

## THE BIBLE HONOURS WOMEN



Earlier this year I read a short article that annoyed me to the point that I've let it simmer, but now I am compelled to respond. The writer casts a shadow over the Bible and the Church. The tone implies Christians have suppressed and neglected the voices of women. I suspect the writer of this unhelpful article came to it from a predisposed, biased perspective.

The article...

*"Yesterday was 'international women's day'.*

*I've been thinking today about the voices of women in the bible.*

*Only 15% of named people of the Bible are women.*

*Only 1% of the words are from women, approximately 1400 words in total.*

*What impact does that make on us when we read the Bible?*

*Who's lives do we miss out on? Where are the stories of the children and families?*

*93 women in the Bible are given a voice for us to hear.*

*How do we understand what was happening from their perspective?*

*Thinking particularly of the story of Sara the wife of Abraham. Sara was effectively sex trafficked but only given 141 words to describe her pain. Tremendous trauma was happening but the Bible was written by men largely for men, and women's contributions are scattered thinly through its pages. How does that reflect then on how church is structured, how hierarchy is established, how woman's voices are valued in times of leadership. How do we continue to change how we read the Bible so that church culture can value women as equal?"*

Posted by Amanda Acheson. (2022, March 9). Facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/amanda.acheson1>

---

The Bible is God's story. From the first page to the last page, it unveils the revelation of God to all people of the world. In its two primary sections, the Old Testament promises a Saviour for the world would come, and the New Testament tells the world the Saviour did come. **Every story in the Bible is pointing towards the greatness of Jesus Christ**, the Saviour of the world. 'God gave Christ to the world in a specific geographical, historical and theological context. God sent Jesus to a particular place, at a particular time and within a particular framework of truth.'<sup>i</sup> The purpose of the sixty-six books, which in reality is one book, is to inform and transform the reader to believe in God and His Son, Jesus (John 20:31).

The stories of every person man or woman (great or small), place (high and low) in the Bible is subject to the preeminent theme of Jesus. When the Bible gives voice to men and women, it isn't being sexist or attempting to devalue one or the other. Rather, the Bible incorporates these valuable people by adding the colour of their narrative to help us see the bigger, magnificent picture of Jesus. To read the Bible from a 'woman's' or 'man's' perspective is the wrong approach. The Bible isn't about proportioning 15% of its story to women or giving ninety-three women a voice for others to hear. **The Bible's emphasis is about the divine revelation to all people.** All men and women in the Bible are complimentary characters to the transcendent drama of a loving God giving us His Son.

**The Hebrews honoured and admired the faith, resilience and daring of their women.**

When someone suggests that women don't get a fair representation in the Bible, they tout the idea that God has failed women. A proper contextual reading of the Bible will affirm that God and His people the Hebrews, respected and valued the brains and courage of their women. Many of the pagan nations mentioned in the Old Testament, like the Romans in the New Testament, devalued and treated their women and children as inferior property. In contrast, the Hebrews in the Bible honoured and admired the faith, resilience and daring of their women. **Some women may not have said much but their lives are dynamic and give powerful examples to their faith in God.**

Consider:

- The wisdom of Sarah, Hannah, Abigail, Mary the mother of Jesus.
- The tenderness of Rachel, Ruth, Elizabeth, Martha.
- The passion of Rebekah, Miriam, Mary Magdalene, Tabitha.
- The heroism of Jochebed, Rahab, Deborah, Jael, Jehosheba Esther, Priscilla.

The inclusion of their stories, time, circumstances and trust in God, adds detail and critical significance to a deeper understanding of the Bible's message. **Every word spoken by women in the Bible mattered enough for God to include them in the Scriptures.** Their words are inspired and compelling. To claim that 'women's contributions are scattered thinly through the pages' of the Bible is a weak and naïve viewpoint. The Bible highlights no particular sex or occupation as it unfolds the pages of history. Every story in the Bible, whether from a man, woman or child is wonderfully recorded to help us comprehend the truth that would have remained a mystery were it not told through human interactions.

Undeniably, the Bible reveals a patriarchal framework that is indicative of its time and history. Equally indisputable is the fact that Christianity's roots are found in the Middle East and Christianity helped shape

Western civilization. In no way does this indicate the Bible was written by men and for men. It would be foolish to judge past histories through the eyes of today's secularized culture, and even worse to allocate blame with what happens today because of ancient experiences. To claim that women aren't valued in the church and by association Christianity, is theological fracking. It poisons the truth and splits the church.

**When Jesus walked this world, He radically modelled and challenged the culture of His time.** Roman authority was male dominated, women were commodities and children were 'owned'.<sup>ii</sup> These behaviours were familiar in the Jewish world when Jesus came, but the attitude and actions of Jesus turned the eccentric behaviour of Rome and Israel upside down.

Jesus loved, respected and always spoke tenderly to His mother. He kindly responded to His mother's request at a wedding and quietly performed a water to wine marvel. Every moment from that first miracle you will find Jesus treating all women with the same unique dignity He showed his mother.

**Jesus was always attentive to the  
repressed and discarded women He met.**

During his three years of public ministry Jesus was always attentive to the repressed and discarded women He met:

- Jesus deliberately and kindly spoke to an outcast woman (John 4).
- Jesus shows grace and does not condemn a sinful woman (John 8).
- He honours a begging but discerning woman's faith (Mark 7).
- He displays empathy for a woman's sorrow and raises her son back to life (Luke 7).
- He allows an unclean woman to touch His garment and be healed (Luke 8).
- He sets a woman free from her deformity (Luke 13).
- He sympathises with a mother's heart over the sadness of Jerusalem (Luke 13).
- He weeps with Mary and Martha (John 11).
- He defends a generous woman from criticism (John 12).
- The Lord honours a poor woman for her sacrificial giving (Luke 21).
- Risen from the dead He appears first to women (John 20).

Jesus, and the teachings of Christianity were never about hierarchy, patriarchal domination and the abuse of position and power against women. The writer of the contentious article avoids the misogynistic way the Taliban treat women, or how the Quran depreciates women. The article neglects how appalling it was for Greek philosophy to degrade and subjugate women as a 'natural and social necessity.'<sup>iii</sup> Analyzing those historic positions would have been more applicable to International Women's Day. Instead, the author evocatively questions the one historical writing that honours, elevates and respects women more than any other book ever printed. 'Unlike many comparable records of antiquity, **the Bible continually places women at the forefront of events. Women were prized for their wisdom, tenderness, passion and at times heroic ruthlessness.**'<sup>iv</sup>

Jesus loved and lived in solidarity  
with every man, woman, boy and girl.

The example of Jesus Christ revealed the best practice in how to treat every human, then and now. It is unthinkable to believe that if you change 'how' you read the Bible, it will help you value women more.

When the discerning Christian reads the Bible, they will be looking for Christ. As they read and observe the faithful life of Jesus, they will be challenged to treat all people as equal. To our Lord there were no favourites. He treated everyone with equal dignity and virtue. Jesus loved and lived in solidarity with every man, woman, boy and girl. We are compelled to do the same.

The church today is to be the protector and advocate for all humanity. **Our love and esteem for all people is to be the hallmark of our identity.** We love because He loved. We serve because He served. We make sacrifices because Jesus made the ultimate sacrifice, 'once and for all' (1 Peter 3:18). The church, of all places, should be the champion where impartiality, acceptance, harmony and love are given in abundance to every man, woman, boy and girl. Jesus said, 'A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another' (John 13:34-35).

As we conduct ourselves in this manner, we magnify the Bible's message to every person in today's world.

Graham Ashby May 2022

---

<sup>i</sup> *Understanding the Bible* by John Stott, p.9

<sup>ii</sup> <https://www.pbs.org/empires/romans/empire/family.html>

<sup>iii</sup> <https://smartacademicwriting.com/2020/02/22/the-subjugation-of-women-in-greek-culture-and-literature-essay/>

<sup>iv</sup> *Heroes* by Paul Johnson, p.6-7