



Feminism: Legitimate, Fearful, or Feared

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INTRODUCTION

Forbes has an annual award for The World's 100 Most Powerful Women with names such as Angela Merkel, Christine Lagarde, and Nancy Pelosi. The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) also had a list of 100 women for 2019 that included Precious Adams, Parveena Ahanger, and Piera Aiello. There are awards for the Woman of the Year offered by magazines such as Glamour, Harper's Bazaar, and Vogue. There is no shortage of such awards offered annually by businesses, communities, and schools. This chapter examines the women of the Bible as if they were being awarded such a noble prize. In total, there are fewer than 200 women whose words appear in the Protestant Bible, which consists of 66 books. According to Frank (2019), there are 10,000 words spoken by 86 women; 44 are named and 42 are unnamed. Hannah (2015) stated

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there were 93 women in the Bible; including 14,056 words by 49 named and 44 unnamed. Bible Gateway lists 176 women in the Bible. In the Roman Catholic Canon of the Bible there are 73 books with 333 women (Camille 2017).

WHO'S WHO OF WOMEN IN THE BIBLE

According to Hannah (2015), there are 14,056 words spoken by 93 women in the Bible. Of those 93 women, only 49 were named (Hannah). Eve only spoke 74 words in the Bible. Mary, the mother of Jesus spoke 191 words. In her research, Hanna found 61 words for Mary Magdalene and 141 words for Sarah. The woman with the most words in the Bible was Judith with 2689.

LEGITIMATE

According to Pelikan (1996), Mary, the mother of Jesus Christ, has inspired more people than any other woman in history. In his book, *Mary Through the Centuries: Her place in the history of culture*, Pelikan posits that Mary embodies the polar struggle of modesty and sensuality that many women still struggle with today. She is a complex woman portrayed as virgin and mother, model of purity and shelter for sinners, God-bearer and sheltered nun, and Monarch of heaven and mother of all (Morgan 2005). As a teenager, Mary was told she would give birth to the savior of the world. In modern society, Mary would have a choice of keeping her fetus or aborting it. Thankfully for all of us, she chose to continue with the pregnancy despite the fact she would have hardships as an unmarried, betrothed woman. In the days of Mary, it was normal for women to be engaged or betrothed prior to their wedding day. In the days of Mary and Joseph, a betrothed woman was legally married, yet remained in her father's home until her wedding day. During the betrothal period, a woman was to abstain from sexual relations. The betrothal period was not only a time to prove virginity, it was also a time for family negotiations to occur. The future groom would compensate the bride's father since he was taking a working member of the family away. Although the bride and groom were not living in the same house, they were legally considered married for all intents and purposes. Therefore, in the case of Mary becoming pregnant prior to moving in with Joseph, this was grounds for divorce. Joseph had a decision to make too. If he divorced Mary, she

would be unable to care for herself and the child because women were not permitted to handle money or have jobs during that time. Regardless if he stayed with Mary or not, her reputation as a virgin was on the line.

Mary Magdalene may be the most misunderstood woman in the Bible. Unfortunately, she has a “foul stigma” attached to her name; however, she has supporters that claim she is the only woman of the Bible that “superseded Mary in her devotion to the Master” (BibleGateway, n.d.). A major controversy surrounds this woman as some claim she was a prostitute; however, there is not a shred of evidence in scripture that infers she had an unsavory reputation. In comparison to other women through the centuries, one might wonder how many women have lived a life with a reputation they did not deserve. Her introduction in Luke 8: 2 describes Mary Magdalene as one of the women with Jesus and the twelve disciples. In that passage, the women are described as followers that were “healed of evil spirits and infirmities.” Specifically, Mary Magdalene had seven demons. She is mentioned fourteen times in the gospels (Matthew 27: 56, 61; 28: 1; Mark 15: 40, 47; 16: 1–19; Luke 8: 2; 24: 10; John 19: 25; 20: 1–18). In eight of those instances, she is listed with other women and her name tops the list. In the one instance where her name does not top the list it is because she is alongside Jesus’ mother and aunt (John 19: 25). In the five times she is mentioned alone, it is in connection with Jesus’ death and resurrection (Mark 16: 9, John 20: 1, 11, 16, 18).

FEARFUL

Proverbs 31: 30 states, “Charm is deceptive, and beauty is vain; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised.” This scripture passage calls into question the definition of fear as we know it today. At first thought, a fearful woman may be one that is beyond submissive allowing emotional, physical, or sexual abuse to take place out of fear their relationship will fall apart. The word fear refers to awe, calamity, danger, fright, intimidation, respect, revere, and terror. Nelson (2019) believes the word “fear” is used in reference to God at least 300 times in scripture. The phrase “Fear of the Lord” is used 25 times in the New American Standard Bible and appears more in the book of Proverbs than any other book of the Bible. Fear infers honor and respect for the Lord; whereas, wisdom is the beginning of knowledge. Therefore, this section of the chapter examines fearful women as those seeking wisdom to grow in spiritual maturity. Psalm 139: 14

states, “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

Edwards (2017) documented the following ten women of biblical times that exceeded expectations: Huldah, Jehosheba, Lydia, Phoebe, Priscilla, Puah, Rahab, Shiphrah, Tamar, and the women that witnessed the resurrection of Christ. Joseph (2015) wrote of the following five “seemingly insignificant” women that, amid crisis, stood up bravely against the violence: Miriam, Moses’ Mother, Pharaoh’s Daughter, Puah, and Shiphrah. This section selects a few of these cases to examine in further detail.

Two women, never mentioned again in the Bible, are praised for saving thousands of lives while disobeying government authority. Puah and Shiphrah were Hebrew midwives commanded by the King of Egypt to kill all firstborn male Hebrew children (Exodus 1: 15–22). Instead of following the order of the king, the two women feared God more than Pharaoh and resisted the evil regime. According to Kadari (2009), the midwives “did not obey the royal edict because they feared God” and “God rewarded them for their actions.”

A woman was the first Christian in all of Europe. Lydia of Thyatira was a wealthy businesswoman. She made and sold purple cloth. Elliott (2008) explained that the color purple was indisputably signified as a magnificent sacrifice and royal wealth noting that the wealthy would flaunt their purple goods when they went to the marketplace. Criswell (1983) proclaimed that all things of the Judeo-Christian faith come out of history and he explained that prophecy is unique to the Judeo-Christian religion. The history of Lydia is no different. Lydia is the first Christian convert in Macedonia (Acts 16: 11–15). After her conversion, she was baptized right away and invited Luke, Paul, and Silas to her home.

Women were the first to see Jesus after he raised from the dead. Setzer (1997) argues the validity of an argument over female witnesses and the law since witnessing the absence of a body in the tomb was “hardly a legal context.” However, many scriptural references affirm that some men were slow to listen and adhere to the directive of the women to meet Jesus in Galilee. Yet, Setzer reveals that “someone believed them” as “the disciples made their way to Galilee to the mountain to which Jesus had summoned them” (Matthew 28: 15). Other disciples relayed the message saying the tomb was empty “just as the women had said” (Luke 24: 22–24). In general, this event where Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women reported to the tomb, found it empty,

encountered and received a message from Jesus Christ, and proceeded to tell others as instructed is a huge display of fearing God, rejoicing, worshiping, and becoming joyful (Setzer, pp. 266–267).

WICKED WOMEN

Spangler (2015b) explained that “One of the things that makes Scripture so believable is that the unsavory stories remain part of it. In truth, the Bible never attempts to clean up the stories or whitewash its characters” (p. 10). In her book, *Wicked Women of the Bible*, Spangler included wicked women as in (a) morally evil, and (b) very, very good. Her book opens with Eve, the first woman of all times. She also includes Abigail, Bathsheba, Deborah, Delilah, Esther, Gomer, Hannah, Herodias, Jael, Jezebel, Mary Magdalene, Michal, Miriam, Naomi, Peninnah, Rahab, Ruth, Salome, Sarah, Tamar, the Medium of Endor, the Woman of Samaria, and the Woman who wiped the feet of Jesus. Spangler (2015a) guest authored a list for Bible Gateway demonstrating how “the most ancient of books has shaped and formed the history of our world.” Her list included Athaliah, Delilah, Eve, Gomer, Herodias, Jezebel, Lot’s wife, Potiphar’s wife, the witch of Endor (also known as the medium of Endor), and the woman of Samaria. Coming in at number one on both lists was Eve, “the original baddie.” Spangler stated she selected Eve as number one because of “all the evil she and her husband unleashed on the world” (2015a). Although Eve was the perfect woman, she knew both good and evil. She knew what it was like to “feel every sense satisfied, every need cared for” and she “knew the immensity of love” (Spangler 2015b, p. 14). Yet, Eve also experienced how “sin could lurk at your door, waiting for a chance to beat you down and shatter you into a thousand jagged pieces, each on a thorn and a barb” (p. 15). Eve also knew “deceit, blame, want, shame, and terrible grief” (p. 16).

D’Ror Chankin-Gould, Hutchinson, Hilton Jackson, Mayfield, Schulte, Schneider, and Winkelman (2008) exegete 2 Samuel 11: 2–4 to understand Bathsheba’s character and clear her reputation of what some call whore and others consider a rape victim (p. 352). Their scholarly interpretation of the text points to Bathsheba’s “action on the roof, her ethnic identity, and her character” (p. 350). The scholars focus on the following three words in the Hebrew Bible pericope: *robeset* (washing), *mitqaddeset* (self-sanctifying), and *mittumatah* (from her uncleanness). The first word, *robeset*, is found 77 times in the Hebrew Bible and is

never used in connection with a woman bathing after her menstrual cycle, according to D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. (p. 342). The scholars note that this type of reactive washing occurs when something is in need of being cleaned. Such bathing could include hygiene or to remove dirt. It could also mean cleansing oneself or another person for hospitality, emotional cleansing, or preparing for ritual sacrifices. The authors note that menstruation at the time of Bathsheba's famous washing would not necessitate a bath for women because at that time, a woman would social distance for seven days due to her period and return with sacrifices of doves or pigeons (Leviticus 15: 19–30). However, if a man came in contact with a woman's blood, they were to bathe. The second word, *mitqaddeset*, is used in Ezekiel 38: 23 when God declares He is great, holy, and will make himself known to many nations. It is only used once by a human, causing the scholars to consider Bathsheba in a position of God cleansing her for the sake of Israel's lineage (p. 348). The last word, *mittumatab*, does not refer to uncleanness due to menstruation, but could refer to a male or female needing to clean for the sake of touching a dead body or sleeping with a person that is not their spouse (pp. 348–349). The scholar's interpretation reveals that Bathsheba was likely not an Israelite because she proactively bathed. D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. explain that the word *roheset* also “signals Bathsheba's legitimacy to become a mother of a future leader of Israel” (p. 351). They also explain that *mitqaddeset* refers to her action of laying with David and in contrast, Bathsheba is “the only individual human to self-sanctify herself” signifying again her “acceptability as a mother of a future leader of Israel” (p. 351). Finally, *mittumatab* reaffirms the self-sanctification due to the sexual encounter. The scholars explain that reactive washing could simply be due to intercourse and the body fluids that arise from such an event. In the end; however, D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. explain that “The author of Kings ultimately proves Bathsheba's status as a clean, sanctified, legitimate mother of Israel” noting 1 Kings 1: 15–40 where “she, at the instigation of Nathan, enthrones her son, the next Israelite king” (D'Ror Chankin-Gould, et al. p. 352).

BIBLICAL WOMEN IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

Deborah had a heart fixed on God and is the only female judge of Israel and one of a few prophetesses mentioned in the Bible. During the period of Judges (1382–1063 B.C.) God appointed 12 Judges; their role was

not elected nor anointed. Deborah served 20 years before and 40 years after a time of conflict where the Israelites defeated Canaan and Sisera's army in 1216 B.C. Deborah was a key spokesperson for the victory as she listened to God's strategic instruction and commanded 10,000 men to battle against 100,000 soldiers and 900 iron chariots. Her colleague respected her fear for God and divine wisdom so much that he said, "If you go with me, I will go; but if you don't go with me, I won't go" (Judges 4: 8). Nielson (2018) explains that when reading Judges 4–5 one will see that Deborah had a God-inspired strength within her. As a prophetess, she had the ability to discern the mind and purpose of God and speaks God's word. In addition to speaking God's word, she obeyed it, and she sang God's word giving credit to God for the victory. Marrone (2019) explains that Deborah lived during a time before there were kings and after there were deliverers. Her charismatic leadership style and fear of God provided her with sound judgment, divine wisdom, and outstanding character qualities. Marrone said she had high moral character and integrity. She was highly intelligent, cunning, witty, smart, and intuitive. She was also a military leader, warrior, poet, wife, and mother. Others trusted her and saw her as fair, open, and a person that refused to show partiality.

The book of Esther has the distinction of being the only book of the Bible named after a woman. This Old Testament book portrays the history of a beautiful and faithful Jewish girl orphaned at youth and raised by her cousin Mordecai during the time of Jewish exile. Considering her Jewish heritage and her status as a captive of the Persian Empire, Esther represents an unlikely candidate to become Queen during the reign of King Ahasuerus 484–464 B.C. However, Esther's courageous journey to become the leader and the rescuer of her people serves as a useful illustration of the practice of spiritual discernment and leadership during a period of extreme duress. The events in the book of Esther take place during the period of Jewish exile; notably, the Diaspora Jews descended from those driven into exile in Babylon and Egypt following the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. (Bell 1998, p. 21). While some Jews returned to rebuild Jerusalem with Nehemiah in 536 B.C., many other Jews continued to practice their faith and maintained their unique identity as exiles in a foreign land (Bell 1998, p. 21). Walvoord and Zuck (1985) articulated that the book of Esther served to "encourage the returned Jewish exiles by reminding them of the faithfulness of God who would

keep His promises to the nation” (p. 701). The book opens by chronicling how King Ahasuerus removed the reigning queen, Vashti, for failing to obey his direct command; moreover, the queen’s behavior represented a direct challenge to the existing patriarchal structure of this society as “the queen’s behavior [would] be made known to all women, causing them to look at their husbands with contempt” (Esther 1: 17). The king then ordered his officers to gather all the beautiful young girls in the provinces in order that “the young woman who pleases the king [would] be queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2: 4).

Considering that Esther “had a beautiful figure and was lovely to look at... [she] was also taken to the king’s palace and put in custody of Hegai, who had charge of the women” (Esther 2: 7–8). During this initial twelve months stay at the king’s palace, Esther remained secluded in the king’s harem while awaiting her introduction and subsequent opportunity to please the king. Prior to her departure, however, Mordecai, commanded Esther to not disclose her Jewish heritage. Interestingly, the name Esther means secret or hidden (Hitchcock 1996). While the scriptures do not indicate that Esther had a choice to comply, most scholars agree that Esther understood the ramifications of this decision because “by law, Esther was not to marry a pagan or have sexual relations with a man who was not her husband, and yet this was the purpose of her being included in the harem” (Waalvoord and Zuck 1985, p. 704). While the text omits any discussion of Esther’s inner struggle with her situation, the writer does acknowledge Esther’s willingness to obey the sound advice of Mordecai by remaining silent concerning her Jewish heritage (Esther 2: 10). Additionally, Esther chose to adopt a favorable disposition and attitude despite her circumstances which gained her favor with Hegai who managed the harem while she also “won favor in the eyes of all who saw her” (Esther 2: 15). When she was finally presented to the king, “the king loved Esther more than all the women, and she won graced and favor in his sight...so that he set the royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti” (Esther 2: 17).

As the story continues, Mordecai informed Esther of an impending plot hatched by the king’s top advisor, Haman, which would destroy all Jews in the kingdom of Ahasuerus; specifically, Haman convinced the King that Jews in Persia refused to obey the laws of the land (Esther 3: 1–9). Moreover, Mordecai implored Esther to go before the king to “beg his favor and plead with him on behalf of her people” (Esther 4: 8). Esther carefully measured her response to Mordecai and she reminded

him that “if any man or woman goes to the king inside the inner court without being called, there is but one law—to be put to death” (Esther 4: 11). While Esther’s response may have appeared selfish at the surface, some scholars noted that Esther demonstrated foresight in questioning how she could serve her people if she exposed herself to certain death by approaching the king without being summoned (Nixon 2015, p. 334). On the other hand, Mordecai admonished Esther for being overly concerned for her own life in his statement, “Do not think to yourself that in the king’s palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jew from another place, but you and your father’s house will perish” (Esther 4: 13–14).

As this historical event unfolded, Esther effectively employed a discernment strategy that enabled her to effectively process the complexity of her situation and develop a strategic course of action to rescue her people. According to Thomas, Clark, and Gioia (1993), perceived threats or crisis situations often restrict the number of alternatives considered by decision-makers; additionally, the authors stated that threat interpretation “may distort information processing...and cause rigidity in decision processing that limits organizational responses” (p. 244). Discernment; however, requires leaders to seek God’s wisdom; therefore, they must intentionally “forfeit any short-range or less-than-free solution that relieves the tension, settles the chaos, makes a decision, moves to action, makes oneself feel good, enhances the bottom line, gets someone off your back” (Delbecq, Mostyn, Nutt and Walter 2004, p. 157). Esther now exercised her legitimate power as queen and leader of her people to initiate a plan of her own which began with a request for the Jews to conduct a three day fast on her behalf while she personally fasted and prayed for guidance from God. In this decision to first pause and commune with God, Esther clearly recognized her need for spiritual guidance and courage to approach her decision-making process with an open mind and creativity; moreover, after this period of fasting and prayer, Esther communicated her willingness to intervene on behalf of her people regardless of the consequences stating “If I perish, I perish” (Esther 4: 16). According to Delbecq et al. (2004), spiritual discernment requires reverent listening and a posture that remains “attentive to emerging deep feelings...not transient emotions or anxieties, but rather the deep and persistent inner voice of truth” (p. 159); likewise, Esther placed herself in a receptive posture prepared to respond to God’s revealed truth.

Esther orchestrated a strategic and risky plan to foil Haman's plot and rescue her people. Adopting a humble and unassuming bearing, Esther rejected the king's offers of personal gifts and favors in preparation for her ultimate request as an intervention to spare her and her people. With great emotion and poise, Esther honorably presented her request stating, "For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king" (Esther 7: 4). Moreover, Esther cleverly presented her petition using Haman's own words, thereby leading the king to the conclusion that he had been tricked by Hamen.

WHO'S THERE, YET MISSING IN THE BIBLE

Is a name all that important? Names identify the person. Historically, a name was much more than a label; it claimed a person's identity, such as "Daughter of Abraham" or "Wife of Moses." A person's authority, character, ownership, reputation, will, and worth were determined by the name. Today, many people want their name to be popular, celebrated, or immortalized in some way as to be famous. Reflection of names in today's culture reveals some of ancestral significance, such as being named after a grandmother; historical relevance, such as being named after a princess, and then there are names on the Outrageous Baby Name List such as Tesla, Lucifer, and Lemon. Scripture confirms that to enter heaven, one must believe in Jesus Christ and in doing so, their name is written in the Book of Life (Revelation 3: 5) and every child will have a new name in heaven (Isaiah 49: 16, Revelation 2: 17).

THE UNNAMED WOMEN OF THE BIBLE

According to Bible Gateway, there are 107 unnamed women in the Bible and "thousands upon thousands of unnamed men." However, it is challenging to really know how many women are not named and what their role in history has been. Human creation started with Adam and Eve. While Eve was named in the Sacred Text, her daughters were not; however, their part in modern-day history is not to be taken lightly. God blessed Adam and Eve and told them to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 1: 28) and then their sons are named as Cain, Abel, and Seth. In Genesis 5: 4, scripture quickly speaks of Adam and Eve having other sons and

daughters. Without the daughters, it would have been impossible for Cain and Seth to have children. It is believed that Abel did not have any children. Adam's children numbered 33 sons and 23 daughters (Josephus, Whiston and Maier 1999, p. 53).

In the New Testament, it is interesting that Jesus' sister's names are unknown; however, many of the women he associated with are; the most loyal nonfamily member being Mary Magdalene. Jesus has many encounters with unnamed women. This section of the chapter will look at the woman who anoints Jesus with a highly valued jar of perfume and the Samaritan woman that Jesus meets at a water well. Both women serve Jesus. In Luke 7: 36–50, an unknown woman approaches Jesus with an alabaster jar of pure perfume. The value of the perfume is extremely high. Some scholars believe the price of the perfume would be equivalent to the annual earnings of an average Roman worker during the time of Jesus (Ottuh 2015). The unnamed Samaritan woman who meets Jesus at the well has 151 words recorded in scripture documenting their interaction as he stopped; “tired from his journey” (John 4: 1–26).

Ultimately, in believing that scripture is God breathed, one may wonder why some women are mentioned and others are not. One may wonder why some have as many words documented as Judith, while others have no words recorded. While we may never know these answers this side of heaven, one can rest with assurance that God included the women scripture because they hold equal value as do men and children.

BIBLICAL REFERENCE TO EQUALITY

Bird (2017) suggested that the creation accounts in Genesis 1–3 attempted to describe the essential nature of man and woman; furthermore, the author stated that the origin account in Genesis 1 reflected a shared embodiment of humankind symbolized by the divine image of God (p. 271). While man served as the model, the author stated that the grammar in the text designated the species as a whole—both man and woman made in the image of God (p. 271). However, the author suggested that the historic gendered existence of men and women as evidenced in the New Testament has promoted gender differentiation of roles, values, and authority (p. 271). Based on these gendered interpretations of Hebrew Scripture, male authority structures within ancient Israel, and the early church elevated the male perspective and status that persists to this day (p. 271). Consequently, biblical interpretations regarding the

biological and cultural differences of human beings (gender, race, class, and ethnicity) as “equally characteristic of the species” (p. 271) pose challenges for contemporary theologians. Hence, the author argued that theological anthropology in the Hebrew Scriptures, as well as theological anthropology derived from the Hebrew Scriptures, presents an explicitly or implicitly male view of humans created in the image of God (p. 271). The author’s feminist approach reflects present-day efforts to reconcile ancient Hebrew interpretations with New Testament applications of Hebrew texts that continue to shape the dialogue regarding roles, responsibilities, and status in the modern-day Church.

Malina (2001) identified the concepts of honor and shame as paramount cultural identifiers in the first-century Mediterranean world; specifically, the author argued that honor established a person’s status and place in society. Individuals who failed to live up to societal expectations experienced humiliation or defeat (pp. 48–49). Paul routinely dealt with issues of status, honor, and shame when ministering to a diverse body of believers dispersed across a vast area of the Mediterranean during the first century. In Fiorenza’s (1997) discussion of Paul’s leadership among the diverse community of believers in Galatia, the author employed socio-cultural hermeneutical analysis to explore the meaning of unity in ethnic, gendered, and class terms. Addressing a mixed congregation of Jewish and Gentile believers who contested the necessity of circumcision for inclusion into the body of Christ, Paul stated, “You are all sons of God through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have to put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3: 26–2).

Employing the structural functionalism model, Fiorenza (1997) argued that Paul’s stance on equality represented a radical departure from the recognized societal structure of Jewish and Gentile communities during this period. The author stated that Paul’s declaration of religious equality for all believers included both the individual’s standing before God as well as their social status and function in society (p. 226). Furthermore, the author noted that kinship lines would now be drawn on the basis of faith in Jesus Christ rather than racial and national inheritance as a believer’s baptism in the name of Jesus Christ established an individual’s equal status among believers in the body of Christ (pp. 226–227). Paul’s declaration in Galatians 3: 28 represented a formal challenge to the established societal structure at this time as even male converts into

Judaism could not claim the status of the male Israelite in society (p. 226). For Jewish and Gentile Christian women, this claim equal status among men fundamentally subverted societal understandings of the role and status of women. Moreover, Kahl (2000) argued that Paul's emphasis on oneness as opposed to otherness openly challenged the masculine identity of male members of the Galatian congregation and introduced confusion concerning established gender roles in their society (pp. 47–48).

Huizing (2011) examined the prescribed roles of women in the early church that continue to influence the debate over leadership roles for women in the church today (pp. 18–21). In 1 Timothy 2, Paul addressed appropriate behaviors for believers in the church at Ephesus during times of worship and preaching to include lifting of hands, modest dress, and the roles of students and teachers of the scriptures. The author argued that Paul encouraged women to be “equal learners” (p. 17) so long as they followed the cultural practice of respectful submission to the teacher (p. 17). The author suggested that Paul primarily wanted to protect the church from false doctrine while also addressing behaviors of prominent women in the Ephesian church that were not in alignment with the proclamation of the gospel message (Huizing, pp. 19–20).

From a present-day standpoint, Paul's command against women teaching men in the church has incited much debate over the accepted leadership roles for women in the church. According to Huizing, (2011), authentic servant leadership “shares authority and develops others” (p. 21); furthermore, the author pointed out that the introduction of secular leadership principles under the guidance of the Holy Spirit may result in alterations to the existing Biblical model of leadership (p. 21). From a historical and cultural perspective, Paul's academic experiences as a highly educated Jewish scholar and his familiarity as a student under the most prominent all-male Pharisaic rabbis possibly shaped his decision-making process regarding the exclusion from women teachers in the church (Philippians 3: 4–6, Acts 22: 3).

In his discussion of the role of ideology when interpreting texts, Vanhoozer (1998), indicated that feminist criticism has demonstrated “greater sensitivity to the political implications of language and interpretation” (p. 167). Fiorenza (1983) stated that “feminist theory insists that all texts are products of an androcentric patriarchal culture and history” (p. xv). Therefore, Vanhoozer (1998) stated that the challenge for feminist readers includes interpreting the Bible in a fashion where “its oppressive potential is neutralized while its liberating power is released” (p. 180).

The author suggested that “feminist interpretation seeks to liberate the text from its own ideological limitations” (Vanhoozer, p. 181) thus situating the interpretative authority “outside the text in those social practices that encourage the liberation of women” (Vanhoozer, p. 181).

Wolters (2000) emphasized that ideological criticism refers to how the author’s social location (race, class, gender, sexual orientation) influences the interpretation of that author’s writing (p. 101). The author offered the example of how feminist biblical scholars remain alert to the presence of bias rooted in gender (Wolters, p. 101). Examples of feminist interpretation include Tribble’s (1978) discussion of Hosea 1–3 where Hosea used the imagery of a female harlot to denounce Israel’s lack of faithfulness; the use of degrading female sexual images in Ezekiel 23; and the association of woman with wickedness and her removal from the restored land in Zechariah 5: 7–11 (Wolters, pp. 101–102).

Dube (1997) stated that among biblical and theological feminist readers, women from Two-Thirds World settings most frequently address the challenge to read postcolonially for decolonization (pp. 20–21). The author questioned how passages like Matthew 28: 18–20, Luke 24: 46–47, and John 20: 21 demonstrate the construction of power relations in the encounter with the Other and whether these passages “propose relationships of liberating interdependence between races, genders, cultures, and nations or do they propose a model of unequal inclusion” (Dube, p. 21). Moreover, Edet and Ekeya (1988) argued that among African people “there is alienation because evangelization has not been that of cultural exchange but of cultural domination and assimilation” (p. 3).

CONCLUSION

This chapter exegetically examined the role of women and the relationship between the historical context and modern-day presumptions that exist. Research confirmed there were named men and unnamed men, just as there are named women and unnamed women. Women in the Bible were faced with similar issues that modern-day women are faced with such as the polar struggle of modesty and sensuality. Today, just as in Biblical times, women face adversity where some are not trusted or believed, some are given horrendous reputations they do not deserve while others carry scarlet letters they have rightfully earned, and all are tempted with sinful desires. However, scripture demonstrates that women

do overcome such adversities with fear of God and prayerful consideration. Ultimately, women of the Bible are similar to women of modern day in that they can be leaders and followers just as good or bad as men. As good, they are characterized with words such as committed, courageous, high moral character, hospitable, integrity, loyalty, problem solver, selflessness, self-sacrificing, and visionary.

CHAPTER TAKEAWAYS

The takeaways from this chapter are numerous. Overall, the idea is to see that some women are mentioned in the Bible, and some are not. In understanding that women had pivotal roles in history, one can discern that they maintain such valued places in modern-day society. And, while we may not understand why some women are mentioned and some are not revealed by name; nor may we understand why some historical events are included, while others are not, we take refuge in knowing that scripture is God breathed and perfect just the way it is.

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