

“Eve the Helper”

Last month, as I was teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage, I spent a good bit of time studying Genesis 2, on the original relationship between male and female. I couldn't tell you how many times I've read that text we just opened up with, but as I was going back through it last month some things popped out at me in ways I had never seen them before.

I'm so glad we can continuously, over-and-over, review the Scriptures. They never get old. I never grow weary of reading the Bible. As a matter of fact, in times when I have grown weary because of life's problems and trials, I've always found strength from reading and quoting the Bible.

Singular Man, Plural Man

In my last reading and study of Genesis 1-2, what I saw - clearer than ever before - was that Yahweh did not create the male to lord over the female, to subdue the female like an animal, or to dominate her as though she isn't valued as highly as he. He created male with the female inside of him, as one person to begin with. This is something I had read before, but it never stood out to me like it did this past month, and I want to show it to you today. Look first at *Genesis 1:27-28.

"God created **man** in his own image. In God's image he created **him**; male and female he created **them**. (28) God blessed **them**. God said to **them**, "Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the sky, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." (Genesis 1:27-28, WEB)

That first word man is literally "the man." Elohim created the man in his own image. Then the verse repeats that in a slightly different way. "In Elohim's image he created him." So we have "the man" and "him." Both of those are singular words. Yet the last part of verse 27 (in repeating the first part a second time) says, "male and female he created them." It jumps to plural, and then continues with that plural by saying "Elohim blessed THEM, and said to THEM" the commands and purposes in the rest of verse 28.

Not only is the word *them* plural in verses 27 and 28, the context shows it has to be understood as plural, because the first command given is "be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth." You can't multiply by yourself. It takes male and female coming together to make a child.

Now, the point here in Genesis 1 is that Yahweh created the man (singular) male and female (plural). As we continue to read in Genesis 2 we do see that there was a time when man existed without the female beside him as a separate person, but at the same time we learn that the female existed *inside* him. Part of Adam became Eve because what Eve existed inside the body of Adam. Adam was created with both male and female attributes inside of him. I believe that's how Genesis 1 can speak in both singular and plural terms without contradicting itself.

Genesis 5 Explains

Not only do we have Genesis 1 teaching this, but we also have Genesis 5 re-teaching this and adding more clarity. Look at Genesis 5:1-2.

"This is the book of the generations of **Adam**. In the day that God created **man**, he made **him** in God's likeness. He created **them** male and female, and blessed **them**. On the day **they** were created, he named them **Adam**." (Genesis 5:1-2, WEB)

Now look at this and think with me. This book records the generation or family line of Adam. Who is that talking about? Adam, right, the person mentioned in Genesis. Then it goes on to say "In the day that Elohim created man (singular), He made him (singular) in Elohim's likeness. He created THEM (plural) male and female and blessed THEM (plural). On the day THEY (plural) were created, he named THEM (plural) Adam." That word Adam in verse 2 is the same as verse 1. *Their* name was Adam. Not just the male, but also the female. But I thought the female's name was Eve?

Well... her name later became Eve, according to Genesis 3:20 and 4:1, or actually her name literally in Hebrew was Chava, meaning life. In transliteration through languages we lose that original sound, but in old English it was probably pronounced Ey-vah, not Eve. Anyhow... Chava was her personal name, but she was originally called Adam according to Genesis 5:2. So you had a male Adam and a female Adam. You had a male man and a female man. Am I making you think yet?

It sounds strange to us to say a "female man," because we usually associate man with the male gender. But here's an easier way to understand it: you had a male *human* and a female *human*. The word human is an offshoot of the word man. In other words, mankind. Yahweh originally created Adam - mankind - humanity, as male and female.

There was one person who had both male and female inside of him, and therefore could be classified as both him and them. Then, according to Genesis 2, Yahweh put the male to sleep and took the female part out of him out, and made that part as a separate person from the male. At that point you had two persons, but originally you just had one person.

Equality in Male and Female

As I mentioned in one of my recent sermons, Genesis shows the equality in value between male and female. As Matthew Henry said, she wasn't "made out of his head to rule over him, nor out of his feet to be trampled upon by him, but out of his side to be equal with him, under his arm to be protected, and near his heart to be beloved."

Far too often in Judaism and Christianity (as well as in Islam) the male has been seen to have more value than the female. What we are learning here from Genesis 1, 2, and 5 is that this is not the case. "Yahweh created MAN in his own image, male and female created he THEM, and blessed THEM, and called THEIR name Adam."

Someone says, “but male and female have different roles according to the full teaching of Scripture.” That is correct. Adam was created as a single person first. First carries the role of headship or leader. We also read later in Ephesians 5 (which quotes Genesis) that in a marriage (male-female relationship) the male carries the role of the Messiah and the female carries the role of the assembly. The husband is to love his wife as the Messiah loved the assembly and gave his life for her, and the wife is to submit to the husband as the assembly submits to the Messiah. But different roles (or functions) does not mean inequality in value.

If you were going on a long trip, and I asked you, “Which one do you want, a spare tire or a lug-wrench?” If you could only have one, which one would you choose? You could pick the spare tire, just in case you had a flat, but you can’t get the flat tire off without removing the lug nuts. And ultimately you also need a third tool, a car-jack. My point is that all of these things carry equal value, they just have different functions. You don’t choose just one for your trip, you take all three with you, because you *need* all three.

A Woman’s Value

The husband is the head of the wife (in his role), meaning that he functions as the leader of the home, but does that mean the wife has less value? Not at all. According to Proverbs 31, a virtuous woman is to be *valued* far above rubies. Rubies are used there as an expensive comparison. The author isn’t comparing the righteous woman to something of little value, but to something of great value.

Job 28:18 says the price of wisdom is above rubies. Is wisdom valuable? Very. Proverbs 3:15 teaches that understanding is more precious than rubies. Is understanding valuable? Very. Proverbs 31:10 says a good woman is above fine rubies. Is a woman valuable? Very.

In India, the ruby is called “the lord of the gemstones.” Rubies have long been associated with royalty, wealth, and power. They are more rare than natural diamonds. Fine quality rubies are the most expensive gemstone, and in modern day currency sometimes cost 1 million dollars per carot. This ruby ring sold for 8.6 million dollars in 2014.

She is the Helper

In Genesis, the woman’s value equal with the man, but what’s sometimes centered in on here (in an attempt to lessen the woman’s value) is that the woman is just called the *helper* in Genesis 2. Yahweh says that it’s not good for the male to be alone, so He will make a helper who is meet, comparable, or fit for him.

When we think of the word helper we sometimes think of someone who is less. They just don’t know as much, they can’t do as much, they are lower than another (all those things). I was watching Little House on the Prairie the other night, and Charles Ingalls took in this young, spoiled boy in order to teach him responsibility through hard work. They were standing outside and he told the boy that he would be sleeping up-stairs. As the boy walked towards the house,

Charles said, “No son, the family sleeps in the house, *the help* sleeps out in the barn. I’ll show you the hay loft.”

Is Genesis using the word helper like this? Not at all. When we read the word helper in Genesis 2:18, we shouldn’t think “less value than the man,” we should actually think “filling up what is lacking in the man.” We should think of male and female as two tools with different functions, and both functions are necessary to accomplish the task.

I’ve already shown this in Genesis 1 and Genesis 5, but it can be seen in an even greater way by examining the word helper used in Genesis 2:18 and throughout the Hebrew Bible. Helper is a title of honor, not of lower class. I know this because in the 21 uses of this Hebrew word *ezer* (pronounced ay-zehr) in the Older Testament, out of the 21 times it is used, 16 of those times it refers to... (drumroll) ... **YAHWEH**. Yahweh is our helper.

You already know this word (*ezer*) even though you don’t realize it yet. Have you ever heard the word or name Ebenezer? *Ezer* is the last part of that name. The name Ebenezer means “stone of help,” and is used of Yahweh in the book of First Samuel. There the Philistines were about to attack the Israelites, and Prophet Samuel prayed to Yahweh for help (as well as offered up a lamb as a burnt offering), and Yahweh sent such a great thunder from heaven that the Philistines went into a panic and Israel won the battle. 1 Samuel 7:12 (HCSB) says: “Afterwards, Samuel took a stone, and set it upright between Mizpah and Shen. He named it **Ebenezer**, explaining, “Yahweh has **helped** us to this point.”

There’s an old hymn titled *Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing* (written around 1758 by Robert Robinson) that uses the word Ebenezer of Yahweh in one section. It says, “Here I raise my **Ebenezer**, hither by Thy **help** I’m come.” I’ve heard it said that when some people sing this hymn they wonder “Who in the world is Ebenezer, and why are we singing to him?” The key is that Eben-ezer is a title for Yahweh that speaks of his power and protection for us. Yahweh is our stone of help. Here are other Scriptures in Psalms that speak of Yahweh as our *ezer*.

“We wait for Yahweh; He is our help and shield.” (Psalm 33:20 HCSB)

“I am afflicted and needy; hurry to me, Elohim. You are my help and my deliverer; Yahweh do not delay.” (Psalm 70:5 HCSB)

“Israel, trust in Yahweh! He is their help and shield.” (Psalm 115:9 HCSB)

“My help comes from Yahweh, the Maker of heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:2 HCSB)

Each of these uses of the word help are the Hebrew word *ezer*, and this is a sampling of how this word is used to describe Yahweh. Is Yahweh lower class or less valuable? Of course not. As a matter of fact, **what this shows is that in Yahweh being our help there is a deficiency in us**. We *need* Yahweh’s help. We can’t do it without Yahweh. We depend on Yahweh. Yahweh

protects us and provides for us. And this is the word that Yahweh used of the female that He made from the male and for the male. “It is not good for Adam to be alone. I will make him a helper suitable for him.” Adam needed help. Us husbands need help. Yahweh gives us a wife as a helper. She fills up the areas where we lack. Helper is not a derogatory title in Genesis 2, it is a title of great worth.

Male AND Female

So according to Genesis 1, 2, and 5 both male and female were made in the image of the Creator. Both male and female were blessed. Both male and female were told to be fruitful and multiply, and both male and female were told to subdue the earth, and have dominion over the animals. *Adawm* and *Chava* were equal in value. Yahweh created her inside of him to begin with, and then pulled her out of him to form and fill up what he lacked from just being a single person. Chava was his *ezer*, his helper and aid. They were a team, and both members were vital to success. They complemented one another.

New Sermon Series

This lesson today is the first in a series of lessons I’m going to teach for the next two months. I’m titling this series, “Strong Women in Scripture.” I’m pulling that title from Proverbs 31:17 which says of the virtuous woman, (ESV) “She dresses herself with strength and makes her arms strong.”

In history and religion women have often been looked down upon, objectified, and treated as second class or worse. Men have abused the role Yahweh gave to them, and in that abuse have squashed out the value that women hold. The Bible has been manipulated to teach that men are of more worth than women. There have also been un-believers who have tried to quote snippets of Scripture to say that the Bible is anti-women. I think a lot of people have believed that lie because they haven’t taken the time to seriously study the Scriptures.

What we have seen in this first lesson, from the first two pages of Scripture, is that male and female are equal in value, compliment one another, and rule the earth together when Yahweh’s perfect will is carried out. Where men lack, women help, according to Genesis 2:18.

Next week we will look at Genesis 3 and the fall into sin. I hope to show you some things that you may have overlooked in the past. I know there are certainly some things there that I have overlooked myself. I’ve preached over 700 sermons in my life, and other than teaching through Ruth, this is the first time I’ve centered on the value of women in Scripture. I’m excited.

“Was the Fall Eve’s Fault?”

To be a student of Holy Scripture is an enlightening thing. A student should never think they are beyond learning. It is foolish to believe - at any given point in your life - that you have everything there is to know in Scripture figured out.

Now we say “amen” to this. We claim to believe these things. We say we are open to change. But I’m not so sure we really mean it. I say this because I see so few people study and change their mind on something. I see more people eager to speak instead of listen. I hear so many who want to stick their feet in the ground firmer, and not hear other people give their perspective.

I have been learning and doing some changing in the way that I view women. I’ve loved my wife since I met her and knew I was going to marry her, and I would have never said that I devalued women in general, or didn’t believe they had as much worth as men. But it’s one thing to say something. It’s an entirely different matter to really believe that something, and *show* you believe it by how you live.

I ended last week by saying that I’ve preached around 700 sermons in my life, and other than a 4-part series through the book of Ruth, I can’t remember any sermons that focused on the value and worth of women.

Hypocritical Preaching

I’ve preached on how women shouldn’t be. I’ve preached on what women can’t do. I’ve told wives that they need to submit to their husbands. Some of the things I’ve said have been just and true. Other things I’ve said over the years have been unbalanced and more tough on women than on men. Why is it that many preachers can’t preach about women without telling them what they shouldn’t be doing or what they can’t do?

If I were to teach a series on the most righteous men in Scripture, I don’t think I would get much kick-back. No one would think, “Well he should instead be teaching the men what they shouldn’t be doing and what they can’t do.” No, most would listen, shake their head, say “amen,” and not think twice about that kind of preaching.

Yet if a preacher preaches a series on righteous women in Scripture; how women have just as much value and worth as human beings as men, and how Yahweh has used women throughout history to accomplish much good in the world... this preaching get all kinds of kick-back.

“He’s trying to empower women”

“He’s turning liberal”

“He’s ignoring 1 Timothy 2 or 1 Peter 3”

“Women need to be made to submit”

Faithful to the Word

These are some of the things I’ve heard said about a series like this. But you know? As a teacher of Scripture I have to be faithful **to Scripture** in the very best way that I currently know how. I cannot take my lead from what anyone just thinks or says. I cannot worry about what I’ve always

thought or believed. I can't let it bother me when Christians who say they are open to a better understanding aren't really interested in hearing a different exegesis than what they've always been told or believed.

I genuinely believe that a love for Yahweh and His truth is a gift. I don't believe anyone can muster it up. I don't believe it comes by human nature. I don't believe you can teach someone to love Yahweh and keep His commandments. I believe it has to be initially given to a person. And so I remain patient with people, because Yahweh has been patient with me.

Repentance on My Part

I open up this lesson today in repentance. I would have never *said* I devalued my wife. I would have never told anyone I thought my wife was less than me. But some of the ways I have practiced being a husband, and some of the ways I have spoken to her, have shown that I did not value her as an equal in humanity. I did not look at her as the Genesis 2:18 ezer/helper that she is. I have not always spoken to her in a respectful manner, but sometimes treated her as secondary to me in salvation.

These are not easy things for me to say, but I'm the pastor, and the best way to lead you all is in humility and by example. A good leader doesn't bark orders. A good leader does the hard work in order to show his wife and children that he cares. I'm trying to do better in my life. I'm trying to value my wife in the same way Yahweh values her. Not because of her being married to me, but just because she's a creation in the image of Yahweh too.

What a way to start this sermon. Well... that's how I feel, and I don't believe in putting on a facade or try to act a part up here. I'm just me. And I think that's the best way for all of us to be. Just be yourself and be open and honest, because will never heal from a problem that you refuse to admit you have.

Reading Genesis 3 Lopsided

So I opened with Genesis 3. Why? Because as I go through these lessons someone is bound to ask me, "How does the fall into sin *view* and *affect* women?"

It's been believed and taught (in and out of the church) that the fall was the fault of the woman. Eve was the one who was deceived by the serpent. Eve was the first to partake of the forbidden tree in the Garden. Eve is now required to be a slave to Adam, and this entire problem we've had ever since is due to the woman. Elvis Presley once sang: "*Now Adam told Eve, listen here to me, don't you let me catch you messin' round that apple tree. Oh yeah ever since the world began a hard headed woman been a thorn in the side of man.*"

I want to present an alternate view today. The view I'm presenting isn't brand new, it's been believed by other Christians before, and I believe that it takes a more balanced approach that is most importantly faithful to *everything* we see in Genesis 3 and the rest of Scripture.

All Have Sinned

The first thing I want to make sure you understand is this: I am NOT SAYING that women are less sinful than men. I believe my wife and I are both sinners, but by the mercies of Yahweh. The same holds true for all men and women. This lesson is not about who is a worse sinner between the sexes. We have all fallen short of the glory of Yahweh. We have all transgressed his law in many ways. We have all willfully sinned at one time or another; we knew the right thing to do but we did the wrong thing anyhow.

And this is my point: *both* male and female sinned in Genesis 3. Both male and female fall under the curse of sin and death. Both male and female are equally sinners, and both male and female can equally be redeemed and saved from sin. We should not look at Genesis 3 and come away thinking, “Well if *Eve* had only not done what *she* did.” No. We should read Genesis 3 and think, “All of us, both men and women, would have done the same thing had it been us back in Genesis 3.”

Leaders Have Greater Responsibility

There have been a few ways that this chapter has been used to teach more against the woman than the man. While both Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, if we are going to place any heavier weight of responsibility upon one of them, wouldn't we put it on the one whose role is leader?

I remember when I first started working for brother Arnold (back in '97). We'd sometimes be on the job and hit a water line or power line or even a gas line. I was just a teenager then, and was learning the job, and whenever we'd have a problem happen it would be bad, but I wasn't the one who had to figure out what to do because I wasn't in charge. Fast forward to now and I'm often the one in charge on a job, and with that position or role comes more responsibility and accountability.

If we believe in the roles and functions that Scripture gives for both men and women, then I'm inclined to think that the greater weight of responsibility falls on Adam rather than Eve. Remember that Adam was created first, which means chief. He was given that role of leader in Genesis. He and his wife were created equal in value, worth, and dignity, yet he held the function of leader and protector over his wife.

When Yahweh confronted the two humans about their sin, Yahweh called out to Adam first in Genesis 3:9-11 and said, “Where are you? ... Did you eat from the tree that I had commanded you not to eat from?” Yahweh went to the one he left in charge. What did Adam say? He replied to Yahweh, “The woman You gave to be with me - she gave me some fruit from the tree - and I ate. (Genesis 3:12)” Adam tried to pawn off the responsibility on Eve, *and on Yahweh!* “The **woman You** gave me.” How awful. We still often try that game today. We love to blame our sin on someone else, when our sin is always our own fault.

Did Eve Add to the Command?

So let's move on from here and look at some of the ways I believe Eve has wrongfully been degraded in theology. The first way is in Genesis 3:2-3 where people believe Eve added to the command that Yahweh gave.

"The woman said to the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit from the trees in the garden. But about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden, Elohim said, You must not eat it or touch it, or you will die.'" (Genesis 2:2-3 HCSB)

It's been said that the command Yahweh gave was simply "do not eat from the tree" but Eve added to that command by saying "or touch it." Since we aren't suppose to add to or take away from commandments, *she* did wrong here.

Well... first of all, when this command was given by Yahweh, Eve had not yet been taken out of Adam and made into a separate person. The command from Yahweh is found in Genesis 2:16-17, and is only spoken to the male. Yahweh tells Adam, "You must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil." So if Adam alone was told this command, how do we know that he isn't the one who added to the command when he relayed it to Eve? She got the command second hand from Adam, so he may have added "do not touch it" if we are going to take that route.

However, it's possible that neither Adam or Eve added to the command. Reaching out to touch the tree is a step in the process of eating from the tree. When Eve spoke this to the serpent in Genesis 3:3, she could have just been saying "We are supposed to stay away from partaking of this tree." Partaking would happen in (1) reaching out, (2) touching, and (3) eating.

Now look at Genesis 3:22. After the the sin in the Garden, the male and female were driven out of the Garden of Eden, and in verse 22 we read:

Yahweh Elohim said, "Since man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil, he must not reach out, and also take from the tree of life, and live forever. (HCSB)

See that word also? That's the flip side of the tree of knowledge of good and evil. Yahweh is saying that as they reached out and took from the tree of knowledge of good and evil, they will not be allowed now to also reach out and take from the tree of life. Yahweh uses reaching out and taking in His description of partaking from the tree of life, so it stands to reason that the same would apply to the tree of knowledge of good and evil.

I don't think Eve or Adam added to the law Yahweh gave. I think Eve was just pointing out the logical step progression in Genesis 3:3. In order to partake from a tree, you must reach out (touch) and then eat from that tree.

Was Eve the First to Sin?

But what about Eve partaking of the tree first? Wasn't she the first person deceived by the serpent here in Genesis 3? Wasn't Eve the first to sin?

Well, she was deceived, we read about that directly, later in 1 Timothy 2. But there are a couple things that are often overlooked when it comes to this. First off look at Genesis 3:6 (HCSB):

Then the woman saw that the tree was good for food and delightful to look at, and that it was desirable for obtaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate it.

Did you catch that? Her husband, Adam, **was with her** while this was going on, and for whatever reason, he did not protect her and stop her from what was happening. So Eve was the first to partake of the forbidden tree, but Adam was the first to sin, because he didn't lead and protect his wife in righteousness.

I've thought about this... it reminds me of times when as leaders, we allow things to happen even though we know better. We don't want to upset the apple cart, or hurt someone's feelings, or make someone upset, so we let something slide when we know down deep inside that we should step in and stop what is happening. Adam was with Eve. He was right there when she partook of the forbidden tree. Yet he didn't stop her even though he knew what was taking place.

While Eve was deceived (which means being tricked into thinking something is okay when it's not), Adam knew the wrong that was taking place. Not only does 1 Timothy 2 later tell us that Eve was deceived, it also tells us that Adam was not deceived. That doesn't mean Adam didn't sin, it means he sinned willfully. While both of them sinned, and sinning is wrong either way, if I asked you which was worse - sinning ignorantly or sinning willfully - which would you say?

I would say willful sin is worse than ignorant sin. All sin is sin either way, but I believe it is worse to know and be fully aware that what you are doing is wrong and still do it anyway.

What we are seeing here is that this picture that some have had in Christian history - that the fall into sin lays heavily on the fault of the woman - is actually not as clear as some have painted. I would say that both male and female sinned in the Garden, and were therefore both sinners before Yahweh, and fell under the curse as a result. Yet, I would then say that the responsibility lays more heavily on **Adam, due to his role as leader and protector.**

I think this is what we see explained later in the Bible in Romans 5 where it is said that through ONE man sin entered the world, and then names this one man as Adam. It contrasts this ONE man who sinned with the ONE man who did not sin, Yeshua.

The point is that as we keep reading through the Bible, we eventually see that in the text about sin entering the world, the blame is laid on the male as leader.

I know it is hard to hear this men, but the level of spirituality in your home is dependent upon how spiritual you are. A home that has a dedicated husband and father who serves Yahweh will more times than not be a righteous home. Likewise, if a home is chaotic and unrighteous, it generally falls back upon the man who is not leading a life of humility, as a holy example to his wife and children. I say this as a husband and father. We men must constantly evaluate ourselves rather than try to find someone else to put the blame on.

A Good or Bad Desire?

I want to cover one more point here in Genesis before I close today. The last half of Genesis 3 covers how the serpent, the woman, and the man are cursed due to what took place in the Garden of Eden. Most of the lines of cursing are spoken to the serpent and the man, but there is one verse towards the woman, and it says this:

He (Yahweh) said to the woman: I will intensify your labor pains; you will bear children in anguish. Your desire will be for your husband, yet he will dominate you. (Genesis 3:16 HCSB)

The ESV reads here “your desire shall be contrary to your husband, but he shall rule over you.” This verse is often read as saying that the desire that Eve will now have will be to resist her husband; a sinful desire to come against him. Preachers then teach that a woman is always someone who must be corrected rather than listened to, because she just wants to be contrary. I don’t think this is the best reading of the text. I’m not saying that wives don’t struggle with being submissive to their husbands. We all struggle with sinful thoughts and actions. I’m just saying that I don’t think Genesis 3:16 is best read as a contrary desire from the wife.

In the context of the curses in Genesis 3, there will be desires to continue to fulfill the roles given earlier in Genesis, yet those good desires will be met with opposition. The roles given in Genesis 1-2 are not lost in the fall, it’s just that the fall makes it more difficult to fulfill those roles.

Think about Adam’s role as worker of and watcher over the Garden. He’s told to work and keep the Garden in Genesis 2:15. Does the fall into sin mean that he stops working and keeping a garden? No, but he will be met with resistance due to the fall. Genesis 3:17-19 tells us that Adam will eat from the ground by means of painful labor. The ground will now produce thorns and thistles, and he will have to work by the sweat of his face. Garden production must have been easy prior to the fall, but after the fall it became difficult.

The same with being fruitful and multiplying. Remember in Genesis 1:28 male and female are blessed, and told to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, and have dominion over the animals. They don’t lose that role in the fall. They still are to be fruitful and multiply (as Noah and family is later told in Genesis 9:1). It’s just that now with being fruitful and multiplying comes pain and anguish. Eve will have pain in carrying and birthing children. Being fruitful doesn’t get taken away, it’s just met with resistance.

I now lean towards the desire in Genesis 3:16 being similar to these other things I just mentioned. Eve was created as a helper suitable for Adam, and I don't believe she loses that role in the fall, but she is met with resistance. Being Adam's helper is now more difficult than it was before the fall, because man will have a tendency to want to rule *over* the woman rather than be a servant leader. It's not that Eve lost her helper role, it's that the fall into sin messed things up, so while her desire is for her husband (in a good way) she'll meet her husband's resistance. He'll seek to rule as a tyrant rather than love as a servant.

Back to Eden

Our goal is to get back to the Garden of Eden, like it was before the fall. On this side of the Kingdom we can't entirely do that, but we can sure get started in the right direction, especially since Yeshua conquered so much for us in his life, death, and resurrection. What we lost in Adam can be gained in Messiah.

My Main Point

My main point today is to show that Genesis 3 doesn't teach a degradation of women - to a greater degree than men - as some have suggested. Genesis 3 teaches a fall into sin by **both** the male and female, and when all the dust settles, the greater responsibility for the fall lies on the man's shoulders due to his leadership role in the marriage.

It's time us men quit echoing Adam in Genesis 3:12 when he said, "The woman made me do it." Our sin is our own problem. This doesn't mean women aren't sinners too, it just means that they shouldn't be held responsible for our bad leadership. If anyone is to be held accountable it's the person who has been given the role of leader. We like the sound of that word - LEADER - until we realize the weight, accountability, and pressure that comes with the job. If us men are going to be leaders, we should set a good example by repenting of our sin, and living lives of humility and service to our neighbors. Anyone can shout orders, but good leaders respect and serve others.

"An Overlooked Woman"

I've been doing a lot of reading this week, as well as thinking. I've been reading about some of the great, strong women in Hebrew Scripture, and I've been thinking about the good wife Yahweh blessed me with many years ago. She is what has held our household up through difficult times. She is who has held me up.

Where would I be without the wife Yahweh blessed me with? I would not be here, I can tell you that. I'm not even certain I would be alive. I think a lot of the good men of Yahweh in Scripture were helped by their wives. Remember, that's what Yahweh created her for; He said it wasn't good for the man to be alone, so he made the man a suitable helper (Genesis 2:18); to help fill up where the man lacked. And a woman often does all this helping without any fanfare. She toils and labors and works with her hands with no praise. It's a shame we don't praise Yahweh's women more. Proverbs 31 teaches that the virtuous woman's husband is supposed to praise her, and praise her publicly.

If you look for flaws in people you will find them, because we are all flawed. Us husbands will find flaws in our wives if that's all we look for. But if we will stop searching so hard for the negative and begin to focus in on the positive, we will see a wealth of positive things in our wives. And maybe, just maybe, if we began to praise her for the good things, it would encourage her to do more good things.

Leah's Problems

We began to day with Genesis 29, where Rachel was chosen over Leah. That by itself is just something that happens in life. Jacob had the right to choose whom he wanted to marry. But here's what was not right: Leah was used in a trick by Laban her father. Leah was given over to Jacob at the feast, and slept with him on the wedding night. But the entire time Jacob thought it was Rachel.

We might wonder how he confused the two of them. A few points have been given in both Jewish and Christian history. Josephus suspects that Jacob had a lot to drink, as it was a wedding feast, and the Hebrew word for feast literally means "a drinking party." His heavy drinking may have caused his judgment to be skewed.

Another thing was that she was likely veiled, as was the custom, plus as the feast drew on, nightfall came, and they didn't have electric lighting (as we do), so he probably didn't get to see her clearly before they consummated the marriage.

Lastly, and this is a Hebrew interpretation from a 2nd century midrash - it's likely that Rachel and Leah were twins. Leah was the older of the twins, just as Esau was the older between he and Jacob (twins).

Even if they were identical twins, Genesis tells us that Leah had "delicate eyes" (HCSB). One Aramaic Targum says that Leah's eyes were beautiful, in contrast to Rachel being beautiful in all her appearance. Another Targum says that Leah's eyes were wore out and weak from crying so much, because she thought she was going to be given to Esau (two oldest).

Another ancient writing says that both girls were beautiful in form, but Leah's eyes were not beautiful. Whatever the case was, there was something in Rachel that outshined Leah, at least in Jacob's view, but their being twins helps us see how he could have mistook her for Rachel.

In the end, the fact remains that Leah was used in a trick, and when daylight came, Jacob realized that Leah had been given to him instead of Rachel.

Yahweh Favored Leah

Jacob committed to the marriage to Leah, but she wasn't as loved by him as his other wife Rachel. Leah felt hated when compared to the way Jacob treated Rachel. Genesis 29:30 says that Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah. Then, verse 31 says, "when Yahweh saw that Leah was unloved, He opened her womb. But Rachel was barren."

Here we see the favor of Yahweh upon those who are outcasts. People we deem lower, Yahweh lifts higher. One of the greatest things of value in the eyes of a married, Hebrew woman was to have a baby. It's still that way with a lot of women, although it's become less prestigious in our day and culture. But for the Hebrews, babies were priceless.

She Grows a Human Inside Her

It wasn't that Yahweh just created a woman to have babies and that was it, **it was that human life formed inside of women**, (and Hebrew women hoped to give birth to the promised seed of Genesis 3:15 as well). Yahweh designed a woman's body to conceive with the aid of her husband, and then grow a baby from conception to birth, inside of her body.

Think about that. A woman has the ability to grow another human inside of her. That is something a man cannot do; we aren't built for that. When a woman grows a baby human inside her, she is attached to that baby in a way that only she can be attached. When the baby is born the baby nurses on the mother's breast. The mother has a way of holding the baby, and nurturing and caring for the baby. The mother has a built-in instinct to wake up when the baby needs her, or (as my wife says) sleep with one eye and one ear open.

Leah Hopes for Love

Yahweh let this happen for Leah, and it was because He saw that she was unloved. Rachel was barren, not because Yahweh didn't love her too. But see, Rachel was already feeling love, from Jacob. She was getting attention. She was receiving praise. But Leah was left in the shadows, yet she served Yahweh, and submitted to her husband, and Yahweh blessed her with the ability to conceive. She gave Jacob his firstborn son, Reuben. Genesis 29:32(-35) speaks to this by saying:

Leah conceived, gave birth to a son, and named him Reuben ("to see"), for she said, 'Because Yahweh has **seen** my affliction; surely my husband will love me now.'

She was so proud of this baby, and she hoped that in getting pregnant, and giving Jacob his firstborn son that Jacob's desire and love for her would be as strong as it was towards Rachel.

(33) She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, 'Yahweh **heard** that I am unloved and has given me this [son] also.' So she named him Simeon ("*hearing*").

Evidently, after giving birth to Reuben, Leah still remained unloved, or loved less than Rachel. Reuben's birth didn't pull her out of the shadows, so when she conceived again, she saw it as Yahweh giving her another blessing - another chance to gain the love of Jacob.

(34) She conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, 'At last, my husband will become **attached** to me because I have borne him three sons.' Therefore he was named Levi.

Leah was still vying for Jacob's love. She still felt outcast, and second rate, because after this third son she is still hoping for her and Jacob to be attached together in love. The name Levi means, "to attach," and in giving her son this name she hoped with all her heart that she would get equal treatment of love from her husband.

Leah Praises Yahweh Instead

(35) And she conceived again, gave birth to a son, and said, 'This time I will praise Yahweh.' Therefore she named him Judah. Then Leah stopped having children.

After her fourth child, fourth son, Leah must have resolved in herself that this was just how things were going to be. So instead of giving him a name that had to do with her hopes of Jacob loving her and cleaving to her, she turned to Yahweh. Leah remained where she was. She remained a wife of Jacob. She remained an unloved wife of Jacob. She placed her confidence in Yahweh at this point, and decided that she was going to praise Yahweh in spite of her circumstance.

Now she'd given birth to four boys up to this point. When a woman gets pregnant, and carries a baby for 40 weeks, and then gives birth to that baby, it's not like it's an easy thing. Her body gets tired, weak, stretched, out of shape. She is stressed, she has highs and lows, and then she goes through major surgery as the baby is born, and then everything inside of her that was pushed away to make room for the baby has to slowly move back into place. Leah went through this four times, in time in anticipation: "Now my husband will love me!" Yet her relationship with Jacob remained the same.

But... she was a strong woman of Yahweh, because after she had that fourth baby, she said "I'm naming him Yehudah, because this time I will praise Yahweh for what He has done for me." Leah was strong because she praised Yahweh in spite of being unloved, playing second fiddle, and going through pregnancy, labor, and giving birth four times without really being noticed.

Many Women Feel Like Leah

As I think about Leah, and then I think about women today, women who have been in similar situations as Leah. Feeling unloved, unappreciated, overlooked, outcast, or just a baby-making-machine... I'm sorry this happens. It's not right for a husband to overlook his wife, and it's not right for a culture or society to view women in this way. But following the example that Leah gives, you can say "I proclaim Yehudah because I will praise Yahweh anyhow. I will be strong. I will be faithful. I will love. I will do what Yahweh has called me to do."

Leah Remains Overlooked

Genesis 30 tells us that in the future the Almighty again listened to Leah's cries, and she gave birth to a fifth son (Issachar) and a sixth son (Zebulon). After Zebulon, she was still hoping for Jacob's love. Zebulon means "habitation" or "dwelling." After birthing Zebulon Leah said (Genesis 30:20) "this time my husband will dwell with me."

She also gave birth to a daughter name Dinah. Dinah's name means *justice*. I'm not exactly sure what the implications are for this daughter's name, but I have to believe she named her justice for a reason. That's the theme all through the naming of her children. Maybe she was proclaiming, "I need justice! I'm tired of being left out!" Maybe she felt like her giving birth to a daughter *was* her justice. Neither Rachel or the handmaidens (Bilhah and Zilpah) ever gave birth to daughters.

Jubilees: the Rest of the Story

Last year I picked up this book, the book of Jubilees. Jubilees was likely written in the late B.C. era by a Hebrew. It's a neat book, and although I do not believe it is Holy Scripture, it gives us (as do other historical writings) a look into the thoughts and minds of some believers that lived long ago. When I read a book like this (Enoch, Maccabees, Philo, Josephus, etc.) I take in the meat and spit out the bones. What I'm saying is that I am willing to admit that Jubilees contains some truth, but is not inspired or without error. If it errs from the Law or the Prophets, I go with the Law and the Prophets. But, if it adds clarity and insight to Holy Scripture, without contradicting, I have no problem believing it to be true in those cases.

As I was reading the book of Jubilees, I was delighted at the end of chapter 36, because it gave me some more information about Leah, information that I had wondered about for many years. I'll read you verses 22-25, and comment briefly upon them, as I close out this sermon today.

36:22 And Leah, his wife, died, in the fourth year of the second week of the forty-fifth Jubilee, and he buried her in the double cave near to Rebecca, his mother, to the left of the grave of Sarah, the mother of his father. (23) And all of her sons and his sons came to weep over Leah his wife, with him, and that they might comfort each other on her account, for he mourned over her. (24) For he loved her exceedingly after Rachel her sister died, for she was perfect and righteous in all her ways and honored Jacob; and in all the days which she lived she was gentle and upright and peaceful and honorable. (25) And he remembered all her deeds which she had done in her life, and mourned her exceedingly, for he loved her very much with all his heart and with all his soul.

It took the death of Rachel for Jacob to see how important Leah was. She'd been there all the time, but it wasn't until Rachel died (giving birth to Benjamin in Genesis 35) that Jacob began to look upon Leah with great favor.

So you see why this text in the book of Jubilees encouraged me. It shed light on Leah and Jacob's relationship in the latter portion of their marriage. I'm not certain of the length of time between Rachel's death and Leah's death, but I'm pretty sure it was a good many years. I believe the book of Jubilees tells us the truth here, because I believe all the faithfulness and strength Leah had while she was unloved was finally rewarded by Yahweh. Jacob's heart was turned towards Leah, because Leah remained steadfast. She finally felt the love that she had longed for. Leah was an overlooked woman, and she isn't talked about much today, but she is a strong woman in Scripture. Today we honor her, and praise her for her faithfulness.

“The Women Who Saved Moses”

Just about everyone knows about Moses. There’s been movies made about the exodus, from the Ten Commandments (with Charlton Heston) to the animated Prince of Egypt. Moses is a household name overall, and rightfully so, because he is one of the greatest men in Scripture. Even the very Messiah we follow is called “a prophet like Moses.”

But Moses got started in life because of strong women. I’m speaking of how he made it through persecution, the threat of death, and his upbringing. Moses was born into a hostile government. As a Hebrew boy, born in Egypt at a time when the Egyptians enslaved Hebrews, Moses should not have made it out alive, but Yahweh had special plans for Moses, and Yahweh used women to make sure Moses got to where he needed to be.

Egyptian Background

During the time of Joseph - we read about this time at the end of Genesis - the Hebrews and the Egyptians were friends. Joseph’s wife was an Egyptian, and the mother of Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 41). In Genesis 50, Pharaoh respected the death of Jacob, Joseph’s father, and gave him a proper burial.

Things didn’t stay the same after Joseph and his brothers died out. Their generation passed on, and a new king arose who didn’t really know all that Joseph had done in Egypt and for the Egyptian people. This king became worried that the Israelites would outnumber and overpower them. The Egyptian government began oppressing the Israelites, working them as forced labor, beating them with whips, and making their life bitter. However, the more they oppressed them, the more the Israelites grew in number.

The Hebrew Midwives

Then this happened. Let’s read Exodus 1:15-17, GNB.

"Then the king of Egypt spoke to Shiphrah and Puah, the two midwives who helped the Hebrew women. "When you help the Hebrew women give birth," he said to them, "kill the baby if it is a boy; but if it is a girl, let it live." But the midwives were God-fearing and so did not obey the king; instead, they let the boys live." (Exodus 1:15-17)

Shiphrah and Puah. These are two women we don’t hear much about, but they need to become household names for a few reasons. They were the spear-head of the salvation of so many Hebrew, baby boys. The king’s command was to kill the little boys at birth. The midwives were placed in charge of this command, seeing that they would be the first ones to see whether the baby was a boy or girl. The midwives feared the Almighty over the king. The law of Yahweh said one thing. The king said another thing. The midwives went with what Yahweh said. They disobeyed the king in order to obey Yahweh.

Anytime a law of the land conflicts with a law that Yahweh gives, we should obey Yahweh rather than man. There are numerous examples of this in the Bible, but this is one of the first ones and best ones, and we see that it is an example from strong women. It wasn't like this was some little feat. The king of Egypt had great power, the highest power in all the land. He gave the midwives a direct command. They disobeyed. They put their own lives on the line. They did it to save the most vulnerable of all lives: little babies. They did it because they feared (reverenced and worshiped) Yahweh.

And they were sneaky about it. Oftentimes we get all outspoken about our defiance against unjust laws of men, and we want to shout it from the rooftops. That's not how Shiphrah and Puah did it. They were intelligent, sneaky, and wise. It's okay to be sneaky for Yahweh. Yeshua even teaches us to be wise as serpents. Serpents are sneaky. Trust me, I've been dealing with them all summer trying to steal my chicken eggs. They are smart animals. Shiphrah and Puah were just as sneaky. I know this because of the next few verses in Exodus 1.

"So the king sent for the midwives and asked them, "Why are you doing this? Why are you letting the boys live?" They answered, "The Hebrew women are not like Egyptian women; they give birth easily, and their babies are born before either of us gets there." (Exodus 1:18-19, GNB)

When the king approached Shiphrah and Puah, I'm sure it wasn't casual. It was probably in rage. He wanted the Hebrew boys dead. He wanted the Egyptian kingdom to flourish and dominate over the Hebrews.

The midwives gave their explanation. Now remember, verse 17 already told us that the Hebrew midwives feared the Almighty and did not do as the king had commanded. Verse 17 tells us they disobeyed the king, yet verse 19 has them telling the king that the Hebrew women are vigorous or lively (that's how it reads in the Hebrew). Some commentators say here that the difference was that the Egyptian women were generally dainty and didn't do manual labor. In contrast the Hebrew women were hard workers, and out in the heat and sun more. They were used to having things difficult, so it made their labor easier - not easy, but easier.

You know what I think? **I think the midwives lied to the king.** I've read scholars who try to get around this, because they think that it's always wrong to lie. But I believe what we learn here is that it is sometimes righteous to lie. Lying to cover up a sin is wrong, but when we are saving someone's life, or keeping someone from wicked harm, it is righteous to lie in order to bring about healing, salvation, and safety.

Verse 17 tells us the midwives disobeyed the king's orders, which means they saw Hebrew baby boys born and didn't kill them. Then verse 19 shows us they gave an excuse. However you cut it, they were being crafty and deceptive towards the enemy. Were they punished or rewarded by Yahweh for doing so? Look at the next verses:

"Because the midwives were God-fearing, God was good to them and gave them families of their own. And the Israelites continued to increase and become strong." (Exodus 1:20-21, GNB)

Yahweh blessed the midwives for disobeying an unrighteous law and then lying about it. Midwives back then were normally women who didn't have children or couldn't have children themselves, yet because of what they did, Yahweh blessed them with families of their own, and this was the beginning of how one Hebrew baby boy was saved from the claws of Egypt.

Yochebed

"During this time a man from the tribe of Levi married a woman of his own tribe, and she bore him a son. When she saw what a fine baby he was, she hid him for three months. But when she could not hide him any longer, she took a basket made of reeds and covered it with tar to make it watertight. She put the baby in it and then placed it in the tall grass at the edge of the river." (Exodus 2:1-3, GNB)

Now we come to the next righteous woman in the account: Yochebed. We don't learn her name here, but she's mentioned by name in Exodus 6 and Numbers 26. Yochebed was just as strong as the midwives. She had her baby boy during this tragic time, and she hid her baby for three months. Think of doing this mothers. Think of making sure no government workers saw or heard this baby when they passed by your house or even came in your house to check for baby boys.

It wasn't like Moses was this abnormal baby who didn't cry or soil his diaper. He was a baby just like all babies. This mother had to be sneaky as well. We are learning today about the "gift of sneaky." We've seen two sneaky midwives and now a sneaky mama.

And then look at how strong and full of faith she had to be to to make that basket. She probably cried as she covered her basket with tar, and then later placed her precious baby boy inside of it at the edge of the river. I'm sure she prayed so many prayers up to that point and while she stood there on the river bank and watched the basket float away. She prayed for safety and protection.

Praying Mamas

I've heard a lot of testimonies over the years about praying Mamas. Mamas who prayed over and for their children when they were little, and then Mamas who prayed for their son or daughter when they got older and went down the wrong path. I've also heard testimonies from people who said they believed they had a relationship with the Heavenly Father because they had a Mama or a Grandmama who prayed for them.

I remember one time I found my Mama praying for me. She was crying. I heard her say my name. She did that because she loved me. I didn't understand it all at the time, but now as a grown man with children and grandchildren, I can feel what my Mama felt for me. She prayed for me because she loved me. She wanted what was best for me. She wanted me to have a strong bond with the Creator. I'm thankful for my praying Mama.

Miriam

There's one more strong woman I want to mention today, and that is Yochebed's daughter and Moses' older sister.

"But when she could not hide him any longer, she took a basket made of reeds and covered it with tar to make it watertight. She put the baby in it and then placed it in the tall grass at the edge of the river. The baby's sister stood some distance away to see what would happen to him. The king's daughter came down to the river to bathe, while her servants walked along the bank. Suddenly she noticed the basket in the tall grass and sent a slave woman to get it. The princess opened it and saw a baby boy. He was crying, and she felt sorry for him. "This is one of the Hebrew babies," she said. Then his sister asked her, "Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to nurse the baby for you?" "Please do," she answered. So the girl went and brought the baby's own mother. The princess told the woman, "Take this baby and nurse him for me, and I will pay you." So she took the baby and nursed him. Later, when the child was old enough, she took him to the king's daughter, who adopted him as her own son. She said to herself, "I pulled him out of the water, and so I name him Moses." (Exodus 2:3-10, GNB)

This older sister of Moses is Miriam. We learn later in Exodus 15:20 that Miriam became a *prophetess* - a female prophet. I'll talk about what it means to be a prophetess in a later sermon, but here at a young age, maybe around 10 years old, she was the one commissioned with the job of watching and following the basket that her Mother had placed in the river. She followed it all the way to the place where the Egyptian king's daughter bathed. The princess recognized it to be a Hebrew boy, probably because the boy was circumcised.

The Egyptian Princess

And notice the text says that the princess felt sorry for the baby. Here's a fifth woman in our text today, the Egyptian princess. She knew of her father's command to kill the Hebrew boys, yet she had compassion on the child. I'm sure she figured that this child was in a basket on the river because a Hebrew mother was trying to protect the child from the king's edict. So we see that even the Egyptian princess was used by Yahweh as a strong woman in His plan to bring about Moses.

Closing and More Miriam

And look what happened. Young Miriam who had been following the basket was bold enough to walk up to the princess and speak to her about the baby. That took courage. And when she asked if the princess wanted her to find a Hebrew woman to take care of the baby, the princess said yes and even offered pay. Yochebed ended up taking care of this baby boy, probably for a couple years or so, until he was adopted into the Egyptian family. So Yochebed's faith was rewarded here by Yahweh as well.

We hear so much about Moses, but yet so little about the woman who made it possible for Moses to begin his life. Yahweh used FIVE women in Exodus 1-2, to carry out His plans to deliver the Israelites from Egypt. I'll close today with Micah 6:1-4:

"Listen to Yahweh's case against Israel. Arise, O Yahweh, and present your case; let the mountains and the hills hear what you say. You mountains, you everlasting foundations of the earth, listen to the Yahweh's case! Yahweh has a case against his people. He is going to bring an accusation against Israel. The LORD says, "My people, what have I done to you? How have I been a burden to you? Answer me. I brought you out of Egypt; I rescued you from slavery; I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you." (Micah 6:1-4, GNB)

Miriam, the sister of Moses, wasn't just a behind the scenes woman in Israel. Yahweh mentions her here in Micah as one of the leaders of the people of Israel, right along with Moses and Aaron. Who is the "I" in that text? Yahweh. Who is the "you" in that text? The people of Israel. According to this verse Yahweh sent not just Moses and Aaron to lead Israel. He also sent Miriam to lead Israel. If Miriam is mentioned here by Yahweh as being one of the leaders of Israel, along with Moses and Aaron, why don't we mention her as a leader? Maybe she has gotten left out because she is female?

I'll talk more about Miriam in my next lesson, as well as Deborah, and what it meant to be a female prophet.

"My Testimony"

Today I wanted to get into the office of a prophet and prophetess, and talk about Miriam and then move into Deborah's ministry, but before I do that, I am inclined to give you a little backstory about my life and development as a follower of Yahweh. You might wonder right now why I'd like to do that, but I think as I progress in this lesson, you'll begin to understand.

As a Teenager

I'm going to start with my teenage years here in Conyers, Georgia. I was as a member of Victory Tabernacle, the Pentecostal church my Great Uncle pastored, and that many people in my family attended. It was here that I began to develop my beliefs and understandings of Scripture, from the age of 13-16 years old.

That's pretty young for someone to begin developing personal beliefs, but for whatever reason, Yahweh called me at a young age. I was in church at least 3 times a week, and I joined what was called a "Timothy's Class" when I was 15. My Great Uncle started this class, and it was held early Sunday mornings before church, lasting anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. It was a group of men from my age up to probably 40 years old; men who had a desire to sit under Elders, study the Bible, and teach it to others.

Pentecostal Holiness

One of the subjects that stood out to me in my teenage years was what was called *holiness standards* or *Pentecostal distinctives*. My Uncle Franklin didn't talk a whole lot about these standards, but he believed some of them, and other men and women I was close to in the church

followed these standards. Things like modesty in clothing, no pants or make-up for women, no jewelry for anyone, women shouldn't cut their hair, and even some men I ran into believed that men should be clean shaven, because we were supposed to look neat and clean for the Lord.

I decided to believe in and follow these ways as a teenager, and in the early years of my marriage. I could see these teachings from a few verses in the Bible, but my main reason was I felt that as believers we needed to be different from the world.

My Personal Study

During this time, between 1996-1998, that I began learning about other teachings and practices: the Sacred Name, the Sabbath, the dietary law, the feast days, etc. I soon began believing all of these things, plus I continued to hold to what was known as "old time Pentecostal holiness standards."

Between 1998-2000 I became more convicted of personal Bible study. I was around older men who told me, "Study for yourself. Don't take any man's word for something. Always go back and check it." So that's what I did. I figured that if I found out one thing I believed was wrong, and I had to change, then I needed to go back over everything. Sometimes we drop suitcases of tradition, but we forget to check our pockets.

Jewelry

I eventually got around to studying these holiness standards of the Pentecostal church in light of Holy Scripture. I guess it started with jewelry. Tisha and I never wore jewelry, not even wedding rings. I didn't believe in it, and I would cite mainly two verses out of the New Testament: 1 Timothy 2:9-10 and 1 Peter 3:3-4, both of which addressed the way believing women *should* and *should not* adorn themselves.

When I got around to studying the issue of whether or not it was a sin to wear jewelry, it was the early 2000's, my study methods were getting sharper, and I was learning that proper Bible study examined **all** of Scripture not *parts* of Scripture. The Lord was not going to teach one standard of morality in the Old Testament and change that standard in the New Testament. He was not going to allow His people to practice something in the Old Testament, and then turn around and condemn that practice in the New Testament. We don't serve a Mighty One like that, who changes His mind on what sin is.

After I finished studying, I came to the conclusion that it was not a sin to wear jewelry. I knew that sin was and is the transgression of the law (1 John 3:4), and I couldn't find any law or commandment that taught against men or women wearing jewelry. I also found positive, righteous examples of people wearing jewelry (Genesis 24), and jewelry being used as an analogy of Yahweh's forgiveness, love, and exaltation (Luke 15, prodigal son). I was able to harmonize those texts from 1 Timothy and 1 Peter with everything else I found in Scripture. I eventually wrote a booklet on the jewelry issue.

Raising Children

This was probably around the year 2001. At that time we just had Morgen and Benjamin, and I think Tisha was pregnant with Elijah. I remember discussing this subject with Tisha, and we were just talking one night about following Yahweh and raising our children. We talked about it, and agreed that no matter where it led us, we would only teach our children to follow the law of Yahweh. Not tradition. Not what we felt. We wouldn't take things away from our children that weren't sin, even though they may be deemed sin by some in the church-world. We would be strict where Yahweh was strict and give liberty where Yahweh gave liberty, because we didn't want our children to grow up and one day realize that we enforced man-made traditions on them instead of Yahweh-given commandments.

Make-Up

I think what came next was the whole "women not being allowed to wear pants or make-up or cut their hair thing." This was around 2003 and 2004... and again I just couldn't find anything in the Bible saying that these practices were sin. As with the jewelry, I realized that make-up can be beautiful and decent on a woman or gaudy. It can modestly enhance a woman's beauty or be used for seduction and adultery. Tisha and I both agreed that these things should be worn in modesty and decency, but we also agreed that the Bible didn't forbid women from wearing them altogether. I've written some on this as well in an article on my website. I think there's some good material on this concerning the name of one of Job's daughters.

I remember the big verse about Jezebaal painting her face. That's the one you'd always hear in the Pentecostal church. But when I studied that passage, it had to do with the way and intent in which she wore it, not the make-up itself. The verse also spoke of Jezebaal fixing her hair (2 Kings 9:30), and no Pentecostal believed that it was wrong for a woman to fix her hair in a pretty or stylish way, and I've seen a lot PHD's... Pentecostal hair-do's.

Hair

With women's hair length, I knew of one text in the New Testament that talked about women's hair, 1 Corinthians 11. I find it so odd that in strict, Pentecostal churches this subject was hammered on because of one text, but all the verses about kindness and loving your neighbor as yourself were kind of put on the back burner. I also saw some women who always wore dresses, and had long un-trimmed hair end up committing adultery. In other words, their "standards" didn't mean they were really holy.

I saw a lot of people growing up who followed these standards, but had ugly attitudes that looked down on anyone else who didn't follow these standards. Not everyone. I knew some really good people too who followed these Pentecostal standards. I had to be careful in my studies not to allow my mind to be prejudiced against these views just because I saw ugly attitudes behind them. I had to make sure I let Holy Scripture be my guide and not my own emotions or experiences with people.

So on the woman's hair, 1 Corinthians 11 did mention about women having long hair, but it appeared to me that it was more about female distinctive rather than cutting or trimming the hair,

and I couldn't find any law of Yahweh that said a woman shouldn't cut her hair. I told Tisha that I believed her hair should be long, but it was okay to trim, cut, and style it.

Men's Hair

I also found that Hebrew men wore their hair longer than most men do today. Most of crew-cuts we see today look more like Roman or Egyptian hair-styles. An elder by the name of James Ready was the first one to point this out to me. Hebrew men were actually commanded against shaving the sides of their head, are described as having locks of hair, and are commanded against shaving their beard.

Some of the churches I had been in growing up thought a man was sinning if his hair covered the tops of his ears or touched his collar in the back, but I found a vow of consecration to Yahweh in the Old Testament where a man was forbidden from even trimming his hair while on the vow, and some men took the vow for life. That's in Numbers 6. The verse in 1 Corinthians 11 about long hair being a shame on a man seemed to do more with wearing long hair in attempt to be feminine. Kind of like cross-dressing or being a transvestite.

Beard

With the beard thing I found that the entire Bible taught the exact opposite of what some Pentecostal churches teach. Some of the churches I worshiped in wouldn't allow a man to be on the platform in the music ministry or teaching ministry if he had any facial hair. I think it came from associating facial hair with the hippie movement of the mid-20th century. But that's not how we decide what's right and wrong. We don't look at what the world is doing and do the opposite. We always go with what Yahweh teaches in His law. The world's ways will ebb and flow and change with the times. The world has no standard. Yahweh's people have a standard. It's the Torah, and in the Torah, Yahweh commands against a man shaving his beard, Leviticus 19:27. So I stopped.

Pants on Women

Then the whole issue of pants on women. Huge subject. When I studied this subject, I did see modesty in dress clearly taught throughout Scripture, but I saw it for both men and women. Most of the Pentecostal teaching I had heard growing up on modesty was directed at the women. The men would wear tight blue jeans or tight suits, and sometimes sit in a pew with their legs spread wide open, but they'd direct the women to sit properly and only wear a dress or skirt.

I actually got stricter on my view of modesty after studying, because I came away from that study believing that both men and women should wear tunics. I know that's a hard one to swallow for many people, because it's so different, but I do believe that's what Scripture teaches, starting with Genesis 3:21. I don't believe it's wrong for a woman to wear pants, and I don't believe pants are a man's garment, but at the same time I believe women - and men - should wear a tunic over their pants to modestly cover their mid-section. All ancient Hebrew men and women, and pretty much all Christian men and women wore tunics or robes up until the 1600's when pants began to take over for men.

Why Was I Changing?

I studied all of these matters out, and I found that I changed to some degree on pretty much every single one of them. Why did I change my views? Was I just trying to be disagreeable or was there a reason? Well... there was a reason.

I soon realized that the reason was: **I had started studying the first 75% of the Bible instead of only the last 25%.** What I had been doing in my teenage years was focusing on what the New Testament said, and really... *ignoring* the Old Testament.

For example, if you believe the law has been abolished, and you don't really need to read the Old Testament - as most churches believe and practice - you can come away with making up a doctrine that men must have a crew-cut, be clean shaven, and wear a suit and tie to church. I once had a lady tell me she would never allow her children to wear sandals to church. I asked her gently, "What do you think Yeshua wore on his feet to synagogue?"

Anyhow... You can read 1 Timothy 2 and 1 Peter 3 and use them to say jewelry is a sin, because that's all you've got. You can read 1 Corinthians 11 by itself, without having to make it harmonize with all the Scripture that came before it.

When you stop ignoring the first three quarters of the Bible, and add that to your studies, you come away with an entirely different message. Your dress and outward appearance begins to look Hebrew rather than Pentecostal (or Baptist, or Catholic, etc.). I am still different from the world, but my difference doesn't stem from me just trying to be opposite of the world. My difference comes from simply following the commandments of Yahweh.

So my method of study changed. I began viewing the Older Testament as the foundation upon which the New Testament was built. I do realize that the New Testament often develops and increases our understanding on some things, especially in matters of the promised Messiah and the salvation that was to come. But on matters of morality - right and wrong - and way of life, the teaching has to be the same. Yahweh doesn't teach a proper way of life to people before the Messiah's death, and then turn around at the Messiah's resurrection and say, "Okay, scrap all that. Erase everything and I'll show you how I really want you to live (or dress)."

My View on Women in Ministry

So I went through all that to say that the same thing has happened in regards to my views about women. I have changed some of my views on women in ministry, not because I'm trying to keep up with the times or be progressive. I'm not looking for hand-claps or pats on the back from anyone in the world. I don't follow any of the world's groups, movements, or ways. I only follow Yahweh, and some of my views about women have changed because of... **studying the Old Testament.** I've been looking at it for a few years now, but just recently I've really began realizing that some of things I believed were in error, simply because I wasn't taking the Old Testament seriously enough on this subject.

What I'll be getting into in my next lessons, regarding the office of prophet or prophetess, and the ministries of Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna will explain this. I will show you from the Old Testament why I believe it is perfectly acceptable to have women teach and lead in a religious setting.

I still believe a wife is to be under the headship of her husband, and a daughter under the headship of her father. I believe in familial patriarchy. But at the same time, I also believe women can be leaders in other circles of the society as a whole, while remaining in submission to their own husbands.

The harmony comes in realizing that a wife is not subject to all men, but to her husband. My wife is not required to live in submission to men because they are men. She is required to submit to me as her husband, as the church submits to Christ. But the Old Testament approved examples show us that this did not forbid that woman from leading a community and teaching and directing the community as a whole. Women like Deborah and Huldah - both prophets - were able to submit to their own husbands in the home, and lead in the community of Israel, even directing men.

I realize that some of you may be thinking, "But what about this verse or that verse?" And the verses you are thinking of probably come from the Newer Testament. I want to encourage you to place your foundation in the Older Testament and then walk through the New Testament knowing that Yahweh's morality does not change. It's not "Well we don't do that now because Apostle Paul said this." It's "Paul can't be saying this now, because Yahweh already said that back then." We start from the beginning and work to the end. We don't start with the end and ignore the beginning.

I'll get more into this in lessons to come. I appreciate you listening to me give somewhat of a testimony this evening.

"The Office of a Prophet"

Today's lesson is going to be a part of my series on strong women in Scripture, but like the last lesson, it isn't going to focus on a particular woman in the Bible, but instead lay some groundwork that is going to help us understand the office of a prophet. In ancient Israel, women could hold this office. In order to see the weight and significance of this, we need to understand what it means to be a prophet.

When we think of a prophet, our minds usually jump to predicting the future. Someone who prophesies that something will happen in the future, or someone who can prophesy over someone predicting *their* future. That is *part* of what it means to be a prophet, but it's not *all* it means, and *it is not even the primary part* of being a prophet. A prophet's primary calling was to be a mouthpiece for the Almighty, someone you could go to in order to understand Yahweh's law, or Yahweh's instruction for you specifically, or to intercede to Yahweh on your behalf.

The Hebrew word for prophet is *navi*, and it comes from a Hebrew verb meaning “to bubble forth.” Smith’s Bible Dictionary says: “the word means *one who announces, or pours forth, the declarations of God. The English word comes from the Greek prophetes... which signifies, in classical Greek, one who speaks for another, especially one who speaks for a god, and so interprets his will to man; hence, its essential meaning is “an interpreter”.*

The pro in the English word pro-phet (from the Greek) carries the meaning of “in the place of,” like in the word pro-noun. A pronoun is a word used in the place of a noun. A prophet is a person who speaks in the place of Yahweh. This does not make the person Yahweh, but it does make the person Yahweh’s mouthpiece upon the earth. There is so close a connection between Yahweh and His prophet, that to harm or speak evil of the prophet is to harm or speak evil of Yahweh. This is because the prophet has been directly sent by Yahweh.

Prophet Abraham

Who is the first prophet mentioned in the Bible? If you would have asked me that question a few months ago, I wouldn’t have answered correctly. I might have said Moses. I didn’t know. No one had ever asked me that before. But I will give you the correct answer today. The first person who is mentioned as being a prophet in Scripture is Abraham. Abraham? We don’t think of Abraham as being a prophet, because we don’t look at Abraham as a man who predicted the future. The problem here is that we have inherited a deficient understanding of a prophet. Let me show you why Abraham was called a prophet. Genesis 20 is our text here (GNB):

- 1 Abraham moved from Mamre to the southern part of Canaan and lived between Kadesh and Shur. Later, while he was living in Gerar,
- 2 he said that his wife Sarah was his sister. So King Abimelech of Gerar had Sarah brought to him.
- 3 One night Elohim appeared to him in a dream and said, "You are going to die, because you have taken this woman; she is already married."
- 4 But Abimelech had not come near her, and he said, "Adonai, I am innocent! Would you destroy me and my people?"
- 5 Abraham himself said that she was his sister, and she said the same thing. I did this with a clear conscience, and I have done no wrong."
- 6 Elohim replied in the dream, "Yes, I know that you did it with a clear conscience; so I kept you from sinning against me and did not let you touch her.
- 7 But now, give the woman back to her husband. *He is a prophet, and he will pray for you, so that you will not die. But if you do not give her back, I warn you that you are going to die, you and all your people."

Yahweh told King Abimelech that Abraham was a prophet, and the meaning here is that he was a holy man who had such a relationship with Yahweh that he could intercede for Abimelech’s forgiveness and healing. This is how we define words and terms, by letting the context of a passage speak for itself. Abraham is not predicting anything here, he is standing in a position of authority and in a close relationship with the Almighty. Abraham was a friend of Yahweh, and an instructor in the things of Yahweh.

Prophet Samuel

A good example of Yahweh's close relationship with a prophet can be seen in 1 Samuel 12:18 where we read: "Samuel called on Yahweh, and on that day Yahweh sent thunder and rain. As a result, all the people greatly feared Yahweh and Samuel." Notice that the words "greatly feared" apply to both the Almighty and His prophet. You could not accept Yahweh and reject His prophet at the same time. No one could say, "I'm good with serving Yahweh, but I just don't go along with that Samuel guy." If you rejected Samuel you rejected Yahweh, because Samuel was a person who stood in the place of Yahweh on the earth. Earlier in 1 Samuel (3:19-21) we read: "Samuel grew, and Yahweh was with him and let nothing he said prove false. All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of Yahweh. Yahweh continued to appear in Shiloh, because there He revealed Himself to Samuel by His word."

Yahweh loves all of His children, but He has a special relationship with some of them, and speaks through their proxy. This brings to light what is said in Psalm 105:15 (KJV): "Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm." I've heard some preachers quote this verse in an attempt to not have anyone talk about their ministry or expose what they may be doing behind the scenes. But this verse isn't just talking about a man who starts a church and calls himself a preacher. This verse is speaking of a person Yahweh hand-picks to be with and speak through. Again, to harm a prophet is to harm Yahweh. This is why it is forbidden.

We gain insight about what it means to be a prophet by looking at the ministry of prophet Samuel (in 1 Samuel). I'll begin reading in 9:5.

5 When they came into the region of Zuph, Saul said to his servant, "Let's go back home, or my father might stop thinking about the donkeys and start worrying about us."

6 The servant answered, "Wait! In this town there is a holy man [Literally: man of Elohim. Why? Because Elohim was with Samuel in a way that was different.] who is highly respected because everything he says comes true. [here's the idea of foretelling] Let's go to him, and maybe he can tell us where we can find the donkeys." [here's the idea of correct instruction]."

7 "If we go to him, what can we give him?" Saul asked. "There is no food left in our packs, and we don't have a thing to give him, do we?"

8 The servant answered, "I have a small silver coin. I can give him that, and then he will tell us where we can find them."

9-11 Saul replied, "A good idea! Let's go." So they went to the town where the holy man lived. As they were going up the hill to the town, they met some young women who were coming out to draw water. They asked these women, "Is the seer in town?" (At that time a prophet was called a seer, and so whenever someone wanted to ask God a question, he would say, "Let's go to the seer.") [More wooden translations read "inquire of Elohim." This carries the meaning of seeing what Yahweh's will on a matter was.]

12-13 "Yes, he is," the young women answered. "In fact, he is just ahead of you. If you hurry, you will catch up with him. As soon as you go into town, you will find him. He

arrived in town today because the people are going to offer a sacrifice on the altar on the hill. The people who are invited won't start eating until he gets there, because he has to bless the sacrifice first. [Notice the high position Samuel had. The people waited until he blessed the meal.] If you go now, you will find him before he goes up the hill to eat."

You can read 1 Samuel 9 and 10 to see more of Samuel's high position among the people of Israel. Samuel was the one who anointed the new king over Israel, and who spoke over the entire nation telling them whether Yahweh would bless or curse the people.

So a prophet is someone whom Yahweh has chosen to have a special friendship with, and who speaks the words Yahweh gives them with authority. That word may be an explanation of an established law of Yahweh, or it may be a word of instruction to your life in particular. A prophet can also predict a future occurrence in your life, or a future occurrence in general.

Prophet Moses

Another example of a prophet's inspired teaching position among the people is with Moses. Deuteronomy 34:10 tells us that Moses was a prophet of Yahweh. Deuteronomy 18:15 speaks of Yahweh raising up another prophet like Moses. This brings up another point: Yahweh raises up prophets. A person can't just decide one day, "I'm going to be a prophet." Yahweh has to raise them up to be so, and the gift and calling of a prophet will be evident in their ministry. Nothing they say will fail, and they will always be in close communion with Yahweh.

*Yahweh says of this prophet He will raise up (18:18-19): "I will put My words in his mouth, and he will tell them everything I command him. I will hold accountable whoever does not listen to My words that he speaks in My name." Again we see here that the prophet of Yahweh stands in the place of Yahweh on the earth. It's Yahweh's words and Yahweh's commands that come from the prophet's mouth. If the prophet like Moses would be used this way, then Moses would be used this way as well.

We know that Moses was chosen to teach the people the laws of Yahweh. We find that in Exodus 18:15-16 where Moses says, "The people come to me to inquire of Elohim. Whenever they have a dispute, it comes to me, and I make a decision between one man and another. I teach them Elohim's statutes and laws." This does not mean that ordinary followers of Yahweh cannot study, learn, and teach Yahweh's laws to others. There is the office of the teacher in Scripture. What it does show though is that Yahweh used prophets to teach the people His will, and not just to predict the future.

NT Understanding

Understanding the office of the prophet properly helps us to understand some of the passage in the New Testament more clearly. For example, 1 Corinthians 14:3-4: "But the person who prophesies speaks to people for edification, encouragement, and consolation. The person who speaks in another language builds himself up, but he who prophesies builds up the church."

Prophesying here isn't foretelling the future necessarily. It could include that at times, but it is primarily speaking in the known language of the congregation that is gathered, and expounding Yahweh's will for their lives. A pastor or elder of an assembly can do this even today and be prophesying, not necessarily because Yahweh is speaking to him directly from heaven (one-to-one), but because the pastor has studied the words of Yahweh that are inspired and written down in Scripture.

Here's another New Testament passage that makes more sense now; Hebrews 1:1-2a "Long ago, Elohim spoke to the fathers by the prophets at different times and in different ways. In these last days, He has spoken to us by His Son..."

Again, this isn't just talking about speaking to people in making predictions about the future, but rather that Yahweh revealed His will to people through His prophets. We can see this by knowing that the way Yahweh spoke to the people living in the first century - by His Son - was in revealing the truth to the people in the Messiah's preaching and teaching ministry. The same happened in the Older Testament by the prophets. Through men like Samuel, Abraham, Moses, and Elijah.

And through women like Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna. And this is my point I've been building up to in this lesson. The office of the prophet - a person who poured forth the sayings of Yahweh; a person who stood in the place of Yahweh on the earth - that office was not just for men. It was also given to women. A female prophet was called a prophetess. That's not a different office than a prophet, it's simply the feminine form of the word for prophet. In Hebrew it would be navi and neviah. If a prophet was a male preacher, then a prophetess was a female preacher. The prophet Yo'el spoke of the last days in which sons *and daughters* would prophesy (Joel 2:28), and in Acts 21:8-9 we read of the man Philip who had four virgin daughters who prophesied. Remember - the person who prophecies builds up the...? Church.

Everything we have learned today about the office of the prophet applies to the prophetess. Yahweh chose to use certain women in the office of the prophet. When Hebrews 1:1 says that Elohim spoke in times past by His prophets, it is speaking of both male and female prophets. And female prophets didn't just speak to other women. They also directed men in the nation of Israel. They told men what to do in relation to the service and worship of Almighty Yahweh. In my next message, we will begin to look at some of these chosen female prophets.

"Miriam and Deborah"

So today I want to look at the ministries of Miriam and Deborah, two great women of Yahweh in Hebrew Scripture. Both of these women were **prophets** of Yahweh, and thus both of these women held the office that I spoke about last week. They had a close friendship with Yahweh, were expounders of His Torah, they could give individual people particular instruction, they could intercede to Yahweh for others, and they had the ability to predict future events.

I talked about Miriam a little bit when I covered the great women in the first two chapters of Exodus. Miriam was Moses' older sister. She was the girl who followed the basket along the river, and spoke with Pharaoh's daughter when she found the Hebrew baby boy inside the basket. Miriam eventually grew up to be one of the leaders Yahweh sent to the people of Israel. We know this from Micah 6:4 where Yahweh says, "Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and redeemed you from that place of slavery. I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam ahead of you."

The KJV says Moses, Aaron, and Miriam were sent *before* the people. *Before* carries the idea of **before your face, or in front of you**. In other words, to be your **leaders**. This should be easy to see here because Moses is mentioned first, and we know that Moses was sent to be the deliverer of the Israelites from Egypt. According to this text in Micah, spoken by Yahweh, Aaron and Miriam had positions of authority among the people as well. The GNB and the NET translate this as, "I sent Moses, Aaron, and Miriam to lead you."

Miriam is called a prophetess in Exodus 15. This was after the Israelites had traveled through the Red Sea on dry ground. Exodus 15:19-21 reads:

19 When Pharaoh's horses with his chariots and horsemen went into the sea, Yahweh brought the waters of the sea back over them. But the Israelites walked through the sea on dry ground.

20 Then **Miriam the prophetess**, Aaron's sister, took a tambourine in her hand, and **all the women followed her** with tambourines and dancing.

21 Miriam sang to them: Sing to Yahweh, for He is highly exalted; He has thrown the horse and its rider into the sea.

Miriam being called a prophetess aligns with Micah 6:4. Prophets led others. Here we see her leading the women of Israel in song and dance. This account is mentioned again in *Psalm 68:11-12: "The Lord gave the command; a great company of women brought the good news: The kings of the armies flee! She who stays at home divides the spoil." That great company of women is the women who followed Miriam's lead after the parting of the Red Sea. Adam Clarke says the literal rendering here from the Hebrew here is: "of the female preachers there was a great host."

At biblehub.com you can compare a Bible verse in 29 English translations of the Bible. In Psalm 68:11, sixteen of those twenty-nine mention women or females. That is missing in the other 13 translations. For instance, the KJV says, "The Lord gave the word, great was the company of those that published it." Why the difference? That phrase in the KJV, "those that published" is in the feminine gender in the Hebrew. This is why many translations bring it across as women proclaiming the good news. Other translations see it just as a collective plural, consisting of both men and women.

Adam Clarke speaks more on this in the rest of his commentary on Psalm 68:11, and in his commentary on Isaiah 40:9. Clarke points out that it was the women (in large groups) who would announce the good news of victory to the people. Clarke brings up the women in Exodus 15, and the women who announced the slaying of Goliath by David in saying, "Saul has slain his thousands, but David his ten thousands!" (1 Samuel 18:6-7). The prophetess and judge Deborah also led the song in Judges 5 which proclaimed the good news of victory.

I will quickly add here that it was women - Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James - who first found the empty tomb, and announced the resurrection of Yeshua to the Apostles. This too was a great victory over death and the devil, and was announced by women, which is in alignment with the HCSB rendering of Psalm 68:11.

Another text that shows Miriam's authority in Israel, but usually gets overlooked because of Miriam's sin, is in Numbers 12. Miriam and Aaron complain against Moses. Miriam's speech must have been the harshest because she is the one struck with the disease of leprosy due to her sin. So most of the time, this text is read and Miriam's sin is mentioned. (Leaders can disobey too. Even Moses disobeyed and wasn't allowed into the promised land, Deuteronomy 32:48-52.)

Look at Numbers 12:1-2: "Miriam and Aaron criticized Moses because of the Cushite woman he married (for he had married a Cushite woman). They said, 'Does Yahweh speak only through Moses? Does He not also speak through us?' And Yahweh heard it."

The part of this I want to center in on is the complaint given by Miriam and Aaron. "Does Yahweh speak only through Moses? Does He not also speak through us?" The complaint here is made because they are leaders in the community. It wouldn't make any sense if they were just ordinary laypeople in Israel; people who were followers and not leaders.

Remember, in Micah 6:4 Yahweh says that he sent Aaron and Miriam to lead. The problem in Numbers 12 is that they weren't recognizing the *highest* authority on the earth. Yahweh had a closer relationship with Moses than He did with anyone else. Thus they should not have criticized Moses for just doing something they didn't like. The point though that they bring up - *Yahweh speaking through them too* - shows that both of them had an authoritative position among the community of Israel. Not just Aaron the priest, but also Miriam the prophetess.

Some try to say that Miriam just led the women in Israel, but that goes against what we learned last week about being a prophet. No one would read about a male prophet, and then assume that he only led the men in Israel. Prophets were spiritual leaders in the community as a whole. Miriam had the authority to proclaim Yahweh's word to women and men. When her and the other women proclaimed or preached the good news of victory in Exodus 15, everyone in the congregation was listening and rejoicing. The men weren't told to shut their ears because they can't learn anything from the women.

The authoritative role the females in Israel could hold is seen even more readily in the ministry of Deborah. In Judges 4:4 we read that Deborah, the wife of Lappidoth, was both a prophet and a judge over Israel. Israel includes the men of Israel.

Notice that this verse mentions Deborah's husband, Lappidoth, yet Deborah is the prophet and the judge. She was the one raised up to hold these offices. Based on the totality of Scripture, I believe Deborah was able to remain submissive to her own husband in the home, yet at the same time rule and govern the community of Israel.

When I was growing up, and in my teenage years and adulthood, the most common objection to Deborah being a judge over Israel was this: "Well, she was the judge because a man would not step up to the plate." Or, "she ruled because there were no men fit for the job."

First of all, **nothing in the text says that**. Judges 4 and 5 are the two most extensive chapters in the Bible about Deborah, and neither chapter says anything about Deborah being a judge because the men weren't doing their job. Furthermore, there are times in Scripture where men were called by Yahweh, and didn't want to do the job, and Yahweh still made them do it. The prophet Jonah is a good example. When Jonah went opposite of Nineveh, Yahweh appointed a great fish to swallow him and spit him up. Yahweh has no problem sending people who don't want to do what He is calling them to do.

Secondly, that objection assumes a man could just step up and be a prophet, or a judge, but that's not how it worked. Remember what we covered in the last lesson. **Yahweh raises up prophets**. People don't just decide one day, "I'm going to be a prophet." That gift is an office Yahweh gives people He chooses. The same thing applies to being a judge over Israel. Look at Judges 2:14-19.

14 Yahweh's anger burned against Israel, and He handed them over to marauders who raided them. He sold them to the enemies around them, so that they could no longer resist their enemies.

15 Whenever the Israelites went out, Yahweh was against them and brought disaster on them, just as He had promised and sworn to them. So they suffered greatly.

16 Yahweh raised up judges, who saved them from the power of their marauders, 17 but they did not listen to their judges. Instead, they prostituted themselves with other gods, bowing down to them. They quickly turned from the way of their fathers, who had walked in obedience to Yahweh's commands. They did not do as their fathers did.

18 Whenever Yahweh raised up a judge for the Israelites, Yahweh was with him and saved the people from the power of their enemies **while the judge was still alive**. Yahweh was moved to pity whenever they groaned because of those who were oppressing them.

19 Whenever the judge died, the Israelites would act even more corruptly than their fathers, going after other gods to worship and bow down to them. They did not turn from their evil practices or their obstinate ways.

After chapter 2, as you begin to read in Judges 3, you see that Yahweh raised up judges to save the people of Israel. The judges were saviors or deliverers. In Judges 3:9 (WEB) we read, “When the children of Israel cried to Yahweh, Yahweh raised up a savior to the children of Israel, who saved them, even Othniel son of Kenaz, Caleb’s younger brother.”

These saviors/judges did more than just settle disputes among the people. To be a **judge** in Israel at this time in the nation’s history meant you **ruled** in Israel. You were sent by Yahweh to save the people of Israel from their sin. The judges would lead battles, set a righteous example for the people to follow, teach the people the instructions of Yahweh, and govern in judicial cases. This was before the era of the kings of Israel, so the reality here is, the judges Yahweh raised up held the highest office in the land.

Whenever one of these judges came on the scene, good things happened, because Yahweh was with the judge. Consider Othniel (I just mentioned a moment ago). Judges 3:10-11 says that the Spirit of Yahweh was on Othniel, and the land was peaceful for 40 years during his life. But then, he died and things got bad again.

That’s usually how it happened. While a righteous judge was leading, the Israelites would have peace. After a while, the judge would die, and the Israelites would go back to their evil ways. Generally, when you have a good leader, a community remains in good shape. Every community will ebb and flow, and always have problems pop up, but overall, good leaders produce a good community. The influence that a good leader has on a community is seen most clearly once the good leader dies. The nation of Israel would fall apart when one of these righteous judges died. When they lost their leader, they lost their faith.

No one bats an eye when we read about a judge like Othniel (or Ehud, in chapter 3). Or when we come to Gideon in chapter 6. Everyone recognizes that these men were raised up by Yahweh to lead. Yet when we come to chapters 4 and 5 where Deborah - the female prophet and judge - leads, many people start squirming, because they don’t like the idea of a female leader.

But Deborah is listed right along with these other judges. Yahweh raised up Deborah as both a prophet and a judge. She led Israel. In Judges chapter 5, when she leads a victory song after battle, she says this in verses 2-3, 7, “When the leaders lead in Israel, when the people volunteer, praise Yahweh. Listen, kings! Pay attention, princes! I will sing to Yahweh; I will sing praise to Yahweh Mighty One of Israel... Villages were deserted, they were deserted in Israel, until I, Deborah, I arose, **a mother in Israel.**” Deborah is like a mother to the Israelites - they are likened her children. What does a mother do to her children? She takes care of them. She leads them in the right direction. They come to her for comfort. They come to her for instruction. This was Deborah’s role in Israel.

Judges 4:5 says, “It was her (Deborah’s) custom to sit under the palm tree... between Raman and Bethel in the hill country of Ephesus, and the Israelites went up to her for judgment.” If you compare Judges 4:4-5 to Exodus 18:13-16, you will see striking similarities

between Deborah's role and Moses' role. Both sat to judge the people, meaning: the people would come to them to receive instruction; they taught the people how to follow Yahweh.

In Judges 4:6 we see her summoning Barak (from the tribe of Naphtali). She tells Barak: "Hasn't Yahweh the Mighty One of Israel, commanded you: 'Go, deploy the troops on Mount Tabor, and take with you 10,000 men from the Naphtalites and Zebulunites? Then I will lure Sisera commander of Jabin's forces, his chariots, and his army at the Wadi Kishinev to fight against you, and I will hand him over to you.'"

That's an instruction or command from Yahweh that she relays to Barak. It's not Barak instructing Deborah, it's Deborah instructing Barak. Do you know what Barak says here? In 4:8 he says, "If you will go with me, I will go. But if you will not go with me, I will not go." Deborah replies in verse 9: "I will go with you, but you will receive no honor on the road you are about to take, because Yahweh will sell Sisera into a woman's hand."

Later in this chapter, when Sisera (a Canaanite captain) mobilized his troops against Israel, Deborah again instructs Barak (4:14): "Then Deborah said to Barak, 'Move on, for this is the day Yahweh has handed Sisera over to you. Hasn't Yahweh gone before you?'" Again we see Deborah in charge. She is the one instructing Barak, because she is the prophet and the judge over Israel.

But, Deborah's prophecy was right. Sisera the captain got away from the battle when he saw how badly his troops were doing. Every single man in Sisera's army died, but he escaped and fled to the tent of a woman named Yael, the wife of Heber the Kenite. He fled there because there was peace between his king and Heber's family. But beginning in verse 18 we read:

18 Yael went out to greet Sisera and said to him, 'Come in my lord. Come in with me. Don't be afraid.' So he went into her tent, and she covered him with a rug.

19 He said to her, 'Please give me a little water to drink for I am thirsty.' She opened a container of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him again.

20 Then he said to her, 'Stand at the entrance to the tent. If a man comes and asks you, Is there a man her? Say No.'

21 While he was sleeping from exhaustion, Heber's wife Yael took a tent peg, grabbed a hammer, and went silently to Sisera. She hammered the peg into his temple and drove it into the ground and he died."

What a children's bedtime story. Yael was another strong woman of Yahweh. Imagine the craftiness, wisdom, and courage it took to do that. One wrong move and Sisera may have woke up from his sleep.

Yael is praised in the song of Deborah in chapter 5. "Most blessed of women is Yael" it is said. I believe Yael is what that text in Psalm 68:12 alludes to. After it says great was the company of women who proclaimed the good news, it reads, "The kings of the armies flee, they flee. And she who remains at home divides the spoil."

At the end of chapter 5 we read that the land had rest for 40 years. That's the same thing we read during the time of Othniel, the first judge Yahweh raised up. Deborah's rule brought about the same peace in the land. Nothing negative is ever said about Deborah's rule. She was a righteous prophet, a righteous judge, and Yahweh put her in that position. Deborah was a lover of Yahweh, and a commandment keeper. She was given by Yahweh because the Israelites cried out to Yahweh and He had compassion on them. He sent Deborah just as he had sent Othniel. Deborah was a savior to the people of Israel.

Why do we not hear much of Deborah? Two reasons are most likely. One, it's in the OT, and in more of an obscure book like Judges. Two, she is a female, and many people in Christianity (including myself in the past) think that women aren't supposed to lead over men. Well... Deborah disproves that thinking.

What many Christians do today is start with the NT epistles of Paul, read them out of context, and then read their understanding back into the OT, and try to explain why Deborah's leading really doesn't matter. Many Christians do the same thing with the dietary laws, the feast days, and a host of other things. The mindset they have is that the OT is lacking. It can't really teach us the will of Yahweh. The NT comes along and changes all of the problems with the OT.

But we should know better than that. The OT isn't deficient, it is foundational. The NT certainly builds upon the foundation of the OT, but not by taking a sledge hammer and destroying the foundation. Rather, it builds a square and proper structure, because the OT foundation is so perfect and beautiful. Anything we read in the NT that appears on the surface to contradict Deborah's ministry, and Miriam's ministry, should be harmonized with the OT, not the other way around.

"Huldah"

In this lesson, I'd like to look at the ministry of another great woman in Scripture: Huldah.

When you mention the name Huldah, people give a blank look. I was raised in a church where we attended a gathering at least three times a week. On top of that I went to what was called Sunday School where we would learn about Biblical, historical accounts: like Daniel in the Lion's Den or Noah and the Ark. I learned by memory all the books of the Bible from an early age, and I could quote a lot of Scripture from memory even as a little boy.

I don't remember the first time I ever heard of Huldah the prophetess, but as I think back, I can pretty much guarantee that at the age of 20, if you were to mention Huldah to me I wouldn't have known who she was. How many of you who grew up in church ever learned about Huldah? How many of you knew who Huldah was before I mentioned her in this series? How many of you are hearing about Huldah for the first time? The next time you discuss Scripture with a believer you meet, ask them if they know who Huldah is, and see what they say.

Well... I plan on changing all of that with this lesson, or at least I plan on teaching you about Huldah today, and then placing my lesson online in hopes that many people will learn of this great women of Yahweh. She was used by Yahweh during a time of distress, and as part of a great revival in the nation of Israel. Yahweh used her to direct the highest men in the nation. She told them what would happen and what to do.

Josiah, the Young King

This account begins with a young king named Josiah, and is found in the book of 2 Kings 22. Josiah began ruling as king in Judah when he was 8 years old. That's awful young for a king I know, but how it worked in ancient Israel was - sons of kings would often take over when their father died.

Josiah's grandfather, Manasseh had been king for 55 years in Judah. Manasseh was an evil king, and you can imagine the kind of damage that was done to the nation over a period of 55 years with a bad ruler. You can read about him in 2 Kings 21. When Manasseh died, Amon his son became king. Amon was also an evil king. By the way, evil here means that these kings did not govern by the law of Yahweh given through Moses. Well, Amon only ruled as king for 2 years, but he walked in all the ways of his father Manasseh, which was a bad thing.

When Amon died, his son Josiah took over at 8 years old. The plan was probably that Amon would live longer and Josiah would take over at an older age, but that isn't how it worked out.

Josiah was different from his father and grandfather. He did not walk in their ways. For 57 years Judah had been ruled by wickedness, but 2 Kings 22:2 tells us that Josiah did that which was right in the sight of Yahweh, and that he walked in all the ways of his ancestor David - he didn't turn to the right or the left.

The Straight Path

That phrase "did not turn to the right or the left" is taken from Deuteronomy 5:32-33 where we read "Be careful to do as Yahweh your Mighty One has commanded you; you are not to turn aside to the right or the left. Follow the whole instruction Yahweh your Mighty One has commanded you, so that you may live, prosper, and have a long life in the land you will possess."

So the way we judge a king's righteousness is not by how many people liked him, or by how long he ruled. It is by how closely he followed the commandments of Yahweh. That's really the only thing Yahweh looks at. How closely a person walks with Him.

That introduction to King Josiah teaches us that we don't have to follow the path of wickedness or destruction, even if our parents and grandparents did. We aren't locked into a position just because a family member lived a certain way. Josiah never said, "Well, my dad lived this way so this is just who I am." Josiah served Yahweh in spite of bad examples. Don't ever use bad

examples in your life as excuses to continue down the wrong road. If someone sets you a bad example, use it as a spring-board to help you know what NOT to do in your life.

Josiah's Early Years

A parallel text to 2 Kings 22 is 2 Chronicles 34. Same account, same king, just a different text in Scripture. We read there that when Josiah was 16 years old he began to seek the Mighty One of his ancestor David, and at age 20 he started cleaning up Judah and Jerusalem by removing all the idols his dad and grandad has set up. He tore down the pagan altars, smashed the Asherah poles, and the carved images to powder. At the age of 26 he began to repair the temple of Yahweh that had been neglected for so many years.

Josiah's account also teaches us that we can have a relationship with Yahweh while we are young. All the children in here are just as much a part of this congregation as the adults. The same goes for the young adults. We need all of you. In twenty years these children and young adults will - Yahweh's will - carry on this congregation. We may have the next King or Prophetess right here in our midst and not realize it, but Yahweh is working in their lives right now. Devote your life to Yahweh. Let no one despise your youth.

In both 2 Kings 22 and 2 Chronicles 34 we read that the young, King Josiah began to collect money from the people of Israel in order to help repair the Temple. He sends his secretary Shaphan to the high priest Hilkiah, in order to give over the money to those who were overseeing the work. The overseers would then give the money to the workers - the carpenters, builders, and masons - for timber and stone.

Finding a Lost Book

During this time, the high priest Hilkiah tells Shaphan the secretary that he found this book inside the Temple while they were all in the process of doing the repairs. Evidently the book had been tucked away somewhere, collecting dust, maybe even with stuff stacked on top of it. It was somewhere that had to be cleaned up in order to get to it. Think about going into a storage room that hadn't been cleaned for 50 years, and finding old, family items that you didn't know you still had.

This book is named by Hilkiah the high priest. It is called "the book of the law" or literally "the scroll of the Torah." Hilkiah tells Shaphan, "I have found the book of the law in Yahweh's temple," and he gave the book to Shaphan to read it. (2 Kings 22:8)

So we have (1) the king of Israel, (2) the king's court secretary, and (3) the high priest as part of this account. That's some pretty prestigious positions in Israel, and the king is already said to have done many lawful things in restoring the nation, even before the finding of this book.

This book of the law is most likely the book we call Deuteronomy. The majority of the book of Deuteronomy was written down by Moses after he spoke it. You'll find this in Deuteronomy 31 where it is then called "the book of the law" and placed beside the ark of the covenant. Inside the

ark of the covenant lay the ten commandment stones, Aaron's staff that budded, and a pot of manna from the wilderness. Right beside it lay the book of the law that Moses wrote down.

Deuteronomy is also called "this book of the law" in Deuteronomy 29 and 30, and specifically, in 29 the curses for disobedience to the law are mentioned as part of the writing in the book of the law. That's another clue as to what this lost book was, because the curses are what the king centers in on after the book is found.

Josiah's Reaction

We see this in 2 Kings 22:10-13 where we read:

Then Shaphan the court secretary told the king, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book," and Shaphan read it in the presence of the king. (11) When the king heard the words of the book of the law, he tore his clothes. (12) Then he commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam son of Shaphan, Achbor son of Micaiah, Shaphan the court secretary, and the king's servant Asaiah: (13) "Go and inquire of Yahweh for me, the people, and all Judah about the instruction in this book that has been found. For great is Yahweh's wrath that is kindled against us because our ancestors have not obeyed the words of this book in order to do everything written about us."

The tearing of the clothes is a sign of grief and sorrow. When Reuben (the oldest child of Jacob) found that his brother had been taken from the pit and sold into slavery he tore his clothes (Genesis 37). When the Israelites were defeated by Ai, Joshua fell facedown on the ground before Yahweh and tore his clothes (Joshua 7). That also shows the tearing of the clothes could be a sign of penitence and humility before Yahweh. Sadness, loss, regret, repentance. All of this was going on in Josiah's mind and heart at the reading of the book of the law.

Realize that King Josiah, although performing some righteous acts up till now (like removing all the idols in the land) had likely not heard all the words of Yahweh's law. No one had Bibles like we do today, and the law was passed down mostly by word of mouth from parents to children. Since Josiah's dad Amon and grandad Manasseh were evil kings (for 57 years), Josiah would not have had much passed down to him.

So when Josiah heard the book of Deuteronomy read to him, he was saddened, because at the end of it, he heard about all the curses that would come upon Israel for forsaking the law.

Josiah knew the curses were coming, so he tore his clothes in grief when he heard the book of the law. Many pastors today do not tear their clothes, but put on their finest suits to tell people that we don't need to pay attention to the book of the law. We don't have to keep Passover. We don't have to eat clean. We don't have to worry about tassels, or a land Sabbath, or purity laws, and on and on and on. What a difference between King Josiah and many preachers of our day.

What About Huldah?

So what does all of this have to do with Huldah? I thought you were teaching about Huldah brother Matthew? Well, she is next, but in order to show you the weight of her ministry, I had to lay the groundwork of King Josiah.

We just read a moment ago that when the king heard the words written on the scroll of the Torah (book of the law) that he gave a commandment to 5 men to “go and inquire of Yahweh for me, the people, and all Judah.” So the king plus 5 men makes 6 men total, and in these men you have the very King of Judah and the High Priest in the Temple. Josiah didn’t go to inquire of Yahweh himself, and Josiah didn’t even inquire of Yahweh through the High Priest. Inquire of Yahweh means to “ask Yahweh a question” or “see what Yahweh says about a matter.” Who did the king send the men to? Huldah, the prophetess. 2 Kings 22:14:

So Hilkiyah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to the prophetess Huldah, wife of Shalom son of Tikvah, so of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. She lived in Jerusalem in the second district. They spoke with her.

The king and 5 other men inquire of Yahweh through a female prophet. I have found that many commentators give all kinds of excuses for this female prophet, just like they do with Deborah the prophet and judge over Israel. They begin with viewing Huldah as a problem to be solved rather than an inspired spokeswoman for the Creator.

If we stick to the text, **nothing negative is ever said about Huldah**, and really, the text doesn’t try to say anything in regards to why the men were sent to a female prophet rather than a male prophet. It’s just assumed that she is the prophet that will tell you what Yahweh says. Why does there have to be some ulterior reason? Why can’t we just read this, and see that Yahweh speaks His word through women?

What’s significant here is that during this time there were at least two other prophets of Yahweh available: Jeremiah and Zephaniah. We know this by reading Jeremiah 1:1-2 and Zephaniah 1:1. They prophesied during the time of Hilkiyah the priest and Josiah the king. It is possible that Jeremiah may have even been the son of Hilkiyah the priest! Huldah must have been the primary prophet for King Josiah. He must have had great respect for her.

Notice that the King did not send for Huldah to come to him. He rather sent men to her. Generally, the people of lower status come to someone of higher status, not the other way around. Josiah respects Huldah as the communicator of this book of the law; the prophetess who can tell us what Yahweh says about this situation we are in.

Huldah begins her speech to the men by saying, “This is what Yahweh, the Mighty One of Israel says.” (2 Kings 22:15) Huldah speaks for Yahweh, and is directing men here as the prophetess. The men do not balk. The men do not say they need to hear it from another man. **The high priest himself** stands there and receives the message Yahweh gives them through a woman.

Huldah continues: “(16) This is what Yahweh says: I am about to bring disaster on this place and on its inhabitants, fulfilling all the words of the book that the king of Judah has read. [This is a key to the book being Deuteronomy, seeing the curses for national disobedience are listed in Deuteronomy.] (17) Because they have abandoned Me and burned incense to other mighty ones in order to provoke Me with all the work of their hands. My wrath will be kindled against this place, and it will not be quenched. (18) Say this to the king of Judah who sent you to inquire of Yahweh: This is what Yahweh Mighty One of Israel says: As for the words that you heard, (19) because your heart was tender and you humbled yourself before Yahweh when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and because you have torn your clothes and wept before Me, I Myself have heard you - declares Yahweh. (20) Therefore, I will indeed gather you to your fathers, and you will be gathered to your grave in peace. Your eyes will not see all the disaster that I am bringing on this place.” Then they reported to the king.

King Josiah and the High Priest of Israel then submitted to the authoritative word of Yahweh that was given through a woman. Evidently, Huldah was seen by these men as *the* spiritual advisor, or at least *a* spiritual advisor for the entire nation of Judah. Huldah was not a plan B prophet, she was a plan A prophet. Huldah bore witness that the things written in the book were true, and she interpreted sections of Deuteronomy as applicable to what was going on in the nation of Judah (and Israel) at that time. She performed the work of a prophet, because she was a prophet.

Why Have We Not Heard?

Why doesn't Huldah receive the respect that other prophets receive? The main reason: Huldah is a woman. Things are said like, “Well, when men don't step up Yahweh has to use women,” the exact same lame excuse people give in the account of Deborah in the book of Judges. One has to wonder, did the prophets Jeremiah and Zephaniah need shaming? They were there in Israel at this time and were holy men. Was Yahweh using Huldah to shame them? Of course not. Yahweh didn't use a woman because men needed shaming. Yahweh used women because: He uses both women and men to do His work! Had Jeremiah or Zephaniah been the prophet used in this case, no one would even attempt to make an excuse for them. If Jeremiah had been called, the commentators wouldn't even spend time wondering “why Jeremiah and not Zephaniah or Huldah?”

The same should go for Huldah. We shouldn't even ask the question, “Why consult a woman?” We should just submit to the fact that this is who King Josiah chose to consult because this person was close to Yahweh in a way that neither he nor the high priest was. Huldah held the closest and most authoritative role to Yahweh in the nation, speaking the very words of Yahweh through her mouth to the king. The righteous King Josiah did not dismiss Huldah or seek a second opinion because she was a woman.

Closing

How do people answer these OT examples of women leaders, prophets, and teachers? Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah. The same way they answer when you attempt to share with them about the

Sabbath, or dietary law, or a host of other things: “That’s OT. We go by the NT now.” Then they rip Paul’s writings out of context. Well Paul just called... and he wants his context back.

There are two big problems here. (1) a complete dismissal of the OT approved examples. (2) Not understanding that the church existed in the OT. The same word used for church all through the NT (ekklesia) is used in Acts 7:38 where Stephen speaks of the “church in the wilderness.” That church is the Hebrews congregation, led by: Moses, Aaron, and Miriam (Micah 6:4). I’ve got a lot more to say here, but it’ll have to wait for another time.

I’ve been guilty of this bad argumentation in the past, but I’ve repented of it and am actively trying to do better. It’s a humbling experience. I guess Yahweh doesn’t show you all His truth at once. Maybe it would blow our mind up, I don’t know. But some things that I go back over and study seem so easy for me to see now, and I wonder, “Why couldn’t I see this before?” Always remain humble in your studies. Yahweh will reward you with His pearls if you remain humble.

Next week, I plan on moving into the NT, and looking at some of the great women there. I want to particularly look at how Yeshua viewed and interacted with women, and I want to challenge some of the preconceived notions about certain women during his ministry.

“How Yeshua Treated Women”

In this lesson, I’d like to look at women during the ministry of Yeshua, in particular how he treated women. When we look at the life of Yeshua, we see that he valued women. He interacted with them when others wouldn’t. He never viewed them as snares or sexual objects. He never acted inappropriately towards them, and he never marginalized them as though they had nothing to offer to the Creator or congregation. He noticed them, he praised them, he helped them, he received their help, he listened to them, and he included them in his ministry.

What makes this fascinating is the cultural backdrop behind this. Jewish tradition had developed a low status view of women in the first century. The great women like Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Esther, Huldah, and many others, faded away. Women were viewed as mere objects of seduction. Some of the rabbinical sayings or precepts that existed then were “Let no one talk with a woman in the street, no, not with his own wife,” and “Let the words of the law be burned rather than committed to a woman.” There was even a prayer that Jewish men prayed in which they thanked the Lord that He did not make them a woman. All of these sayings can be found in commentaries on NT texts that cite rabbinical sources.

Such a distortion of what we’ve learned from the Older Testament should not surprise us if we are students of the Bible. We know that rabbinical Judaism had also distorted major commandments like the Sabbath, or the honoring of one’s parents. Yeshua rebuked the Jewish leaders of his day for violating both of these commandments through their tradition, and I believe that his entire life and ministry was a rebuke of the common view of women in Judaism.

We are going to cover several texts today, but let's begin with Luke 8:1-3:

Soon afterwards He was traveling from one town and village to another, preaching and telling the good news of the kingdom of [Yahweh]. The twelve were with Him (that's his 12 students/disciples, mentioned earlier in Luke 6), and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary called Magdalene, seven demons had come out of her; Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward; Susanna; and many others who were supporting them from their possessions.

As Yeshua traveled, he didn't just have along with him his 12 male disciples. There were women that traveled around with him as well (as disciples), and these women are praised as supporting his ministry with material needs.

Yeshua had ministered (or served) these women in spiritual matters. They had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses. So they in turn ministered to the Messiah and his disciples in the natural matters. This means making sure they had clothing, shoes, food, things like that. The point is that these women traveled along with Yeshua, and he valued their company and support. He never told them they shouldn't be here learning, or that with him wasn't there place, and he never turned down their support as though a woman helping him was belittling him. These women either supported him because they worked (hair-dresser, midwife, innkeeper, cloth merchant), or because they'd inherited dowry money due to a deceased husband. Either way, Yeshua accepted the financial support of women.

It also needs to be pointed out that that the women who were traveling with him would have been considered the lower class in that culture; not *just* because they were females, but *also* because of their social status. They had to be healed of evil spirits it says. Seven demons came out of Mary Magdalene. "Can you believe he lets Mary Magdalene travel with him? I've never heard of such!" I can hear the gossip now. But Yeshua didn't let this stop him. He loved the unloved, healed the worst of problems, and welcomed the penitent. He was all about turning people's lives around and using the "lower class" to do big things.

Some of these women were there when Yeshua was crucified. Mark 15:40-41 tells us:

There were also women looking on from a distance. Among them were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome. When He was in Galilee, they would follow Him and help Him. Many other women had come up with Him to Jerusalem.

Again... they would **follow** (disciples) Him and **help** (support) Him - in his ministry.

In Matthew 12:46 we read that Yeshua was speaking to the crowds when all of a sudden his mother and brothers were standing outside wanting to talk to him. The crowds told him about this, but he replied (48): "Who is my mother and brothers? (49) And stretching out his hand

toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and brothers! (50) For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven, that person is my brother and sister and mother.”

Notice how he points to his disciples and then calls them brother and sister and mother. In a Middle Eastern context you don't call a male disciple your sister or mother. I wouldn't even do that today, but some people would. The cultural context though shows that he had to have pointed to **both male and female disciples of his**. These would be the men and women who traveled with him, and personally followed his teachings.

In Luke 10:38-42, we read that a woman named Martha welcomed Yeshua into her home. The text does call it her home, so culturally that means she was either single or widowed.

While they were traveling, He [Yeshua] entered a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed Him into her home. She had a sister named Mary, who also sat at the Lord's feet and was listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by her many tasks, and she came up and asked, “Lord, don't You care that my sister has left me to serve alone? So tell her to give me a hand.” The Lord answered her, “Martha, Martha, you are worried and upset about many things, but one thing is necessary. Mary has made the right choice, and it will not be taken away from her.”

So Martha is busy serving, which is a righteous thing to do if the Messiah comes to your home for dinner, lol. But Mary sits at Yeshua's feet. Please don't misunderstand this phrase. That doesn't mean she was sitting at his feet and gazing into his eyes because he was so handsome. Sitting at his feet and listening to him speak means she was being a student to his Rabbinical teaching. Deuteronomy 33:3 says (JPS), “Yea He loveth the peoples, all His holy ones, they are in Thy hand, and they sit down at Thy feet, receiving of Thy words.”

When Rabbi's would speak, their pupil's would often sit at their feet out of respect for the Rabbi. When I was a teenager, there was an older man named James Ready that came and visited brother Arnold. I was there in the living room with him one day, and because I wanted to listen to him intently, I walked over the couch where he was sitting, and sat on the floor to listen to him while he explained the Scriptures. He looked at me, smiled, and said, “All the great disciples learned at the feet of their teacher.” An example would be that Paul (the Apostle) was reared as a Pharisee by sitting at the feet of Rabbi Gamaliel, a doctor of the law (Acts 5:34; 22:3).

Mary does this towards Yeshua, and Yeshua takes up for Mary. He gently tells Martha that she's worried about many things, but there is one thing that is important. He says that Mary has chosen to be where she is, and she's chosen correctly, and it won't be taken from her. Yeshua received Mary, a woman who desired to learn the ways of Yahweh.

Yeshua welcomed women that no one else would welcome. In Luke 7 there is an account where he goes to eat at a Pharisee's house, and there was a woman in town who had the reputation of a being a sinner. In those days, if a woman had such a reputation, it usually meant she was loose

and promiscuous. This woman found out Yeshua was at this house for dinner, and she went there with some fragrant oil, came inside, stood behind him weeping, and then bent down and began to wash his feet with her tears, even kissing his feet, drying them with her hair, and then anointing them with the oil.

Imagine how that appeared to the Pharisee owner of the house?! Imagine how you'd feel today if something like that happened in your house. It would probably make most of us feel very awkward and uncomfortable.

The Pharisee did get upset and said, "This man, if He were a prophet, would know who and what kind of woman this is who is touching Him - she is a sinner!" (Luke 7:39) Well... Yeshua was a prophet, and he knew exactly who this woman was, and he still let her do what she did. If this happened today, to a holy man, would we react like the Pharisee, or would we react like Yeshua?

Yeshua replied to him with a parable about the forgiveness of debts. He explained that the reason she loves Yeshua so much is that she had been forgiven of so much. Yeshua met her where she was at; she repented, and her sins were forgiven. The Pharisees were not willing to meet people like this where they were at, much less women, but Yeshua didn't care what it looked like to those there. His concern was on this woman's spiritual healing.

There was another time when Mary of Bethany (John 12:1-7; the same woman who sat at Yeshua's feet to learn) took a whole pound of fragrant oil, pure and expensive nard, and poured some on Yeshua's head (Mark 15:3), and used some to anoint Yeshua's feet (John 12:3), and then wiped his feet with her hair. The whole house smelled like the oil.

Judas got upset about it, and others did as well. They began to scold Mary, saying that the oil could have been sold for 300 denarii, and the money given to the poor. Yeshua told them to leave her alone, because he saw it as a noble anointing of his body before burial. He told them they'd always have the poor with them, but they wouldn't always have him. Then he said (Mark 14:9), "I assure you: Wherever the gospel is proclaimed in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told in memory of her." So we remember Mary, and what she did for Yeshua, today.

In Mark 5 we read of a woman who had been suffering from bleeding for 12 years. This would have made her ritually unclean pretty much all of the time. She had heard about Yeshua, and the power He had to heal sickness, disease, and cast out evil spirits. She made her way through a crowd of people, and she reached out and touched one of his tassels. The Scriptures tell us that she was instantly healed, and she even felt in her body that she was cured (Mark 5:29). The woman fell down before Yeshua in fear and trembling, and spoke to him the whole truth of her situation. He didn't get upset. He didn't turn her away. He said, "Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace and be free from your affliction."

Yeshua opposed misogyny and sexism. Those words weren't used back then, but the concepts sure were. It was the view in Judaism that a woman was always responsible for lust when a man lusted after her. Some men still hold that concept today in order to take the blame off of them. I am not saying that there aren't women who dress provocatively in order to cause lust - those type women are certainly mentioned in Scripture and in the world today, but there are so many times when women are dressed appropriately, yet lustful men still gawk at them, and then blame the woman. Yeshua challenged this view in His Sermon on the Mount, where he placed the sin on the man doing the lusting. In Matthew 5:28 he says, "But I tell you, everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." This would have been radical to most Pharisees, as they would have always found a way to blame the woman rather than themselves.

We never see Yeshua objectifying women, or viewing them as lesser humans. He speaks to them, interacts with them, and includes them, just as he does the men. This all contradicted practices in his day. When Yeshua spoke with the Samaritan woman at the well, even his own disciples (early on in his ministry), "...were amazed that He was talking with a woman." (John 4:27) Why were they amazed? Because that wasn't the normal practice for a Rabbi, to speak with a woman out in public. Yeshua went against the customs and traditions when they violated the written Scriptures, and that is a large reason he was always getting into trouble.

I have found that you get into the most trouble when you challenge the customs and traditions of church people. People do not like you messing with what they think is right, even if you can show them scripture after scripture. Yeshua didn't care though. He only sought to please His Father. We need to be more worried about upsetting our Father than upsetting people.

In my life in the church-world there have been times when I've seen women treated well, but there have also been times when I've seen them treated poorly. I have seen them be excluded from certain areas of ministry, with no Biblical precedent. I've heard preachers mock, saying that they should stay in the kitchen and not in the Bible. I've seen men in positions of power use that power to denigrate and even manipulate females. I've been in discussion groups where when a woman has something to add, the men don't even listen to what she has to offer, and I've seen men speak down to women in ways they would never speak down to a brother.

I want the women of this congregation to know that you are loved and cherished by Yahweh. And in our discussions at Sabbath or at the Feasts, I have learned things from you by just listening to you explain certain parts of Scripture. I have learned things from my wife as we have discussed Scripture over the years. Even though a wife is to live in submission to her husband, that doesn't mean a husband can't learn anything spiritual from his wife. I am thankful for my wife and her great example to our children. She views me as the head of our home, but she still has a personal relationship with Yahweh just like me. And I'm in submission too, to the Messiah. I believe that in many churches, the women have been overlooked unjustly. They have been made to feel inferior and left out. I don't want that to happen here. I haven't been the best at all of this in the past, because I inherited some lies from forefathers just like many have.

Recently, one of the ways I decided to include the women was to have them help in the reading of the Torah during our holy convocation. I don't believe there is anything in the law that would forbid a woman from doing that, but custom and upbringing had me always asking a man. I've had a few sisters read already, and I want all of you sisters to know that if you'd like to read the Torah one Sabbath, just come and ask me. Same for you brothers. That's something we can all share in as a body of believers.

As time progresses, I hope to find more ways to include the women in our services. I don't have any hidden agenda or something going on in the background. Last week something was mentioned about maybe I believed in woman preachers. Well, I do believe in women preachers. Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah were women preachers. I understand that there's other verses to harmonize with those, and I believe all of Scripture, not just parts, but I just think the verses upholding women have been set to the side and covered over. I want to uncover those verses and shed light where the light has been dim. I've heard a lot of sermons about what women shouldn't do, but I've heard very few sermons on their value and what they can do as daughters of Yahweh.

Next week I want to talk about the Samaritan woman in John 4, and Mary Magdalene. I think there have been some incorrect thought on both of them, and I want to show you some things you've maybe never thought about. We'll stop here for today... praise Yahweh for our women, amen?

"The Samaritan Woman"

Read John 1:1-42 :: So I've been teaching about many of the strong, righteous women in the Bible for last couple of months, and I have really enjoyed it. I'd never heard a series like this preached before, so I decided to take up the task, and it's been rewarding. I've learned... so much.

Sometimes I go into a study wondering if I will learn anything new. I don't know why I wonder that, because I always learn something new when I study or re-study a subject. I guess sometimes you think you know something pretty well, but when you dig deeper you find more treasures in the Word.

I've received some messages of encouragement during this series, and these have helped me realize that I made the right decision to teach on this subject. I'd like to share two of them with you today.

One sister sent me this: "I needed to hear these messages. It's difficult to be a woman, and feel a call from Yah when so many people don't think a woman can do much of anything for Yah. Some things my girl friends have had said and done to them have been awful! Myself as well. It's so helpful to hear a man of Yah speaking and saying that women are not second class or slaves. It helps me know that I'm not wrong to want to do Yah's work!"

Another sister posted this: “As an abuse survivor, I appreciate your series on women! I wish more people would hear the truth of how Yah created women to function! It would end the domestic abuse and stop the generational dysfunction being passed down. I am a speaker and radio host along with being a writer, I speak on the roots of addiction. I believe much of the trauma is stemming from not understanding how Yah created us, women... the porn addiction, the objectifying women and sex-slave trade, etc. is due to the distortion of His word.” That’s heavy, I know, but the Word is healing people.

I’ve also had people tell me that they had never thought of some of the things I’ve presented, and it was changing their mind on the way they viewed women. Well here’s a secret: I had never thought of some of the things I’ve presented either, lol, but that’s why we study - and re-study - and study again - the Bible.

Yeshua Breaks Custom

So I opened today with a lengthy reading in John 4, about the Samaritan woman that Yeshua met at the well. It is the longest conversation or encounter of Yeshua recorded in the gospels. I bring up this text because it is another text that focuses on a woman, and I believe it is a text that gets distorted sometimes, making the woman out to be something she is not.

Now, we do learn in this text that - customarily - it was not proper for a man to speak with a woman in public. Some tradition forbade a man from speaking with his own wife in public. That’s ridiculous if you ask me, but people loved their traditions back then just as much as church-folk love their traditions now.

What Yeshua did here was out of the ordinary, because in verse 27, when his disciples arrived and saw him there at the well talking to this woman, it says “**they were amazed that he was talking to a woman.**” That wouldn’t be said if it was ordinary. Yeshua broke custom here and spoke in public with a woman. As I mentioned last week, first century Judaism had a low view of women. Women were seen as a snare. Jewish men would often assume that if a woman wanted to talk to them, she was automatically trying to be seductive. They also viewed men that spoke in public with women as having unlawful desires. **Yeshua didn’t care what anyone thought. He reached out to this woman, and revealed himself to her.**

Yeshua also broke custom by asking a Samaritan for a drink of water. In verse 9 we read the woman saying, “How is it that you, a Jew, ask for a drink from me, a Samaritan woman?” Then it says “for Jews do not associate with Samaritans.”

The word *associate* here doesn’t mean that the Jews never interacted with the Samaritans. Verse 8 tells us that the disciples had went into town to buy food, and the town they went into was the local Samaritan town named Sychar (vs. 5). The Jews would interact with the Samaritans in matters of buying and selling, but they would not have table fellowship with them, accept a favor from them, nor have them as close friends. Why?

Brief History of the Samaritans

It started in 2 Kings 17 when the northern tribes of Israel were taken captive into Assyria. Due to the Israelites sins, Yahweh allowed the king of Assyria to ransack the land of Israel and take captive the Israelites. The king of Assyria then replaced the Israelites with foreigners from various surrounding nations, and settled them in place of the Israelites - where? - in the cities of Samaria, northern Israel.

When these foreigners first came to the land of Israel to live, they had no clue how to serve Yahweh, so Yahweh sent lions among them and they killed some of them. I can imagine that was quite an experience.

After this the King of Assyria sent back a priest he had taken captive in order to teach these foreigners the ways of Yahweh. These people gradually learned how to fear Yahweh, but they would still follow many of the original customs and worship to the other mighty ones. 2 Kings 17:29 gives us the first use of the word Samaritans in the Bible, and it's these people that the text is speaking about.

In the removal of the Israelites from their land, and the settling of foreigners in the land of Israel, intermarriage eventually took place. Not every single individual Israelite was taken from Samaria, and the Israelites that were taken captive by the King of Assyria lived in a land with foreign peoples. Marriages were made, children were born, and eventually you had a group of people living in the cities of Samaria (in the northern part of the land of Israel) that were either of mixed lineage or completely foreign lineage.

This background explains why John 4:9 says, "for Jews do not associate with Samaritans." Many in Judah (southern Israel) built up an animosity towards the Samaritans due to their sketchy origins.

Mount Gerizim

By the time of Yeshua, the Samaritans did follow Yahweh for the most part. They had slowly abandoned all their worship to other elohim, but there were still some doctrinal differences between them and Judah. A big difference was the place of worship. Jews worshiped in Jerusalem, where the Temple stood. Samaritans worshiped on Mount Gerizim. In John 5:20, when the Samaritan woman tells Yeshua, "Our fathers worshiped on this mountain," they could probably see Mount Gerizim from where they stood at the well of Jacob.

Mount Gerizim is mentioned twice in the book of Deuteronomy, and both times in a positive light. It is said that Mount Gerizim was the mount of blessing, where leaders among the tribes of Israel would stand and bless the people. The Samaritans took these verses as saying Mount Gerizim was the chosen place for true worship.

Father Jacob?

Some people think the Samaritan woman was an Israelite because she tells Yeshua in verse 12, “You aren’t greater than our father Jacob, are you? He gave us the well and drank from it himself.” All this proves is that the woman *believed* her ancestor was Jacob. It is possible that she had some Israelite blood in her, but she was still part foreigner. All Samaritans that worshiped on Mount Gerizim at this time looked to Jacob as their father, because by this time they had all been taught the *ways* of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

What all of this teaches us is that Yeshua went to people that others didn’t want to go to. He bypassed both gender and ethnic rules, and ministered and revealed himself to people who were deemed the least of these. The people that some wouldn’t touch with a 10 foot pole, Yeshua embraced in love, gentleness, and humility.

All those Husbands

After Yeshua tells the Samaritan woman that he has living water springing up to eternal life (vs. 14), she tells him, “Sir, give me this water so I won’t get thirsty and come here to draw water.” And Yeshua says:

16 Go call your husband... and come back here.

17 “I don’t have a husband,” she answered. “You have correctly said, ‘I don’t have a husband,’ Yeshua said.

18 “For you’ve had five husbands, and the man you now have is not your husband. What you have said is true.”

19 “Sir,” the woman replied, “I see that You are a prophet.

And then she begins asking him about true worship, and Yeshua points to the spirit (heart) and truth (mind) rather than a particular location... but let’s think about the comment about her many husbands.

What happens with most commentators is that they automatically assume this woman is a promiscuous harlot, running around on her husbands, stealing other people’s husbands, and “shacking up” with the man she’s currently with. Yet... Yeshua never says anything to her like “Your sins are forgiven” or “Go and sin no more,” things he says when he does encounter people who have been living in sin. In John’s gospel particularly, Yeshua calls people out in their sin.

But the Samaritan woman... she is Scripturally inquisitive, asking about true worship (vss. 19-20). She knows about the coming Messiah, which means she is educated in Scripture (vs. 25). She gets so excited when he reveals himself as the Messiah to her that she leaves her water jar and runs into town (vss. 28-29). And then she testifies about her encounter with the Messiah to the Samaritans in her town, and we read (in verse 39) that many Samaritans began believing in Yeshua as the Messiah *because of her testimony*, so they must have viewed her as a credible witness. There is nothing in the text that leans in the direction of her being a shunned harlot or known sinner in her community.

The only thing people go to is the statement about her having five past husbands and being with a man now who wasn't her husband.

Divorces

I think many interpreters miss the (1) context of Torah, and (2) context of culture. For starters, the Torah allowed a man to divorce his wife if she found no favor in his eyes. I covered this in detail in my series on marriage, divorce, and remarriage. It was called "any cause divorce" in Yeshua's day, and it was practiced by many in the land of Israel. It is not out of the realm of possibility that this woman could have been divorced multiple times.

The law itself in Deuteronomy 24 speaks of a woman being divorced twice. She finds no favor in her first husband's eyes, because he finds something indecent in her that he doesn't like, so he gives her a bill of divorce. She then remarries, it says, and her second husband hates her (or dislikes her) and he divorces her as well. The point is that few commentators consider this to be a possible reason why the Samaritan woman had been married more than once.

Marrying an Older Man

And then there's the cultural context. Although we aren't comfortable with this in our American culture, women in ancient Israeli culture would often marry men a good bit older than them. This was done in order to provide women just starting adult life stability. Even later in life, a divorced woman would seek an older man to take care of them. So it wasn't uncommon to find a woman married to a man who was 15-20 years older than she. Maybe even more sometimes.

I first ran across this when I studied about Miriam and Yoseph, Yeshua's parents. History records that Miriam (Mary) was a teenager when she was betrothed to Joseph, and then the last thing we read about Joseph is in Luke 2 when Yeshua is 12 years old. Many scholars believe Joseph died soon after that, and that's why we never read of him being active again. He died because he was older than Miriam, and in those days a man was considered old in his 40's. You can verify that in Luke 1 where Zachariah the priest calls himself an old man while he ministers in the Temple. The priests weren't allowed to minister in the Temple passed the age of 50 (Numbers 4; 8). The life expectancy wasn't as good then as it is now.

My point is that the Samaritan woman could have lost multiple husbands to death as well. That's not out of the realm of possibility. Life could have been bad for her, going through divorces, and losing husbands to death. This could be the reason why it is said she had five husbands.

Recognize too that Yeshua acknowledges all five as husbands. These weren't affairs on her part. They were all husbands. I think Yeshua was reaching out to someone who had been through a rough life.

Concubines

What about the man she was currently with? The one Yeshua says was not her husband. Does that have to be a sinful relationship?

I know this isn't popular either, but it was common for women in that culture to be handmaidens or concubines. A concubine is a woman who lives with a man, and is sometimes a servant to the wife of that man, and is taken care of by that man, but is not legally his wife. There is no *ketubah* between a man and his concubine, but the man provides for the woman, and can even have children by the woman, and it is not a sin. Righteous men like Abraham and Jacob had concubines, and they were never condemned for it. I know some people will not like me for bringing that up, but it is a Biblical fact and it shouldn't be forbidden from being a possibility here.

Assuming instead of Examining

My point is this: we shouldn't just assume the Samaritan woman was a promiscuous woman, especially when nothing else in the text leans in that direction. Some ask, "Why would Yeshua even bring up all that about her husbands if not to scathe her for her behavior?" I'll tell you why. **Because he was revealing himself as a prophet.** Remember, prophets could tell you things about your life that were personal and no one else knew, because they had been given direct revelation from Yahweh. As soon as Yeshua tells her that he knows about things in her life, even though he'd never met her, she says, "Ah... I see you are a prophet," and she begins asking him about worship. I believe Yeshua spoke about her life to show her he wasn't an ordinary man.

There are certainly women in the Bible who were known sinners in their community. The woman in Luke 7 who wept at Yeshua's feet is an example of such a woman, but the text there spells that out for us; it calls her a sinner. The text in John 4 doesn't do that, and I think there are better ways to view this Samaritan woman than we have heard. The Samaritan woman at the well is one of the first people Yeshua ever revealed himself to as the Messiah, and she testified of him to the people in her town. I believe she was a good woman and credible witness, well respected in her community. The point of Yeshua's encounter with the Samaritan woman is not that she was a known sinner who needed to repent, but that Yeshua went against tradition: calling anyone he wanted to, no matter who they were (gender) or what their family background was (ethnicity).

No matter who you are, or how you are viewed by others, Yahweh can use you in His plan and for His glory. You don't have to be rich. You don't have to be popular. You don't have to be a king. You don't have to be a man. You don't have to be of the "right lineage," or a certain skin color. All you have to be is a willing and empty vessel, ready to be filled up by the love and power of the Messiah. And then you can go out and testify of what He has done for you.

"Mary Magdalene"

Read **Luke 8:1-3** - Today I would like to talk about another woman that I believe was a strong, righteous woman in Scripture, and that is Mary Magdalene.

Was She Yeshua's Wife?

Throughout Christian history, there have been all sorts of ideas and beliefs held concerning this woman. One of the more recent theories, that attempts to be based in the Gnostic gospels -

writings about 100 years after the time period of the canonical gospels - is that Mary Magdalene was the wife of Yeshua, and that she bore a child by him.

I do want to say something here that I always think about when I hear this claim. What is the big deal about Yeshua having a wife? Do I believe Yeshua was married? I don't see any evidence for him having a wife in the gospels, and it appears from 1 Corinthians 9 that Yeshua wasn't married, because Paul (in speaking about his right as a minister of the gospel) says this (vs. 5): "Don't we (Paul and Barnabus) have the right to be accompanied by a believing wife, like the other apostles, the Master's brothers, and Cephus?" If Yeshua, the Master here, had a wife, Paul surely would have mentioned it along with the others he mentioned as having a wife.

Do I believe it would be a sin for him to have a wife? Of course not. If a man finds a wife, he finds a good thing, and obtains the favor of Yahweh (Proverbs 18:22). People act like it would be inappropriate or even lustful for Yeshua to have a wife, but having a wife and being intimate with your wife is not a violation of Yahweh's law. Marital intimacy doesn't all of sudden become unclean when we think about Yeshua.

But... I don't find any evidence of this in Scripture. I don't believe Yeshua was married to Mary Magdalene. I do believe they were close friends, but not husband and wife.

Was Mary Magdalene a Prostitute?

Another theory posed about Mary Magdalene is that she was a prostitute prior to coming to faith in the Messiah.

Luke 8:1-3 does say that seven demons had come out of her. The fact that at one time, seven demons in-dwelt this woman does lead in the direction that she had a rough and sinful life prior to coming to the Messiah. Whenever someone is demon possessed in the gospels, it carries with it the idea that they are sick, and can be driven to all kinds of wicked behavior.

But in the Bible, **she is never called a prostitute**. There was a Pope, Gregory the Great, from the 6th century, that equated Mary Magdalene in Luke 8 with the sinner woman in Luke 7; the woman who enters into the Pharisees house and anoints Yeshua's feet with oil, and he tells her later that her many sins are forgiven. That comes right before Luke 8 where we read of Mary Magdalene. Pope Gregory stated that he believed the two women were the same, but that's *not* good Bible study. There were other women mentioned right along with Mary in Luke 8, and they had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses as well. Why couldn't we equate the woman in Luke 7 with *them*?

But... why do we have to equate the woman in Luke 7 with any of the women in Luke 8? It's really just speculation. There's nothing in the text suggesting that the woman forgiven in Luke 7 traveled around with Yeshua after she was forgiven of her sins. Yeshua interacted with and forgave many people that weren't his personal disciples.

What if Mary Magdalene had been a prostitute? Would that be a problem? Not unless there's a problem with someone being forgiven of their sins.

Whatever life Mary lived prior to coming to faith in Yeshua, *all of that was in her past*. She was at one time tormented by seven demons, but not anymore! Mary had been healed and changed, and surely she would have testified of this to others.

What Mary shows to us is that no one is ever too far for the mercy of Yahweh to catch them. Sometimes we wonder how certain people could ever be delivered out of the life of sin they are in, but we should never underestimate the power of Yahweh! Yahweh does a great work in delivering people from lives of sin to lives of holiness, and regardless if she had been a prostitute or not, she was delivered from those demons, and I'm sure she was so great-full.

Why Magdalene?

Why is she called Magdalene? We speak things like this all the time but never stop and think about what they mean. I remember years ago studying about Judas Iscariot. Why Iscariot? What in the world did that mean? Was that his last name, like Janzen is for me?

Magdalene might stem from a town named *Migdal Nunnaya* that was named such because of the fish trade industry that went on in the town. It means "tower of fishes." Identifiers were often placed upon names that were common. It's recorded that Mary was a very popular name in that area and time. Maybe even up to 25% of the women living in Israel were named Mary. In order to distinguish her from other Marys, friends would call her "Mary of Migdal."

It's also possible that it's a nickname: "Mary the Tower" or "Mary the Fortress" as that is the literal meaning of the word *Migdal* by itself. Yeshua gave nicknames to people sometimes. He called Peter a "Rock" and James and John "Sons of Thunder." He could have named Mary "Tower" because of her righteousness and great support for him in the ministry.

Learning from the Bible

This is all interesting and good to know, but let's paint a portrait of who Mary Magdalene was, based on what is actually said about her, instead of coming up with theories like people have done in the past.

A Disciple and Supporter

Number one, she was a disciple of Yeshua, often traveling around with him and learning his teachings, and she also supported him financially. Luke 8:1-3 teaches us that, along with Mark 15:40-41. Adult co-education was frowned upon and rarely practiced in the Judaism of that day, but Yeshua welcomed women disciples to travel with him just as he did male disciples. Mary Magdalene learned right there at the feet of Yeshua, along with the men.

And she supported Yeshua from her possessions. The men that Yeshua called to be his 12 disciples used to be fishermen for the most part (and there was one tax collector in there). Yeshua

called these men to leave their jobs and follow him wherever he went. He would be their teacher, and they would be his students. The women who followed Yeshua were never called to leave behind their life like the 12 were. These women gave Him and the 12 places to stay, food to eat, money for travel, and clothing to wear. Yeshua's ministry was kept up by working women.

This was not a one time donation on Mary's part. Scholars point out that the phrase "supporting them from their possessions" indicates from the Greek imperfect tense that "they **kept** supporting them" meaning an on-going offering into his ministry. So Mary Magdalene used her money to support the ministry of Yeshua, for as long as he needed it. Yeshua did not see being supported by women as undermining his manhood, nor did he view a woman supporting him as violating her feminine qualities.

Close to the Messiah

Mary Magdalene must have been very close to the Messiah, because she is spoken of by all the gospel authors as being there at his crucifixion, burial, and resurrection. The male disciples of Yeshua fled when they saw Yeshua betrayed and knew he was about to be beaten. In Matthew 26:31, right after the last supper we read that Yeshua said to the 12, "Tonight all of you will run away because of Me, for it is written: I will strike the shepherd and the sheep of the flock will be scattered. But after I have been resurrected, I will go ahead of you to Galilee."

Later in that same chapter it says, "But all this happened so that the prophetic Scriptures would be fulfilled. Then all the disciples deserted Him and ran away."

John 19:26 does speak of a disciple Yeshua loved standing there with Mary the mother of Yeshua while he was hanging on the cross, but this would be the exception to the desertion. The same goes for Joseph of Arimathea who in John 19:38 is called a disciple of Yeshua, and who asked Pilate for permission to remove the body of Yeshua from the cross. Nicodemus who had met with Yeshua at night came as well, but these men were not the personal 12 disciples of Yeshua. My main point is that the large majority of the disciples fled in fear when Yeshua began to be taken away.

One woman who is recorded as being there at the crucifixion, burial, and resurrection of Yeshua is Mary Magdalene. Other women are named, but not consistently mentioned like her. She watched Yeshua be crucified (Mt. 27:56; Mk. 15:40; Jn. 19:25), she watched him be buried (Mt. 27:61; Mk. 15:47), and saw the empty tomb early in the morning (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1; Jn. 20:1). Luke's gospel (23) mentions women crying as Yeshua walked to be crucified, and then Luke mentions women beholding his crucifixion and watching the burial. Luke 24 then mentions Mary Magdalene by name as one of the women who told about all of these things to the disciples.

Mary Magdalene, and these other women were invested in Yeshua's ministry. They weren't standing there watching casually. They were there because they loved Yeshua, and followed him, and looked up to him as the greatest teacher on the earth. That's the best witness you can have to an event like this, someone who is deeply concerned and invested in what is going on.

A First Witness of the Resurrection

Luke 24:1 tells us that the women who had prepared the spices and perfumes (before the Sabbath) - to anoint Yeshua's body (after the Sabbath) - came very early in the morning on the first day of the week, and they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Mark 16:3 says as they were walking to go to the tomb they were saying to each other, "Who will roll away the stone for us?"

They had watched Yeshua be beaten, tortured, and nailed to a cross. They had seen him taken down, and they watched as his lifeless body was wrapped in linen and laid inside a tomb. They had probably cried so much, and now they come to try and anoint his body out of respect for their Master, and the stone is rolled away from the tomb, and his body is gone.

All of a sudden (Luke 24:4-8) these women see two spiritual beings (we call them angels) standing there in shiny clothes. The women bow to the ground in fear, and the men say, "Why are you looking for the living among the dead? He is not here, but He has been resurrected! Remember how he spoke to you when he was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be betrayed into the hands of sinful men, be crucified, and rise on the third day.' And then the women remembered Yeshua's words."

The women reported all these things to the disciples, and others. Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of James, and other women told the apostles all these things, but their words seemed like nonsense to them, and they did not believe the women. But Peter got up and ran to the tomb, and when he stooped down to look in, all he saw was the linen cloth.

It was **women** who were the first to witness the empty tomb and thus resurrection. It was **women** who the angels spoke to there at the tomb, and it was **women** who first gave witness, speaking about the resurrection to others. And Mary Magdalene is especially critical here.

The First Person to see the Resurrected Yeshua

John 20 tells us that Mary Magdalene stood outside the tomb crying even after speaking to the angels. As she turned around, there stood Yeshua, but she did not recognize him. We aren't told why; maybe she is just distraught, and her eyes are blurry from many tears. She doesn't expect him to be standing there because she just watched him die 3 days ago.

Yeshua asked her why she was crying and who she was looking for. She thought Yeshua was the gardener, tending to the burial plots. She tells this "gardener," "Sir, if you have removed him (Yeshua), please tell me where you've put him, and I'll take him away."

At that point Yeshua looks at her and just says, "Mary" and all of a sudden she shouts (in Hebrew) "**Rabbouni!**" Rabbouni means Master or Teacher. And then Mary Magdalene goes to the disciples and announces to them, "I have seen the Master! He's alive!"

This is why some in church history have called Mary "the apostle to the apostles." The word apostle in its basic form means "one who is sent out to speak, a delegate or commissioner." Mary

Magdalene was delegated, commissioned, and sent by the Messiah to go and tell the apostles of the resurrection... and she did.

Using Women to Validate the Resurrection

It really is amazing that Yahweh used women to be the eyewitnesses of the torture, death, burial, and resurrection of His Son. In those days, a woman's testimony was low, and oftentimes not even allowed in a court of law. If you wanted someone to believe your story, you wouldn't bring a woman as your eyewitness.

But not so with Yahweh, and think about this in relation to the greatest story ever told - the death, burial, and resurrection of our Messiah. It's been said throughout history, and even in our time that the resurrection of Yeshua didn't happen; it's all just a fabrication. Secular historians believe Yeshua existed, and many believe he was crucified... but resurrected? No way. Who gets resurrected from death?

If you were an early believer in Yeshua, back in that time and culture, why would you choose to fabricate your story based upon the witness of persons that would NOT be deemed substantial? To fabricate a story, you would pick whoever's testimony would be the most credible in society. Women would have been the last choice in the eyes of men, in that day, if the resurrection story had been made-up. **Yet Yahweh picked women.** Yahweh ordained that it be women to watch all of this, and that it be women to go to that tomb early in the morning on Wave Sheaf day to find that empty tomb. I think Yahweh did this to confound the ideas of the day, and to give us a record that we can surely put trust in. Only Yahweh would have done it this way, so we know for sure it happened.

Closing

I hope this lesson helps paint a picture of Mary Magdalene that - even though you may have never heard of before - is completely Scriptural and encouraging. I pray she will get more recognition in our minds and conversations. She was the first to see the risen Master and tell of his resurrection. What a privilege that was! If she was esteemed to receive that position by Yahweh, may we too give her great esteem as well.

Series to be continued...