

Shining a Light on Women Warriors of the Bible



by R. S. Ranieri

During a recent conversation with my granddaughter, the subject arose regarding the androcentric essence of the Bible and the god who inspired it, a god who—so my granddaughter opined—relegates women to a lower or lesser status. In response, I would argue that the Bible is replete with women and, indeed, illustrates the fundamental and profound part they play in God’s Word. In *Proverbs*, for example, Solomon’s exposition on *Wisdom* uses the feminine pronoun throughout (v. 8:1-4). Additionally, as Alice Camille points out in her article “Naming the 333 Women in the Bible,” [1]“Humanity’s binary gender design as male and female reflects in some mysterious way the nature of God. While sharing a common humanity, the man and the woman are unique and complementary rather than identical. This complementarity, in turn, reflects a facet of God’s own nature.” Camille’s insightful assertion is, in fact, supported by Scripture: “So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them;

male and female he created them” (Genesis 1:27). [2] Lastly, I submit that the Bible must be read within its cultural context, and that, in God’s divine wisdom, it is presented to us in a manner that humankind—given our vastly limited, subjective perspective—may better understand and relate to in terms of the *concept* of God. Clearly, God has no gender. God is Spirit (John 4:24), and operates from an *eternal* framework—as opposed to we humans, who operate within worldly boundaries and a here-and-now perspective. Put another way, wrapping our human brains around the idea of an omniscient creator is beyond our capacity. And so we rely on faith, which is God’s gift to us, built on the inspired or “breathed” Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16), and presented to us in language we *can* relate to. [3]

That having been said, the purpose of this writing is to bring the reader’s attention to several of the countless women of remarkable faith and courage who make only cameo appearances in Scripture, but nonetheless were chosen by God for a specific purpose, and, without whom, God’s Word would be incomplete.

The Bible, of course, is a sacred book. It can, however, be read as a memoir or novel—it has a beginning, a middle, and an end, many plot twists, and extraordinary characters. Despite its deeply patriarchal point-of-view, many of those characters are women of both the Old and New Testaments. Most of us, even those with only a passing familiarity of the Bible, can easily rattle off the names of prominent Biblical women; *Eve*, *Sarah*, *Mary* (mother of Jesus), and *Mary Magdalene* (the most famous of the many women disciples of Christ). There are so many others who often go unrecognized for the pivotal role they played in carrying out God’s intentions and delivering his message. These are the women-warriors of the Bible. We will take a closer look at several of these women (*Ruth*, *Deborah*, *Lydia*, and *Priscilla*), and how God used them to advance His Kingdom: “The Lord announces the word, and the women who proclaim it are a mighty throng” (Psalm 68:11 – ESV).

If you have not read the story of *Ruth* in the Old Testament, I fervently recommend it. It is short (only four chapters), and enlightening... as all biblical books are intended to be. *Ruth* is a love story, a story of devotion,

loyalty, commitment, and faithfulness. Ruth, being the great-grandmother of King David, played an essential role in the lineage of Jesus Christ (a fact many Christians may be unaware of). In addition to its many themes, The Book of Ruth (who was an outsider—a Moabite (gentile) among Israelites), teaches that there are no outsiders, for we all count in the eyes of God, and our faithfulness is rewarded with God’s grace.

Because of a famine in Bethlehem in Judah, an Israelite, Elimelech, takes his wife, Naomi, and their two sons to live in Moab, a pagan nation. The sons eventually marry Moabite women, and after the death of her husband, and later her sons, Naomi and her two daughters-in-law start back to Bethlehem. Only Ruth continues the journey with Naomi, declaring her unconditional faithfulness to Naomi, her people, and her God: “... where you go, I will go... your people will be my people, and your God my God” (1:16-17). Ultimately, Ruth is “covered” by and marries *Boaz*, her “Kinsman Redeemer” (closest relative bound to carry on the family name) and bears a son, *Obed*. Because of her faithfulness, courage, and a warrior’s perseverance, God honored Ruth by giving her a place in the lineage of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Ruth’s link to Jesus is thus: Obed fathered Jesse; Jesse fathered David, and Jesus is of the lineage of the house of David (for more on the lineage of Christ, read Matthew 1:1-25).

Over the years, it has been my privilege to make the acquaintance of many modern-day women-warriors: prayer-warriors, missionary-warriors, prison ministry-warriors, foster care-warriors—all fulfilling God’s purpose, a purpose beyond themselves to which they’d been called. Ruth certainly fits into this category. However, the only female *military* leader in the bible is *Deborah*... a Warrior’s-Warrior. Deborah was a judge and a prophet (Judges 4:4). During that time, the Israelites were under the barbarous rule of Jabin, a Canaanite king (4:1-3). On God’s word to her, Deborah sends for Barak from the city of Kedesh and tells him he must lead ten thousand men to Mount Tabor to fight Jabin’s army under the command of Sisera. Barak agrees only if Deborah accompanies him. So, along with Barak, she leads the army prophesying that Barak would not have credit for the victory because “the Lord will hand Sisera over to a woman” (4:9 and 4:17-23). Deborah’s prophecy comes to pass when Sisera is killed by *Jael*, a woman. Jabin is

destroyed, and the Israelites emerge victorious (4:23-24). Another notable example of the influence and significance God vests in women.

Lydia makes a brief appearance in a number of verses in the Book of Acts, but much has been gleaned about her from those verses that underscore her faithfulness and God's hand in her life and destiny. It is unknown exactly what led her from her home city of Thyatira (now a city in West Turkey) to Philippi in Macedonia where the Apostle Paul was also led; through a vision (Acts 16:8-9). A serendipitous meeting designed, no doubt, by the Holy Spirit, as Macedonia was the first European region where Paul preached the Gospel... and where Lydia became the first documented Christian convert.

In Acts 16, Luke presents Lydia as a woman of significance; a business woman having accumulated a good deal of wealth from selling purple cloth. Purple dye was hard to come by and only the rich could afford purple garments. She is described as a God-worshipper (a Gentile who followed Jewish tradition without becoming a full convert). Hearing Paul, Lydia became a convert to Christianity along with her entire household, and opened her home to Paul and a number of Apostles (14-15; 40). Lydia is an outstanding example of the spiritual gifts of hospitality and generosity. Her financial support, leadership, courage, and faithfulness were instrumental in the establishment and growth of the Church in Philippi.

The last notable under-recognized woman I bring to your attention is Priscilla. Priscilla stands out as a woman-warrior on a number of fronts: she was fearless as a "fellow-worker" to the Apostle Paul, and risked her life for him; she opened her home to the Apostles, which became the site for teaching the Gospel message (Romans 16:3-5; 1 Corinthians 16:19).

Priscilla epitomizes woman as *partner* in marriage. It is interesting to note that in keeping with the historically patriarchal tone of Scripture, Priscilla is never mentioned independently of Aquila, her husband. Conversely, the fact that she is recognized along with Aquila in terms of her commitment to teach the message of the Gospel (Acts 18:26), her initiative, faith, and courage, speaks to her agency, and the extensive sphere of influence she commanded. Archeological and textual evidence give credence to her intellect and

knowledge—and as a number of scholars propose — alleged authorship of the Epistle to the Hebrews. [4] Theological discussions on that subject aside, Priscilla was unquestionably an outstanding woman of her time... and a stellar example for ours.

I've presented to you only four women out of hundreds, under-recognized for the most part, but nonetheless amazing women of the Bible whose faith and fortitude... and God's grace... propelled them to unparalleled heights. The purpose herein is not to offer a dissertation on the lives of these women, but merely to bring to the forefront their essentiality to Scripture, and perhaps whet the appetite for a closer and more intentional reading of the Bible, wherein women are very much an integral part.

[1] Camille, Alice. *U.S. Catholic Faith in Real Life*. March 2, 2017.

[2] From both the New International Version (NIV), and the New Living Translation (NLT).

[3] Unless where otherwise noted, for purposes of this writing I have used The New Inductive Study Bible, English Standard Version.

[4] Haddad, Mimi. "Priscilla, Author of the Epistle to the Hebrews."

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