

Women of the Old Testament

Some women in the OT worth thinking about. This may take you into places in the Old Testament you haven't looked at recently.

Miriam sister of Moses and Aaron. Micah 6:4 I sent *before* you (to lead you NIV, CV) Moses, Aaron and Miriam. (Italics mine)

Rahab (Canaanite) Joshua 2.

Innkeeper (prostitute?) in Jericho. She hid the spies who had been sent to spy out the land because she believed what she had heard about Yahweh. She is commended for her faith (Heb 11:31); James 2:25 says she was justified by her works.

Tamar (Canaanite) Genesis 28.

Judah had 3 sons: Er, Onan, Shelah. Tamar was married to Er.

Er died. Under Jewish law, the brother-in-law was supposed to father children for the widow. Onan was unwilling and "spilled his semen on the ground." Judah sent Tamar back to her parents until Shelah grew up. When he was grown up he didn't claim Tamar. Tamar took the initiative and seduced Judah.

Judah was told Tamar was pregnant. He had her brought out to be put to death. She produced the signet and staff that he had given her.

Deborah Judges 4 and 5.

At that time Deborah, a prophetess, wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel. She used to sit under the palm of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the Israelites came up to her for judgment. The judges had authority to lead the people. Deborah was in a line of judges that began with Moses and led to Samuel. . . . (*read the rest of this story in Judges*) We don't hear any more about Lappidoth.

Ruth (Moabite) Book of Ruth

Comes to Judah with Naomi, her mother-in-law, when her husband dies. She took initiative, in leaving her home in Moab, finding work, choosing a husband and proposing to him. None of this was deemed inappropriate for a woman. In fact Ruth is praised many times for her actions.

Huldah

2 Kings 22:14–23:3; 2 Chron. 34:22–32 (identical)

Prophet, consulted by Josiah after the discovery of scrolls in the Temple. She prophesied to the people of Judah the destruction of Jerusalem, and to Josiah that he would be spared from witnessing all that because he had turned to the Lord with all his heart.

Josiah died before the destruction of Jerusalem.

Women of the Old Testament

Esther

Book of Esther

The plot hinges on the irony (probably intended to be humorous) of the Gentile men in power insisting that women are to obey men in the kingdom and in the home while in reality the story begins and ends with women taking the initiative. The story begins with a Gentile woman defying her husband the king and ends with a Jewish woman using her influence over the King to defeat her male opponent and lead her people to victory.

Three of these women are mentioned in Jesus' genealogy in Matthew 1. Notice anything else about them?

The capable (excellent, noble) wife: Proverbs 31:10-31.

"So what characterizes this idealized "*wife of noble character*"? She is an efficient executive with a well-ordered domestic staff. She deals in real estate, runs a clothing business, and cares for the poor as well as her own household. She has her own earnings. She appears to be the primary income earner in the family. She is also a wise and kind teacher. How does this line up with hierarchical gender roles?" Philip Payne, *The Bible vs. Biblical Womanhood*.

To me, this whole depiction of women in the Old Testament is conclusive in itself. (I've not been selective in the list above--it's all the women who played a significant role in the OT story.)

The argument against women in leadership is based on some difficult passages in Paul's letters. We will look at these verses in coming weeks.

We should not base our theology on isolated verses that are at odds with what the rest of Scripture teaches.

Next Sunday we'll look at how Jesus treated women.