Women of Acts and the Apostolic letters

Women at Pentecost (Acts 1:12-14:2:1-18) While liturgical practices have focused more on the presence of men in Acts 2, women were present at the Pentecost, and sons and daughters were given the gifts of prophecy and preaching.

Dorcas (Gr.) also Tabitha (Aramaic) (Acts 9:36-42) She is the only one mentioned in the feminine form of ‘disciple’ in the New Testament. “In this context, ‘disciple’ seems to describe those with authority.”

Rhoda (Acts 12:11-17) “Rhoda was a female servant in the household of Mary the mother of John Mark in Jerusalem. Late one night she heard a persistent knocking. When she discovered it was Peter, she became so frightened, she left him standing at the gate.” Peter had just been miraculously delivered from prison.

Mary, Mother of John Mark (Acts 12:11-17) Mary, the mother of John Mark, was host to a household in Jerusalem. Tradition indicated that it was used as the headquarters for the Jerusalem church.

Lydia (Acts 16:11-15, 40) Lydia was a Gentile who attended Jewish services and accepted the teachings about the one true God. She and her household were baptized after hearing Paul speak. The church at Philippi was established and maintained through her influence, support and leadership.

The Female Slave of Philippi (Acts 16:16-24) This woman had the power to predict the future, earning vast sums for her masters in Philippi. When Paul delivered her of spirit possession, the source of her skill, her masters became furious at the loss of her lucrative ability. Paul, too, treated her harshly.

Damaris (Acts 17:22-34) “Damaris was a Greek woman who became a Christian after hearing Paul’s words before the Areopagus in Athens. She had enough education and intellectual competence to be persuaded by his philosophical argument.”

Philipp’s Prophetic Daughters (Acts 23:8-14) These four women, all gifted with prophecy, were daughters of Philip, one of the seven chosen by the apostles to assist in ministry. While their reference in Scripture is brief, Eusebius the historian acknowledged their fame in Asia as prophets and transmitters of the apostolic tradition. The 15:1-2 indicates that prophets were the normal ones to preside at Eucharist.

Eudokia and Synthety (Phil 4:2-3) Paul mentions that these two women worked on an equal basis with him and his coworkers to advance the Gospel. He sent an emissary to mediate a dispute between them, indicating “how important the women are both to Paul and to the community in Philippi.”

Phoebe (Romans 16:1-2) “Phoebe was a leader in the church at Cenchrae. An official teacher and missionary commended by Paul, she was a woman of authority, responsibility and influence and Paul’s financial patron.”

Prisca (Acts 18:13, 18-19, 24-28. 1 Corinthians 16:19. Romans 16:3-5. 2 Timothy 4:19.) Prisca (Priscilla) exercised a team ministry with her husband Aquila. They led a house church wherever they settled, and were considered co-workers of Paul.

Nympa (Colossians 4:15) “Nympa was a Christian woman of Asia Minor to whom Paul sent greetings at the close of his letter to the Colossians. The local church at Laodicea (although some would say in Colossae) met at her home.”

Apphia (Phil 1:3-4) “Apphia is greeted by Paul at the beginning of his letter to Philemon. She, Philemon, and Archippus are members of a house church or churches in the Lycaon Valley.”

Chloe (1 Corinthians 1:10-11) “Chloe is mentioned in Paul’s first letter to the Corinthians as the source of Paul’s awareness of disputation within the church. Chloe’s people have told him about it. She may have been the leader of a house church.”

Lois and Eunice (Acts 16:1-3. 2 Timothy 1:5) “Lois was the grandmother of Timothy, Paul’s trusted associate, and the mother of Eunice. . . The author of the second letter to Timothy prays both women for their faith, the faith as it exists within themselves and as transmitted to their offspring.”

The source for this material are the books WomanWorld, WomanWisdom and WomanWitness written by Miriam Therese Winter. Medical Mission Sister and published by Crossroad Publishing Company. All quotation marks are the words of the author. Other text was compiled by Barbara Ballenger and Mary Straka Felker. WomanWorld and WomanWisdom contain a complete listing of all the women in the Hebrew Scriptures. WomanWorld contains a complete list of all the women in the Christian Scriptures. All three texts include original related psalm and prayer resources for reflection and worship.

“If we would only take time now to know the narratives that tell of women’s experience, to know the women, their numbers, and where possible, their names, we might come to a move inclusive understanding of the biblical word.”

-Miriam Therese Winter
Women of the Hebrew Scriptures

Eve (Genesis 3:1-6, 18:21; 1:2) - In the recorded history of Jews and Christians, she is the first woman with a name and an identity. She is the wife of Adam and mother to many sons and daughters, including Cain, Abel and Seth. As the 'original woman', Eve continues to be the symbol of both domination and liberation of women.

Sarah (Genesis 11:27-32, 12, 13:18, 15-21, 18:1-10, 20:1-15, 23:24-14, 24:1-24, 23, 24, 36, 47, 25:10, 49:31; Isaiah 51:5, 2) - Born in Ur of the Chaldians, Sarah married her half-brother Abraham. He left Ur to settle in the land of Canaan. Sarah was childless until the age of 90, when she bore a son, Isaac.

Hagar (Genesis 16:1, 17:1-21, 20:2, 21:2-4. 25: 5-6, 12-17) - The Egyptian slave girl of Sarah, Hagar became Abraham’s concubine when Sarah did not bear children. Hagar twice fled to the wilderness with her son, Ishmael, because of the hostility she suffered in Abraham’s household. Each time, God’s messenger comforted her and intervened to save her life.

Milcah (Genesis 11:26-29, 22:20-24. 24:15, 24:31-34) - Milcah was Sarah and Abra- ham’s niece, the daughter of their brother Haman. Her granddaughter, Rebekah, married Sarah and Abraham’s grandson, Jacob.

Rebekah (Genesis 25:20-24, 26:19-30, 24:6-16, 11, 17, 23, 34:16, 27:1, 28:15, 29:31) - Rebekah was the wife of Isaac and mother of Jacob and Esau. She helped her second-born and favored son, Jacob, compete against his father to win Esau’s birthright and blessing. She also secured Jacob’s safety in the face of Esau’s wrath.


Rachel (Genesis 25:1-9, 29:1-31; 30:6-11, 20, 35:1-22, 34:28-35) - Rachel was Jacob’s second wife. She was the daughter of Rebekah’s brother Laban. Jacob worked seven years to win the right to marry her. She is the mother of Joseph and Benjamin.

Miriam (Exodus 2:1-10, 15-19:21. Num 12:1-2, 20:1-22. Deut 4:8-9) - On a family trip, Miriam was the firstborn daughter of Aaron and Miriam. In the face of the presence of God, she saved the Moses and brought him up in the house of Pharaoh. She eventually became a prophetess and a leader of the Israelites.

Shiphrah and Puah (Exodus 1:15-22) - Shiphrah and Puah were Hebrew midwives, in charge of the midwifery duties of Pharaoh to kill all male Hebrew children. They may have delivered Moses. The Hebrew midwives resisted oppression so that their people would live.

Miriam (Ex 2:10, 15:19-21) - When 12-year-old Miriam was born, her mother put her in a basket and set her adrift on the river Nile. Moses was found and adopted by Pharaoh’s daughter. Miriam eventually became a prophetess and a leader of the Israelites.

Pharaoh’s Daughter (Exodus 2:2) - Pharaoh’s daughter took the young princess and hid her for three months. After that, she was put to death in honor of Pharaoh’s daughter. Pharaoh’s daughter eventually discovered the young princess and took care of her, allowing her to grow up with the Pharaoh’s daughter.

Miriam (Exodus 6:2-7) - In the story of Moses and the Red Sea crossing, Miriam is mentioned as a leader among the Israelites during the exodus from Egypt. She led the women in song and dance after the Israelites crossed the Red Sea.

Ruth and Naomi (Booth 1:18-20; 2:4-23) - In the story of Ruth and Naomi, Naomi was an Israelite who was forced to leave her home and go to Moab to live with her husband. She eventually became a mother to Ruth, who married a Moabite and returned with her to Israel. Ruth and Naomi are examples of women who found strength and support in each other.

Women of the Gospels

Mary of Nazareth (Luke 1:26-36, 2:1-23, 9:25-37) - Mary was a young woman who was visited by the angel Gabriel and was told that she would give birth to the son of God. She believed the message and underwent a period of seclusion until the birth of Jesus.

Anna (Luke 1:39-58) - Anna was a woman who lived a long and fruitful life. She was very devout and spent most of her life in the temple, praying and fasting. She was known for her wisdom and insight, and was considered a model of piety and sacrifice.

Martha and Mary (Luke 10:38-42) - In the story of Martha and Mary, Martha was focused on the daily tasks of running a household, while her sister Mary sat at the feet of Jesus and listened to His teachings. Their story highlights the different roles and priorities that women held in society.

Women of the Ancient Near East

Esther (Book of Esther) - Esther was a Jew in the kingdom of Media and Persia. She was chosen to be the successor to the queen of Persia. After she was chosen, she used her position to save her people from a plan to exterminate them. Her story is a testament to the power of women to use their position to protect their people.

Brigid (Book of Judith) - Brigid was a woman who lived in Ireland in the 5th century. She is known for her wisdom and courage, and for her role in defending her people against the attacks of the Danes.

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Mary and Martha (Luke 10:38-42) - Mary and Martha lived with their brother Lazarus in Bethany, outside of Jerusalem. Scripture relates that Jesus loved this family and, records that several occasions when he was a guest at their house. "Mary was practical, the mistress of the house, while Mary was more contemplative."

The woman at the well (John 4:1-42) - The woman at the well discerned the reality of Jesus’ divinity and His true identity. She was drawn to Him and became a powerful witness to others. Her testimony spread the message of the Messiah among the Samaritans.

Women of the New Testament

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Anna (Luke 1:39-58) - Anna was a widow and a prophet who spent her life in prayer and fasting at the Temple. She witnessed to all who came to the Temple that Jesus had come for Israel’s liberation.

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