

When God Chose a Woman

By Melanie Stone

The scriptures show us that throughout history God has chosen to use both men and women as leaders in ministry, community and government. This article shares scriptures regarding women that God has chosen throughout history to be leaders in service to His people.

One of my favorite scriptures on this topic is found in the first chapter of the Bible. We see from Genesis chapter one that God intended for both men and women to have authority as rulers in the world He created. Both male and female human beings have been made in the image and likeness of God. While we notice general differences in the two genders, we know that the characteristics people have been given are characteristics of God and beneficial for leading others.

*Genesis 1:26-28 “(26) Then God said, ‘Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let **them** have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth. (27) So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; **male and female He created them.** (28) Then God blessed **them**, and God said to **them**, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.’”*

God intended for men and women to complement each other and work alongside each other to rule in the world God has given to all of us. Between the genders, we see both men and women that are both leaders and followers. We observe both genders with varying gifts and personalities. Only in the marriage relationship do we see God giving one man, a husband, the authority over one woman, his wife, in a relationship where they are to partner together as a leader and a co-leader of a family. Otherwise, as human beings, we are to serve one another in the position God chooses and with the grace He provides. Women are not to try to gain power over the male gender, and men are not to try to gain power over the female gender. All things are to be done as yielded to the Lord above, without attempts to dominate one another through discrimination, whether women attempting to control men or men trying to control women. We are one in Christ. I like the verses Apostle Paul wrote in Galatians 3:26-29:

*“(26) For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. (27) For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. (28) There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, **there is neither male nor female**; for you are all **one** in Christ Jesus. (29) And if you are Christ’s, then you are Abraham’s seed, and heirs according to the promise.”*

We would be wise to base our lives on the unity we share and to embrace our diversity, realizing we will accomplish more in a unit than we could ever accomplish in part.

Ministry

We are going to look at scriptures in three categories of female leaders: ministry, community and government. Please remember that most of the Bible was not written to be an accurate book of records, so we can only list the women leaders that are mentioned. The women who are mentioned are tremendous examples of women who lived their lives by faith to serve God and to serve people.

5-FOLD MINISTRY GIFTS

To begin, I would like to focus on the five positions that were mentioned in Ephesians 4:11 “And He Himself (Jesus) gave some to be apostle, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers.” These positions were ministry leadership offices that someone could only enter by the calling and anointing of God Himself.

1. APOSTLE

An apostle is basically a church planter. An apostle is sent out from an established church to go establish new churches.

Junias

Apostle Paul mentions Junias as an apostle in Romans 16:7 “Greet Andronicus and Junias, my kinsman, and my fellow prisoners, who are outstanding among the apostles, who were in Christ before me.”

Scholars have not been sure if Junias was a male or female name here, but in history, John Chrysostom, bishop of Constantinople, said, “Oh, how great is the devotion of this woman that she should be counted worthy of the appellation of apostle.”¹

2. PROPHETS

Prophets or prophetesses are in a leadership position as someone who speaks for God. They often receive messages that pertain to the times we are living in. A prophetic office should not be confused with the gift of prophecy. The gift of prophecy is a message that is given to any believer as the Holy Spirit wills to move through, but they do not have the position of someone who is responsible to serve God as His mouthpiece.

¹ “Who Said Women Can’t Teach?” by Charles Trombly

Miriam

Miriam is mentioned as being in the office of a prophetess. Exodus 15:20, 21
“Miriam the prophetess”

Numbers 12:1, 2 Aaron and Miriam said, “Has the Lord indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?”

Deborah

We read about Deborah in Judges chapters 4 and 5. She was married to Lappidoth. She was a prophetess, judge of Israel and leader of an army battle. The sons of Israel came to her for judgment at Palm Tree of Deborah. God gave her battle plans to defeat Sisera, who was commander of Jabin’s army.

Huldah

We read in II Kings 22:12-20 (II Chronicles 34:22-28) that Josiah is king of Judah. The priest finds the book of the law in the house of the Lord. The scribe reads the law to Josiah. Josiah sends servants to Huldah to inquire of the Lord for himself because he read of God’s wrath and their disobedience. Huldah is the wife of Shallum (he kept the king’s wardrobe). God spoke through Huldah, and Josiah made choices based on the instruction from the Lord that she delivered.

Noadiah

In Nehemiah 6:14 it mentions “the prophetess Noadiah.”

Isaiah’s wife

In Isaiah 8:3 Isaiah’s wife is referred to as “the prophetess.”

Anna

In Luke 2:36, 37 Anna is called a prophetess. She was married for 7 years before her husband died. She is now 84 years old. For the majority of her life as a widow, she gave herself day and night to prayer and fasting, never leaving the temple.

Mary and Joseph bring Jesus to the temple to present Him to the Lord and offer sacrifice. Anna comes to the temple to give thanks to God and preached the Christ to all who were looking for redemption of Jerusalem. Anna was not a quiet widow; she was a proclaimer that the Messiah had come. She was a prophet, a mouthpiece for God.

Four Daughters

Acts 21:9 these four women were known to prophesy, but it is unclear if they were prophetesses or not.

3. EVANGELIST

The only person in the office of an evangelist that is mentioned in the New Testament is Philip; however, we know there were many more that exhorted and preached the Word with signs and wonders following. Although we do not have other examples of the office of an evangelist, we know that God used women to preach or proclaim His Word.

The first ones to tell the good news of the resurrection of Christ were women (Matthew 28:1-8; Mark 16:9-11; Luke 24:22-24).

In Psalm 68:11-12 we also see women who preached with power. “The Lord gave the word; great was the company (feminine) of those who proclaimed it...and she who remains at home divides the spoil.”

4. PASTOR

The role of pastor is to give spiritual oversight to a local group of believers. A pastor is responsible to manage people and tasks, hear from the Lord and deliver messages to the church, to disciple, to care for and meets the needs of people, and to guard from trouble.

Phoebe

In Romans 16:1, 2 we read about the ruler of the church at Cenchrea. In verse 2, the Greek word for “helper” (4368) is only used once in the New Testament. It is the feminine form of #4291, which means “maintain, be over, rule.”²

This word is also literally “protectress,” someone who has the responsibility to watch over, guard and protect.³

House Leaders

In the early church, local churches met in homes. The Bible mentions several women who were house leaders including

- Lydia (Acts 16:40)
- Nympha (Colossians 4:15)
- Chloe (I Corinthians 1:11).

Elect Lady

The elect lady was known as an overseer of the church mentioned in II John 1.

² Strongs Concordance

³ NASB Interlinear Greek-English NT, “Who Said Women Can’t Teach?” by Charles Trombley

Paul's Qualifications for Male and Female Pastors

Charles Trombley, in his book *Who Said Women Can't Teach?*, has shared interesting comments about some scriptures Paul wrote to Timothy concerning female pastors. I offer them to you for consideration. I Timothy 3:1-13 gives a list of qualifications for pastors. In verse one the word for "man" in "If a man desires the position of a bishop is the Greek word "tis." This word is a neuter word meaning either male or female. If Paul wanted to say only "man" he would have used the Greek word "aner."

It says, "Likewise, their wives..." and lists qualifications. The possessive pronoun "their" is not in the original Greek and has been added. The word wives could be translated women instead of wives, so it could read, "Likewise, women..." addressing additional qualifications for the female pastor.

Also in I Timothy 4 and 5:17-19 Paul discussed the office of the presbyter or elder. The Greek words for "older men (presbutero)" and "older women (presbuteras)" are translated elders elsewhere in scripture. It should be translated men presbyters and women presbyters, men and women in spiritual leadership positions.

5. TEACHER

The leadership position of a teacher was more than a believer who teaches. A teacher is someone called and gifted by God to receive teaching with the responsibility to share that teaching with others.

Priscilla

We read about Priscilla in Acts 18:2, 26. She was in ministry alongside her husband, Aquila. They were both Jewish teachers.

In Romans 16:3 we read that Priscilla and Aquilla were team workers of Paul and risked their lives for him.

There are many other women who were spiritual examples that were not in a ministry office. Among them is Dorcas, also known as Tabitha, who was known for her charity.⁴ Paul mentions those who helped him in ministry in Romans 16. There was Mary, Tryphena, Tryphosa and Persis. From Luke 8:1-3 we know that there were women who helped Jesus in His ministry. Hebrews 11 mentions women who advanced the kingdom of God by their faith and obedience, including Sarah, Moses' mother, and Rahab. I like to call these women "sheros of faith," women who are Bible examples for us to honor and imitate.

⁴ Acts 9:36-43

Community

The scriptures gave us several examples of women that God chose to be spiritual leaders throughout history. The Bible also mentions women that were known to be leaders in their community.

In Acts 17:4 some of the women who were saved were “leading women” in Thessalonica.

In Berea, prominent women and men came to believe the Gospel message. They are mentioned in Acts 17:12.

In Proverbs 31 there is an acrostic piece of poetry about a strong, capable woman. She is a God-fearing woman who does business in her community and is someone who is known in the gates of her city.

Many other women are mentioned in the Bible for their faith and their contribution to the world around them. Their obedience should inspire women to excel in their faith and obey God whatever the task!

Government

Women have also been known to hold leadership roles in government positions where their actions have affected nations.

Deborah

In Judges 4 and 5 we read about Deborah. Before Israel had kings, God appointed rulers over the nation as judges. Deborah was a judge and responsible for ruling the Israelite nation. She not only ruled politically, but was also a spiritual leader over the Jews.

Esther

Even though Esther did not have much authority as queen, the Bible reveals to us that she was called by God for “such a time as this” to save the Jewish nation. Indeed, God did use her as queen to save her people (Esther 4:14).

When God Chose a Woman

The female leaders that are mentioned in the Bible are examples of some of God's choices for serving people in a leadership role. Beyond the person leading, whether male or female, it is God who is working through them for His purpose. We should support their leadership because we honor the Lord who put them in their position. It is God who is at work in us and through us for His glory and His glory alone.

Matthew 9:36-38 "But when He (Jesus) saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion for them, because they were weary and scattered, like sheep having no shepherd. Then He said to His disciples, 'The harvest truly is plentiful, but the laborers are few. Therefore pray to the Lord of the harvest to send out laborers into His harvest.'"

There is a world around us that is hurting. We need leaders, men and women, to work together in the harvest, secure in who God made them to be. We need men and women leaders who will be obedient to shine the light of Jesus to the sphere of influence that God has made them responsible for. There are no limits to what God can do through the man or woman that yields to His hand.