

The Value of Woman and How God Has Used Her in the Past

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Introduction

From the beginning of humanity God has placed a great value upon woman. He made her originally to be the "help meet [suitable, fitting]" for man (Gen. 2:18-25). Her appearance was no mere accident nor the result of millions of years of evolution from lower forms, but she was the product of God's immediate and instantaneous creative power (as was Adam before her), made from a portion of Adam to serve as the perfect complement to him. Throughout history God has used many women to serve Him in powerful and influential ways.

Some Great Old Testament Women

The first godly woman to be prominently discussed in the Bible is Sarah, the wife of Abraham. God changed her name from Sarai to Sarah, meaning "princess" or "queen," likely signifying the fact that she would not only be the mother of nations, but of kings (Gen. 17:15-16). Even when her faith in God's promise temporarily wavered because she was long barren, her faith eventually triumphed, and God caused her to be able to conceive in her old age and bear Isaac (Heb. 11:11). She thus became the mother of God's chosen people of the Old Testament and the one through whom God's promises to Abraham would eventually be fulfilled in the Christ (Gal. 3:16). In a powerful allegory Paul employed Sarah as the archetype of the new covenant and of the church of Christ in which there is spiritual freedom (Gal. 4:22-26).

Rahab, the harlot, is a remarkable example of God's use of a woman for His purposes. As with all its characters, however great, inspiration does not ignore the sordid background of this woman. Her heroics in shielding the spies in Jericho were firmly based on her fear of and faith in the God of Israel (Jos. 2:9-11; Heb. 11:31; Jam. 2:25). She was spared in the destruction of Jericho because of her faith and was "adopted" by Israel. She married Salmon, an Israelite, and gave birth to Boaz, the great-grandfather of David (Mat. 1:5-6), through whom our Lord was born (Mat. 1:1).

The story of Ruth, the Moabitess, is one of the most touching and beautiful narratives in all of literature. Though a foreigner to Israel (like Rahab), she believed in God through the influence of her godly mother-in-law, Naomi, and chose Israel as her own people. Her faith initially led to poverty and deprivation, but eventually to a happy marriage to the prosperous

Boaz (thus becoming the daughter-in-law of Rahab). Ruth was likewise in the direct lineage of Christ (Mat. 1:5).

Queen Esther of Persia was a woman God placed in the right place at the right time in His providence. Although born in a strange land, orphaned at a young age, and reared as an adopted daughter by a godly cousin (Mordecai), this Jewish maiden rose to the level of royalty in the mightiest empire on earth in her time. When wicked Haman influenced king Ahasuerus to sign a law which threatened genocide for her people, Esther, as the queen, risked her own life by intervening on their behalf. While Mordecai counseled Esther that if she did not intervene, he expected deliverance of their people from another source, he also wisely suggested that perhaps she had been given her place in the kingdom by God for just such a circumstance (Est. 4:14). She courageously mediated for her people, resulting in the sparing of the Israelites through whom the Blessor of all nations must be born. With what pivotal power did God employ Esther.

Some Great New Testament Women

Elisabeth, a descendant of Aaron, was chosen of God to give birth in her old age to the great prophet John, the forerunner of our Lord. She (along with her husband, Zacharias, the priest) is described as "righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless" (Luke 1:6). Christ indicates the greatness of the honor bestowed upon Elisabeth in causing her to be the mother of John by His appraisal of John: "For I say unto you. Among those that are born of women there is not a greater prophet than John the Baptist" (Luke 7:28). She was further honored of God in that under the influence of the Holy Spirit she was the first woman to confess the Christ in her beautiful words to Mary, "Blessed art thou among women, and blessed is the fruit of thy womb. And whence is this to me that the mother of my Lord should come to me" (Luke 1:42-43)?

As exalted as Elisabeth was, no woman was ever more exalted by God than her cousin, the virgin named Mary. Though of an obscure family in Israel, the unique honor bestowed upon her has for centuries made her the best-known and perhaps most-beloved woman on earth. Though her innocence and righteousness before her pregnancy are never explicitly stated, they are necessarily implied by God's choice of her for this most significant of all births. Doubtless, God had her in mind in His promise to the serpent that the woman's seed would bruise his head (Gen. 3:15). Certainly, she is the virgin who would conceive and bear a son, prophesied seven centuries before by Isaiah (Isa. 7:14; Mat. 1:20-23). God not only uniquely

honored Mary in choosing her to bring His Son and our Savior into the stream of human history and existence. He also wrought a unique miracle to enable her to do this—conception without and before cohabitation with Joseph or any other man (Mat. 1:18–20). Could God ever honor any man more than He honored Mary?

Lydia was providentially granted the privilege of being the first convert to Christ on European soil, of whom we have record. While we cannot know absolutely that she was a Jew by race, she was apparently so by religion. Paul and his companions began their work in Philippi among a group of women who worshipped God on the Sabbath by the riverside. Lydia was among that number (Acts 16:13–14). Upon hearing the Gospel, she was baptized and immediately besought and constrained the men who had brought her the Gospel to make her home their home while in Philippi. By providing accommodations for God's messengers, she had a principal part in helping with the establishment of perhaps the most consistently faithful church in the apostolic era. She was apparently a woman of considerable means and God gave her opportunity to use her wealth to support the Truth and those who preached it.

Priscilla (also called "Prisca") is mentioned six times in the New Testament, all of them in connection with her husband, Aquila, and always in connection with Paul. She is first seen as a noble co-worker with her husband in making tents (Acts 18:2). She is also seen as a beneficent hostess in allowing the penniless Paul to dwell in her home while he preached in Corinth (v. 3). (In this way she was comparable to Lydia in her support of the Gospel.) When Paul departed Corinth, this couple traveled with him to Ephesus, where they stayed while he went on to Jerusalem (Acts 18:18–19). During Paul's absence Apollos came to Ephesus and in ignorance preached the baptism of John. This godly woman and her husband taught him the Truth on that subject, indicating her great knowledge of the Scripture and her zeal for doctrinal accuracy (vv. 25–26). Later, Paul called this godly couple his "helpers in Christ," said he owed them much because they risked their own lives for his and indicated that the church was meeting in their house (Rom. 16:3–5). By any measure, Priscilla was a woman of significant spiritual stature whom the Lord used mightily in His service.

Conclusion

Space fails us to include other illustrious women of Biblical history, but they are many. Womankind has peculiar sensitivities, sensibilities, emotions, and capabilities that allow her to do some things far more effectively than any man. While God has given man authority over woman, this in no way implies a lesser value or worth of her. The "women's liberation"

movement foolishly charges the Bible (and thus God) with denigrating women and making of them inferior beings by having "held them down" through the centuries. While admitting that God has an assigned place for women to keep (even as He does for men), this in no way implies His dishonor or contempt for them (subordination is not the same as and does not imply inferiority). Rather, we have seen that time and again He has elevated, exalted, and honored women to serve Him in the most fruitful ways imaginable. In our own time some of the most powerful servants of God are godly women.

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