the free (Galatians 4:21-31). She is styled as one of the holy women of old because she entrusted to her husband her willing cooperation. From the narrative it's apparent that Sarah was strong willed; yet she chose to submit to Abraham, an attitude which God commended. She was consistently identified as Abraham's wife, reinforcing the fact that God viewed the pair as one flesh. Together they were asked to believe that God would give them a son. Sarah is the only wife named in the heroes of the faith (Hebrews 11:11). Even though Sarah fell into sin, God faithfully kept His promise in Genesis 17:16 that she would be "a mother of nations" '. *Woman's Study Bible, page 27*



'By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.' Hebrews 11:11, NIV

Hagar

She Named God: 'A God of Seeing'



'The Egyptian maidservant Hagar was acquired by Sarah when she and Abraham, together with his nephew Lot, moved from Canaan to Egypt to escape a famine. To this fugitive slave, God revealed Himself. In tender grace He met her immediate need and allowed her to experience His presence. Hagar's legacy speaks poignantly to the growing number of disadvantaged and dispossessed women. Under no circumstance can they escape God's watchful care. As God provided for Hagar, He can and will provide for every woman. Twice the Angel of the Lord came to her aid (Genesis 16:7; 21:17). He was also involved with Hagar and her son in times of crisis and in the times in between (Genesis 21:20). Throughout Hagar's life, she experienced estrangement and prejudice as a foreigner, hardship and abuse as a servant, grief and abandonment as an unwed pregnant woman, and hopeless despair on two occasions as she faced imminent death. Yet despite all these difficulties, Hagar responded to the God who addressed her. Her life was never easy, but God did reward her. In the all-seeing God, Hagar found refuge and life.' *Woman's Study Bible, page 33*

Hagar 'called the name of the LORD who spoke to her, "You are a God of seeing," for she said, "Truly here I have seen him who looks after me." ' Genesis 16:13, ESV



Rebekah

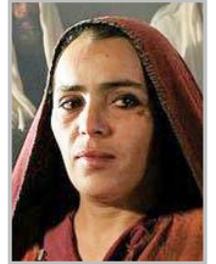
'I Will Draw Water for Your Camels'

'Rebekah was a woman of strong will and ambition, devoted at first to her husband Isaac, but later transferring that devotion to her younger son Jacob, with disastrous results for the life of the family, though the sequel shows that in the over-ruling of God even this was converted to the furtherance of His purpose.' *New Bible Dictionary*, page 1076

'Rebekah, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother, came out with her water jar on her shoulder. The young woman was very attractive in appearance, a maiden whom no man had known. She went down to the spring and filled her jar and came up. Then the servant ran to meet her and said, "Please give me a little water to drink from your jar." She said, "Drink, my lord." And she quickly let down her jar upon her hand and gave him a drink. When she had finished giving him a drink, she said, "I will draw water for your camels also, until they have finished drinking."' *Genesis 24:15-19, ESV*

Leah

The Unwanted Wife

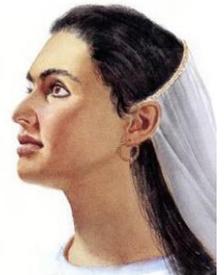


'Leah began her marriage by focusing on what she lacked and being miserable, but she changed her heart and focus to what she had and determined to praise the Lord. Not until the birth of her fourth son, Judah, did this unwanted wife learn to trust God. Tracing the Messianic lineage, the world rejoices with Leah as her faithfulness was rewarded. Jesus the Messiah came through her son Judah and the priesthood through her son Levi. Leah personified for every woman the crucial need to live primarily for God and His glory. Though she may have been unattractive in appearance, unloved, unwanted and even despised, God saw in her an inner beauty that equipped her to carry out His plan (*Genesis 29:31*). She could not change Jacob, but she could change herself and recognise God's hand in her life (*Genesis 30:13*). Leah, for her part, did not let the attitudes of others distract her from the task God had given to her.' *Woman's Study Bible*, page 61

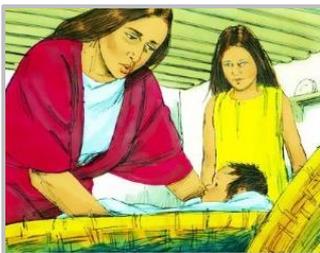
Leah 'conceived again and bore a son, and said, "This time I will praise the LORD." Therefore she called his name Judah.' *Genesis 29:35, ESV*

Rachel

'Rachel and Leah, Who Together Built Up the House of Israel' *Ruth 1:11, ESV*



'Rachel was the daughter of Laban and the younger sister of Leah. She became one of Jacob's wives. From what is related to us concerning her character there does not seem much to claim any high degree of admiration and esteem. The discontent and fretful impatience shown in her grief at being for a time childless, moved even her fond husband to anger (*Genesis 30:1-2*). She appears, moreover, to have shared all the duplicity and falsehood of her family. See in *chapter 31* for instance, Rachel's stealing her father's images, and the ready dexterity and presence of mind with which she concealed her theft.' *Unger's Bible Dictionary*



Jochebed

'A Resourceful Mother' *Woman's Study Bible*

'Jochebed was the mother of Moses, Aaron and Miriam. She models for contemporary women an infectious courage to fear God instead of people and a firm faith in his promises and providences. Jochebed took her motherhood very seriously, nurturing her children in the Lord with conscientious devotion. Surely she must have been the chief influence unto God in the preparation of these children for the great tasks God gave to each in leading His people out of Egyptian bondage.' *Woman's Study Bible*, page 106

'Jochebed, a descendant of Levi, born into the Levite family during the Egyptian years. Jochebed bore Aaron, Moses, and their sister Miriam.' *Numbers 26:59, Message*

Miriam

‘Sing to the Lord, for He has Triumphed Gloriously’

‘When we first meet Miriam, she is involved in one of history’s most unusual babysitting jobs. She is watching her infant brother Moses float on the Nile river in a waterproof cradle. Miriam’s quick thinking allowed him to be raised initially by his own mother.’ *Life Application Bible*, page 231



‘After the passage through the Red Sea Miriam led the Israelite women in praise to God with timbrels and with dances. Miriam was a prophetess and she and her brothers were chosen by God to be leaders of the Hebrew people. However, she with Aaron, made Moses’ marriage with a Cushite woman the occasion of murmuring against his superior position and influence. They claimed that God had spoken by them as well as by Moses. For this insubordination to the will of God, she was made a leper as white as snow, but owing to the intercession of Moses she was speedily healed.’ *Westminster Dictionary of the Bible*, page 400

‘Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron [and Moses], took a timbrel in her hand, and all the women followed her with timbrels and dancing. Miriam answered them, “Sing to the LORD, for He has triumphed gloriously and is highly exalted.” *Exodus 15:20-21, Amp.*

Rahab

‘A Woman With Spiritual Insight’ *Woman’s Study Bible*



‘Rahab was an intelligent woman who showed initiative. She showed a remarkable knowledge of the recent history of Israel as well as of what God was doing for the Israelites. Rahab recognised the disparity between Israel’s God and the gods she and her people served in Jericho. Rahab’s initial confession of faith is seen in the use of the name *Yahweh*. Without any support or input from her world, or Israel’s, she claimed the covenant name God gave to Moses when the Israelites first left Egypt. Then, again without any encouragement from others, she acted on her commitment by hiding the spies. This kind of faith was not often seen in God’s people in the Old Testament, let alone from a Gentile harlot. Rahab is a role model for making the right decisions and standing firm. God honoured Rahab’s faith and courage by placing her in the lineage not only of Israel’s great King David, but also of Jesus, the King of Kings.’ *Woman’s Study Bible*, page 344

Naomi

‘A Wise Mother-in-Law’ *Woman’s Study Bible*

What sort of woman was Naomi to inspire such affection from Ruth? What relationship with God must she have had to cause her daughter-in-law to forsake the gods of Moab and worship Naomi’s God alone? Naomi’s consistent way of living and example must have so impressed Ruth that it brought her into the Israelite community of faith. The Biblical account witnesses to the powerful effect Naomi had on those around her. Even during her more sorrowful moments, she put the welfare of others first. Naomi allowed Ruth and others to see, hear and feel all the anguish and joy of her relationship with God. Because she shared openly about this relationship it brought depth and intimacy in her relationship with others.



‘Naomi lives as a true heroine. Her stalwart faith during years of adversity and her careful tutoring of her young protégé Ruth under difficult circumstances exemplify a woman of deep spiritual understanding. The result of her wisdom shines throughout Scripture.’ *Woman’s Study Bible*, page 432

‘Even in her desperate situation, Naomi had a selfless attitude. Although she had decided to return to Israel, she encouraged Ruth and Orpha to stay in Moab and start their lives again, even though this would mean hardship for her. Like Naomi we must consider the needs of others and not just our own. As Naomi discovered, when you act selflessly, others are encouraged to follow your example.’ *Life Application Bible*, page 418

‘After a short while on the road, Naomi told her two daughters-in-law: “Go back. Go home and live with your mothers. And may GOD treat you as graciously as you treated your deceased husbands and me. May GOD give each of you a new home and a new husband!” She kissed them and they cried openly.’ *Ruth 1:8-9, Message*



Ruth

'A Woman of Excellence' Ruth 3:11, Amp.

Ruth was a 'virtuous woman' Ruth 3:11, NKJV and a 'woman of noble character' Ruth 3:11, NIV. Her name probably means 'friend'. There are several similarities between Ruth and the lady mentioned in Proverbs 31. Ruth was kind Ruth 3:10. She is described as being better for Naomi than seven sons, Ruth 4:15, which is a supreme complement. She is rightly remembered for her pledge of total love and loyalty to Naomi. Ruth clung to Naomi even at the cost of renouncing her Moabite people and their gods in favour of Naomi's God and her people, the Israelites. In one of the most beautiful statements of commitment in history, Ruth said to Naomi: 'Your people will be my people and your God my God' Ruth 1:16. The totality of this commitment is emphasised by its shortness (just four words in Hebrew). Yet Ruth extended her commitment still further, beyond death itself: 'Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried' Ruth 1:17. To understand the significance of these words, we must appreciate the cultural mindset of the ancient Near-Eastern peoples. The location of burial was important to them. Ruth committed to live, die and be buried in Bethlehem. In so doing, Ruth identified herself with Naomi's community in the most absolute manner possible. We can learn from and emulate Ruth's devotion, loyalty and total commitment. In this story we see that Ruth became a member of the community of God largely because of the examples of faithful people, in this there is a great lesson for us today. In addition, Ruth foreshadows the Gentiles becoming part of spiritual Israel, the Church. In the New Testament, Ruth is mentioned just once: in the genealogy of Jesus Christ. Matthew 1:5.

'Ruth said, "Do not urge me to leave you or to return from following you. For where you go I will go, and where you lodge I will lodge. Your people shall be my people, and your God my God. Where you die, I will die, and there will I be buried. May the LORD do so to me and more also if anything but death parts me from you."' Ruth 1:16-17, ESV

Deborah

A Prophetess and Judge

'Wise leaders are rare. They accomplish great amounts of work without direct involvement because they know how to work through other people. They are able to see the big picture that often escapes those directly involved, so they are good mediators, advisers and planners. Deborah fitted this description perfectly. She had all these leadership skills, and she had a remarkable relationship with God. The insight and confidence God gave this woman placed her in a unique position in the Old Testament. Deborah is among the outstanding women of history. Her story shows that she was not power hungry. She wanted to serve God. Whenever praise came her way, she gave God the credit. She didn't deny or resist her position in the culture as a woman or a wife, but she never allowed herself to be hindered by it either. Her story shows that God can accomplish great things through people who are willing to be led by Him.' Life Application Bible, page 383

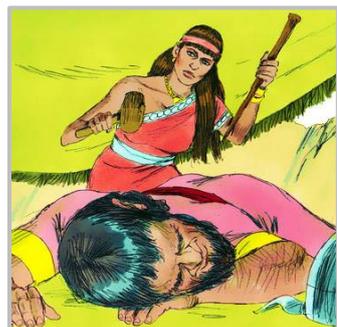


'Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the people of Israel came up to her for judgment.'

Judges 4:4-5, ESV

Jael

'Took a Tent Peg'



'Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between Jabin the King of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. And Jael came out to meet Sisera and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord; turn aside to me; do not be afraid." So he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. And he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a skin of milk and gave him a drink and covered him. And he said to her, "Stand at the opening of the tent, and if any man comes and asks you, 'Is anyone here?' say, 'No'." But Jael the wife of Heber took a tent peg, and took a hammer in her hand. Then she went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple until it went down into the ground while he was lying fast asleep from weariness. So he died.'

Judges 4:17-21, ESV



Hannah

‘A Devoted Mother’ *Woman’s Study Bible*

‘Out of the materialism and ruthlessness of Israel during the period of the judges, Hannah emerged as a woman of faith. Hannah’s personal life was one of despair in her childlessness. Her prayer exhibits selflessness as she pleads for a son whom she might present to God for His use (1 Samuel 1:11). Hannah’s faith is rewarded and her son is named Samuel. According to custom, she probably nursed him for several years, giving time for her to convey to Samuel her own spirit of deep reverence and piety and also to knit his heart with hers through maternal bonding. Nonetheless, she kept her word to the Lord. Into the defiled worship-centre she placed her very young impressionable son. Although humanly it seemed to border on foolishness, this was an act of saintly sacrifice. Her commitment was to God; her gift was prearranged with Him.

Samuel grew up to become the last judge and an outstanding and gifted prophet. His mother Hannah played her part in this spiritual awakening as she trusted God, leaving for all posterity an example of determined devotion in her motherhood.’ *Woman’s Study Bible, page 445*

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Abigail

‘Sensible and Beautiful’ *1 Samuel 25:3, CEB*

David made a peaceful gesture to a wealthy farmer called Nabal, but was rebuffed. David was furious and set off with about 400 men with murderous intent. Nabal’s wife, Abigail met him and tactfully diffused the situation. Consequently, ‘David said to Abigail: “Bless the LORD God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! And bless you and your good judgment for preventing me from shedding blood and taking vengeance into my own hands!” ’ *1 Samuel 25:32-33, CEB*



After Nabal’s death Abigail became one of David’s wives.

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Bathsheba

David ‘Saw a Woman Bathing’ *2 Samuel 11:2, NKJV*



‘Bathsheba was the unlikely link between Israel’s two most famous Kings – David and Solomon. She was lover and wife to one and mother to the other. David and Bathsheba’s adulterous story shows that wrong decisions can lead to much heartache. Bathsheba must have been devastated by the chain of events – unfaithfulness to her husband Uriah, discovery of pregnancy, death of her husband and then death of her child.

From her life we see that the little, day-to-day choices we make are very important. While we must live with the consequences of our sins, God’s forgiveness of sin is total.’ *Life Application Bible, p. 541*

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Jezebel

‘An Evil Queen’ *Woman’s Study Bible*

‘Jezebel ranks as the most evil woman in the Bible. The Bible even uses her name as an example of people who completely reject God (Revelation 2:20-21). Many pagan women married into Israel without acknowledging the God their husbands worshipped. They brought their religions with them. But no-one was as determined as Jezebel to make all Israel worship her gods. Rejecting God always leads to disaster.’ *Life Application Bible, page 585*



‘Dogs shall eat the flesh of Jezebel, and the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say: This is Jezebel.’ *2 Kings 9:36-37, ESV*

Athaliah

A 'Wicked Woman' 2 Chronicles 24:7, NIV.

Like her mother Jezebel, Athaliah was ruthless in shedding blood. She had murdered all the royal household of Judah (apart from Joash who was hidden). 'Athaliah promoted a reign of terror against all her opponents and installed Baalism as the religion of Judah.' *Wycliffe Bible Encyclopaedia*

When Joash was coronated King, Athaliah cried: 'treason, treason', so 'they arrested her when she reached the entrance of the Horse Gate at the royal palace. She was executed there.' 2 Chron. 23:13, 15, CEB



Jehoshabeath A Courageous Women

'Jehoshabeath was the wife of Jehoiada, a true priest of God. By rescuing Joash, Jehoshabeath became God's instrument in His sovereign plan to keep His promise that a son of David would always be King and part of the lineage of the Messiah. Presumably this courageous woman risked her own life to save the life of an innocent

child marked for murder.' *Woman's Study Bible, page 716*

'But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the King, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the King's sons who were about to be put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahaziah, hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not put him to death. And he remained with them six years, hidden in the house of God.' 2 Chronicles 22:11-12, ESV

Huldah

A Prophetess who 'Instructed Israelites in the Mind of God'

'Huldah played a significant part in the history of Israel, although she appeared only once on the stage of the nation's history, during a time of religious defection (2 Kings 22:14 and 2 Chronicles 34:22). In Jerusalem, King Josiah of Judah initiated renewed interest in the book of the law, and Huldah participated in the subsequent spiritual revival. Huldah was apparently so well known as a woman of God and so highly trusted with regard to her understanding of God's law that for a time her nation's whole religious consciousness and practice was reignited in faithfulness to God. Huldah, a deeply devout woman, made her God-given spiritual gifts available to God, and she was obedient and faithful to deliver the word of God to her people.' *Woman's Study Bible, page 639*



'Miriam helped to lead Israel out of Egypt, Deborah judged them, and now Huldah instructed them in the mind of God.'

Matthew Henry Commentary on 2 Kings 22:14

Esther

'If I Perish, I Perish!' Esther 4:16, NKJV



'Esther's beauty and character won King Xerxes' heart, and he made her his Queen. Even in her favoured position, however, she would risk her life if she attempted to see the King when he had not requested her presence. There was no guarantee that the King would even see her. Although she was Queen, she was still not secure. However, cautiously and courageously, Esther decided to risk her life by approaching the King on behalf of her people.'



Life Application Bible, page 823

See if you can memorize these words:
"By faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise." Hebrews 11:11, NIV

Word Search

BIBLE WOMEN
 OLD TESTAMENT
 EVE HANNAH
 SARAH SARAI
 HAGAR ESTHER
 REBEKAH MOTHER
 LEAH RACHEL
 JOCHEBED JEZEBEL
 MIRIAM ATHALIAH
 RAHAB HULDAH
 RUTH NAOMI
 DEBORAH JEHOSHABEATH
 JAEL QUEEN
 ABIGAIL BATHSHEBA

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