

# Women in Ministry in Scripture

There are some leaders who have taken the extreme position that women do not have any place of public ministry within the Church. Often these men can cite examples of women who have abused their gifts and have created disorder in the Church through prophecy or aggressive behavior against governmental leadership. It may be true that some women have used prophecy to control others or have been unwise in their relationships with local church pastoral leadership. However, the same arguments can be made about men. Logically, the misuse of spiritual gifts is not a good reason for the disuse of spiritual gifts. Women should not be singled out when men are as guilty.

It seems apparent both experientially and scripturally that God has given spiritual gifts to women as well as men. For instance, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter quoted the prophecy of Joel to explain the supernatural phenomena that accompanied the events of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. It is clear that this prophecy includes women.

*And it shall be in the last days, God says, that I will pour forth of My Spirit upon all mankind; and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my bond-slaves, both men and women, I will in those days pour forth of My Spirit and they shall prophesy. Acts 2:17-18*

It is clear that women should prophesy. This prophecy says that women *shall prophesy* twice. It is only logical to assume that their normal place of prophecy would be in the meetings of local churches. However for those who object, a second verse is offered.

*But every woman who has her head uncovered while praying or prophesying disgraces her head; for she is one and the same with her whose head is shaved.  
1 Corinthians 11:5*

A woman can pray properly and prophesy in the public meetings of the local church if she is properly *covered*. We have not yet considered the issue of *covering* in this work. What the Bible has to say on this matter will be considered in detail in Chapter 5. It is only necessary to say in this context that women can prophesy or pray publicly if they are properly *covered* according to Paul. Therefore, to absolutely forbid women to prophesy in the Church is wrong and unscriptural. By implication, there must be a legitimate expression for the public ministry of

women. The godly prophetess described by Scripture gives the Church additional scriptural reasons to allow women to function in the prophetic realm.

### **The Ministry of the Prophetess**

The ministry of the prophetess is well established in Scripture, although not as strongly as the ministry of the male prophet. There are eleven individual women connected to this ministry in the Bible. Five are found in the Old Testament and six in the New Testament. Four of these New Testament prophetesses are daughters of the Evangelist Philip.

Of these eleven individual women, two are either false prophetesses or are fighting strongly against God's will being done by His godly servants. Nevertheless, the existence of these false prophetesses logically points to the existence of true prophetesses. One of these false prophetesses is in the Old Testament and one in the New Testament. We will examine these prophetesses in the order that they appear in the Bible.

### **Miriam, the First True Prophetess**

The first direct reference to the ministry of the prophetess is found in the Book of Exodus. The first prophetess mentioned is Miriam, the older sister of Moses and Aaron. The Bible first mentions Miriam when she followed the reed ark of her baby brother, Moses, and observed Pharaoh's daughter finding Moses. Later in Exodus we learn of Miriam's prophetic gift.

*And Miriam the prophetess, Aaron's sister, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dancing. Exodus 15:20*

This verse connects the ministry of worship and singing with Miriam. Perhaps, her prophetic gift flowed in song more often than not. Some prophetesses today seem to be *Miriam-type prophetesses* and are musical in their ministries as well as prophetic. In just a few paragraphs, we will see that Miriam must have received dreams and visions from God as well. A careful study of Miriam is instructive to all those who wish to be prophetesses in the Church today. There are a few verses that indicate to us that God thought highly of this woman. She is a true prophetess. The last mention of her occurs in the book of the Prophet Micah. In this passage, God is reminding His people Israel of the gifted people that He has blessed them with to lead them. The LORD includes Miriam with Moses and Aaron.

*Indeed, I brought you up from the land of Egypt and ransomed you from the house of slavery, and I sent before you Moses, Aaron, and Miriam. Micah 6:4*

In the context of saying that Miriam was gifted and a God-given blessing to the people of Israel<sup>1</sup>, it showed she was human as well, and made some serious errors. This should be a warning for any prophetess today who thinks that her gifting makes her immune to error. It should also be an encouragement for the prophetess who has seriously failed and knows the weaknesses of her humanity. The fact that God disciplined Miriam for her rebellion against her own spiritual authority, yet ultimately found her faithful, should be an encouragement. This instance is found in the book of Numbers. Miriam and Aaron publicly opposed Moses over his choice of a non-Israelite wife.

*Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Cushite woman whom he had married (for he had married a Cushite woman); and they said, “Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us as well?” And the LORD heard it. Numbers 12:1-2*

While the incident that precipitated this rebellion was Moses’ marriage to this Cushite woman, it is obvious that the rebellion had been present already in their hearts and simply came out under these circumstances. They wanted to elevate themselves to Moses’ level of authority. They wanted to become equal with him in authority. This is a common temptation to gifted people. The temptation to break away from authority and to establish themselves as the primary authority is a demonic tactic against five-fold ministry to fragment teams of ministry. It is also the very temptation that led to the fall of Lucifer. He wanted to establish himself apart from God’s authority.

While the passage does not say that Miriam was the instigator of this rebellion against Moses’ governmental leadership, it is strongly suggested by the fact that God’s judgment fell upon her alone rather than upon both her and Aaron. It is also suggested by the fact that her name is mentioned first in the verse above. God corrected her and Aaron by explaining that He had a special *face-to-face* relationship with Moses, but she was an *ordinary* prophetess receiving *dreams and visions*. God then struck her with leprosy. Moses interceded for her and God limited her sickness, but He insisted upon a week as a corrective sign to her, all Israel and now to us. In the Law of Moses, this encouragement reminds us of this divine discipline of Miriam.

*Remember what the LORD your God did to Miriam on the way as you came out of Egypt. Deuteronomy 24:9*

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<sup>1</sup> To be more specific, the Scripture says that Miriam was a *leader of women* in Exodus 15:20. This implies that she did not exercise authority over men.

Despite this event, Miriam remains an example of a true prophetess. Discovery of Miriam's ability to make grievous mistakes in leadership, as any man also can, it is a sobering revelation to any prophetess. This sobriety blesses the prophetess, particularly as she considers her own submission to others in governmental leadership. The sober prophetess reminds herself that Miriam was ignorant of God's view of Moses despite her prophetic calling. She reminds herself that Miriam was required by God to submit to her much younger brother Moses' headship despite her own prophetic gift.

### **Deborah, the True Prophetess and Judge of Israel**

In the book of Judges, an outstanding prophetess is described. The passage tells us that she was married and that she was the Judge of Israel as well.

*Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappi-doth, was judging Israel at that time. Judges 4:4*

Deborah's competent leadership and wisdom is apparent in the passage in the book of Judges that describes her. Deborah is the only woman described as a Judge in the Old Testament. In fact, she is the only clear example of a godly woman who seems to be leading men as an ongoing function anywhere in the Bible.<sup>2</sup> Because of this unique aspect to her ministry, Deborah is the focus of a lengthy discussion in a later portion of this book.

### **Huldah the Prophetess**

During the time of godly King Josiah, the long missing book of the Law is found and read. Josiah is so disturbed by the revelation of Israel's disobedience to the Law that he seeks out the prophetic Word of the Lord. As a result a priest and a few others go to a prophetess named Huldah<sup>3</sup>.

*So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe (now she lived in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter); and they spoke to her. 2 Kings 22:14*

Huldah, the prophetess, gives these men a clear and accurate prophetic utterance concerning the future of the Israelite people and of Josiah. This woman was apparently well-known and obviously well thought of in the city of Jerusalem. It appears that she had married into a prominent family since the names of her husband, and his father and grandfather are mentioned.

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<sup>2</sup> There are many attempts today to find other women in government. These attempts are not very convincing. Some seem to find on-going governmental leadership from examples that seem to be one time acts. Deborah stands alone as a legitimate example of a woman in a God-given calling that was normally the domain of men. However, there are some limitations even in Deborah's service that is not found in the men who were judges. We will examine these limitations in a chapter devoted to Deborah.

<sup>3</sup> This same event is described in 2 Kings 34:22.

The grandfather was *keeper of the wardrobe*, which means that he was an official in Jerusalem. Since her husband's grandfather was still alive during these events, this may reveal that she was a relatively young woman as well. This is a modest speculation since we do not know the actual age of the grandfather or of anyone else. There are no other references to her in Scripture. The positive tone of the passage reveals her as a true prophetess.

### **Noadiah, the Prophetess**

During the time of Nehemiah, Scripture mentions another prophetess. In this situation, Nehemiah was given a divine mandate to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem and this woman opposed Nehemiah's righteous cause. Nehemiah came under a powerful verbal assault by God's mistaken prophets speaking prophecies against him. Apparently this prophetess was a part of this since Nehemiah prays for God's correction of her by name. It is noteworthy that Nehemiah does not tell us of the names of the other male prophets. This may speak to the fact of her prominence as a prophetess or perhaps how vicious her attack on Nehemiah was. There is no indication in this passage that this woman was not a prophetess of God. Noadiah is a Hebrew name, which strongly suggests that she was a prophetess of God. She simply was on the wrong side of this serious issue of the restoration of Jerusalem. She was a thorn in Nehemiah's side and a comfort to his enemies.

*Remember, O my God, Tobiah and Sanballat according to these works of theirs, and also Noadiah the prophetess and the rest of the prophets who were trying to frighten me. Nehemiah 6:14*

This prophetess should also bring sobriety to any prophetic person seeking to serve God. It is abundantly clear that the prophetic gift does not make one righteous or insightful on every issue. She might have been right on many issues but not on this important issue. On this one essential issue of God's will, this woman was acting like a false prophetess. She was opposing God's purpose and the godly man called to that purpose, Nehemiah. However, the very fact of her existence further establishes the ministry of the prophetess in Scripture.

### **An Unnamed Prophetess and a Prophetic Pregnancy**

A reference is found in an obscure, single verse that apparently covers the entire nine-month duration of a pregnancy. This prophetess became pregnant and bore a son whose birth and name were both prophetic.

*So I approached the prophetess, and she conceived and gave birth to a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Name him Maher-shalal-hash-baz; Isaiah 8:3*

Isaiah's naming of this child revealed some of the future destiny of several cities, regions and nations around Israel. This reference is not very helpful in determining much about this particular prophetess since it seems that Isaiah named this child by revelation rather than the prophetess. There seems to be no indication of criticism of this woman in this passage. She apparently is a true prophetess, yet unknown. The very existence of this woman that Isaiah speaks of further establishes the ministry of the prophetess.

### **The Widowed and Old-Aged Prophetess Anna**

The first New Testament reference concerning the prophetess is found in the Gospel of Luke. While this reference is found in the New Testament, Anna would still be an Israelite prophetess since Christ had not yet died on the Cross and the Holy Spirit had not yet been given to all believers. It is also likely that she had been a prophetess for many years before the birth of Christ since we are told that she was *advanced in years*, which simply means she was elderly. She was also unmarried being a widow for many years.

*And there was a prophetess, Anna the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was advanced in years, having lived with a husband seven years after her marriage. Luke 2:36*

The next few verses, which are not quoted here, continue to reveal information about this godly woman. She was eighty-four at the time of her death and she had served God in the Temple continuously with prayer and fasting. This prophetess was a prayer warrior and intercessor. When Mary and Joseph brought the Christ Child into the Temple, she recognized Him supernaturally and begins to speak about Him to all who were spiritually attuned.

There is absolutely no criticism in this passage about this woman. She apparently was a faithful and true prophetess whose ministry seems limited to Jerusalem. The amount of facts in this passage about this woman also suggests that she was a well-known figure in Jerusalem.

### **The Male Christian Prophet**

There are only a few verses concerning prophetesses<sup>4</sup> of the Church in the New Testament. If these were the only verses that we could study then establishing the ministry of the New Testament prophetess would be difficult. However, there are nine male Christian prophets that can be found in the New Testament.<sup>5</sup> Since the Old Testament prophetess is established

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<sup>4</sup> There are two New Testament references to "prophetesses". The first is Anna who is actually a Jewish Old Covenant prophetess even though she appears in the New Testament. The other reference is the false prophetess "Jezebel" in the Revelation. There are a number of references to women prophesying. All believers can prophesy. Prophetesses simply operate in this gift at a different level than the average believer.

<sup>5</sup> For an in-depth discussion of the prophet, see the author's book **The Last Apostles on Earth**, pg. 70-80 and throughout the book.

reasonably well, there is no good reason theologically or biblically to doubt whether there should be an expression of the feminine prophetic ministry in the Church age. This is particularly true since the New Testament prophet is well established.

Some readers may not be aware of this ministry's function in the present time. Some churches teach a false doctrine that can be called Cessationism or sometimes Dispensationalism. These doctrines teach erroneously that these ministries are no longer present in the modern Church.<sup>6</sup> The author of this book accepts the existence of the modern Christian prophetess and rejects the position of Cessationism on this issue.

### **The Evangelist's Four Daughters who Prophesied**

Luke, the writer of Acts of the Apostles tells us that the Evangelist Philip, who had been one of the seven original deacons, had four daughters that were prophetesses or who prophesied.<sup>7</sup>

*Now this man had four virgin daughters who were prophetesses. Acts 21:9*

This verse establishes that an unmarried prophetess can legitimately operate in this gift. These daughters of Philip were unmarried and Anna, the aged prophetess, was a widow. However, we have already noted that any woman who wants to exercise this gift in meetings of the Church must be *covered* according to the apostle Paul. We will examine the verses on *covering* in detail in a subsequent chapter. In the meantime, we must say that their father, the Evangelist Philip would have *covered* these four young women in a spiritual sense, at the time of these events.

### **The False Prophetess Jezebel**

The term *prophetess* is expressed in a negative way also in the New Testament. In the book of the Revelation, the resurrected Lord Jesus Christ speaks a strong rebuke to the Church at Thyatira about a woman that it is tolerating.

*'But I have this against you, that you tolerate the woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, and she teaches and leads My bond-servants astray, so that they commit acts of immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols and I gave her time to repent and she does not want to repent of her immorality. Revelation 2:20-21*

The Lord is drawing from the Old Testament woman Jezebel in His description and naming of this First Century woman. His naming her Jezebel certainly seems symbolic, a type, since it is

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<sup>6</sup> Dispensationalism/Cessationism is thoroughly discussed in **The Last Apostles on Earth**.

<sup>7</sup> The translation here is not as literal as it should be. The term translated "prophetess" is actually not the feminine noun version of "prophet" but rather is the nominative plural feminine present participle. It should read literally "daughters who prophesied". The author recognizes that women may prophesy without being prophetesses.

unlikely that any reasonable person would name their female child after this most wicked woman in the Old Testament. His description of her in this passage also seems consistent with the Old Testament Jezebel. However, this woman is a New Testament Jezebel. She is a Jezebel within the Church. She is a teaching Jezebel. Since she has the capacity to lead the servants of Christ astray, she must also be a confessing Christian. A more detailed examination of what Christ says of this New Testament Jezebel will be accomplished later in this book.

### **Summary of Evidence from the Prophetess**

The gift of prophecy functioning through women and the ministry of the prophetess in Scripture establish that there must be a legitimate place of ministry for women. Logic and Scripture dictates that this place of ministry is the local church. The Apostle Paul legitimizes this function by saying that women can pray and prophesy if they are *covered*. Each of the various women described as a prophetess by the Bible has lessons to teach women in ministry. The fact of prophetic inspiration from God does not make a true prophetess immune from making serious errors. The Bible describes several women who were false prophetesses or who opposed the will of God. This should bring godly caution to the heart of any woman having a prophetic gifting.

This file is Chapter 1 of “The Spiritually Gifted Woman” by Dr. Roger Sapp, copyrighted by All Nations Ministries. The entire book is available from [www.allnationsmin.org](http://www.allnationsmin.org) . There is a companion file available entitled “The General Patriarchal Themes of Scripture”. These two files provide a balance on this subject that is often lacking in theology about women in ministry. This file was obtained from the “Pray and Obey” section of [www.allnationsmin.org](http://www.allnationsmin.org) .