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4

5 **Women of the Old Testament:**
6 **Women of Influence**

7

8 To summarize: in the Old Testament, women were not ordained to the
9 priesthood. This does not mean that they were not important. It just means that
10 they were not anointed to the Aaronic priesthood, or to anything, for that matter.

11 Deborah was a prophetess and called herself a mother in Israel. Jochebed
12 possibly had the most influence of all over the Hebrew nation. Ruth and Rahab
13 were foreigners, but Providence arranged events so they could be Messiah's
14 progenitors. Hannah's prayed-for little Samuel would be a priest, prophet, and
15 judge and save the nation—only because he had a praying mother. Jezebel was a
16 horrid influence but certainly impacted Israel. Ditto for the wicked Athaliah. Esther
17 saved the nation from genocide.

18 All these and many more were highly influential “mothers in Israel.” But we
19 reiterate: there were no women priests, no women elders, even though women
20 were highly influential throughout the Old Testament.

1 **The Bible is not biased.** Feminist theologians would have us believe that the
 2 Scriptures were androcentric,¹ that is, written with a masculine bias that excludes
 3 and subverts the true picture of women of Bible times. Because of this purported
 4 disadvantage, feminist theologians look at language, anthropology of neighboring
 5 civilizations, and context of story to spin fictional accounts of how Scripture would
 6 differ if authored by women. Studying customs and practices through archaeology
 7 and history, they superimpose what was normative of other ancient civilizations on
 8 the biblical accounts.

9 Women today not only rewrite biblical stories about women, but also
 10 reformulate patriarchal prayers and create feminist rituals celebrating our
 11 ancestors. We rediscover in story and poetry, in drama and liturgy, in song and
 12 dance, our biblical fore Sisters' sufferings and victories. . . . We not only spin
 13 tales about the voyages of Prisca, the missionary, or about Junia the apostle, but
 14 also dance Sarah's circle and experience prophetic enthusiasm. We sing litanies
 15 of praise to our fore Sisters and pray laments of mourning for the lost stories of
 16 our foremothers.²

17 **We believe the Scriptures are inspired.** That leaves all bias and
 18 androcentricity out of the realm of possibility. Speaking of the accuracy and non-

¹ Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza argues in *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Reconstruction of Christian Origins*, that feminists must employ a "hermeneutics of suspicion." They must "assume that the Bible's male authors and interpreters deliberately covered up the role of women in early Christianity."

² Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza, "Emerging Issues in Feminist Biblical Interpretation," in *Christian Feminism: Visions of a New Humanity*, ed. Judith L. Weidman (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1984), 53.

1 bias of Bible history, Ellen White says, “Here only can we find a history of our
2 race, unsullied by human prejudice or human pride.”³

3 Biblical civilization is described exactly as God would have us know about it.
4 God’s people with all their sinful, deviant ways were not glorified, but sins of their
5 generations were explicitly explained and condemned.

6 Scripture was given us as admonition and as history to explain to us exactly
7 how God wanted His kingdom operated. Therefore to go to extra-biblical writings
8 to help us “understand” Scripture only confuses what the Bible (and God as
9 Author⁴) clearly say and mean.

10 **Problems with relying on external sources and anthropologies.** When Bible
11 interpreters use what is known from surrounding cultures of the Old Testament to
12 fictionalize and make up their stories about women, this can be highly problematic,
13 because a central theme of the Old Testament is that God was calling His people to
14 come out from these very pagan nations.

15 God mixed up the languages to scatter the peoples of the earth because
16 heathenism was retaking the new post-flood culture.

17 God called Abraham out from Ur of the Chaldees because of the negative
18 Babylonian influence.

³ Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 173.

⁴ Ellen G. White, *Great Controversy*, p. v.

1 God brought His people out of Egypt rather than allowing them just to stay
2 there and their children to become part of that civilization.

3 God wanted Israel to clean out the existing peoples already in the Promised
4 Land before settling there because He did not want them to become idolaters.

5 In short, God wanted his people to be different from the surrounding nations.
6 Therefore to use the surrounding people groups to interpret Scripture is highly
7 problematic. Yes, there may have been similarities, but those similarities may or
8 may not have been God's will at all.

9 No, we cannot take the civilizations of the ancients as normative for Israel. We
10 can learn much from the times, but cannot think we understand all about ancient
11 Israel just because a neighboring civilization does such and so. We cannot conflate
12 those cultures with Israel's or God's ways of doing things. God definitely did NOT
13 want His people mixing with them or imitating them. So why should we use them
14 as normative in our interpretation of Hebrew culture?⁵

15 **God is totally righteous and upright.** His way of doing things is perfect.
16 When God tells us to do something, we are to implement it. Scripture explains how
17 God's way was not perfectly accomplished through much of biblical history, but

⁵ For an example of this type of reasoning, see "The Contribution of Archaeology to the Study of Women in Biblical Times: Two Case Studies," by Jennie R. Ebeling, *Review and Expositor*, 106, Summer 2009. "Since the Hebrew Bible provides limited information about women's lives in ancient Israel," other sources "are available that can be used to reconstruct aspects of women's everyday activities and their roles in important lifecycle events." Here Ebeling uses beer-brewing and childbirth to reconstruct the lives of women in ancient Israel using archaeology, iconography, ethnography, and ancient Near Eastern and Egyptian textual sources.

1 His ideals and government are past questioning. Here was where Satan threw doubt
2 on God in the garden: “Did God really say. . . ?” He held that human beings could
3 be as gods, knowing both good and evil. To cast doubt on the theocracy, patriarchy
4 or any of God’s other injunctions is ultimately undermining God’s authority, not
5 merely some human perception of things.⁶

6 From the first war in heaven, it has been Satan’s unwearied attempt to impugn
7 God’s character, government, and Word. Feminist theology, based on higher-
8 critical methodology, is only his latest attempt at undermining God’s very essence
9 and government. Scripture’s purpose is “to show that Jehovah is upright; He is my
10 rock, and there is no unrighteousness in him” (Ps. 92:15).

11 God’s Word and Way is perfect (Ps. 19:7ff), and He only leads in a righteous
12 way (Ps. 23:3). “The works of his hands are faithful and just; all his precepts are
13 trustworthy; they are established forever and ever, to be performed with
14 faithfulness and uprightness” (Ps. 111:7, 8, NIV).

⁶ Satan “tempts men to distrust God’s love and to doubt His wisdom. He is constantly seeking to excite a spirit of irreverent curiosity, a restless, inquisitive desire to penetrate the secrets of divine wisdom and power. In their efforts to search out what God has been pleased to withhold, multitudes overlook the truths which He has revealed, and which are essential to salvation. Satan tempts men to disobedience by leading them to believe they are entering a wonderful field of knowledge. But this is all a deception. Elated with their ideas of progression, they are, by trampling on God’s requirements, setting their feet in the path that leads to degradation and death.” Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 54, 55.

1 The presupposition of Scripture is that God in His⁷ lovingkindness and
 2 faithfulness has given trustworthy precepts and has led His people in a perfect way
 3 that can be trusted forever. They cannot be second-guessed by a generation
 4 infatuated with its own culture and presuppositions. Nor can we glorify God by
 5 making Scripture say its own opposite through grammar or archaeological and
 6 anthropological interpretations.

7 **God has specific mandates regarding governance.** The Bible is full of
 8 directives regarding how God wishes His people to be ruled. Always present, with
 9 their nagging influences and ungodly culture, were the surrounding idolatrous
 10 nations with their perverse modes of leadership that seemed to be more attractive
 11 to God's people than God's simple way. God wanted His own nation separated,
 12 set apart, distinct, different.⁸

13 Throughout the Old Testament governing modes changed, and godliness waxed
 14 and waned as surrounding cultures impacted Israel. The Scriptures are the Great

⁷ Quite outside the realm of this paper is the question of who God is. "It is hardly possible," writes Catharina Halkes, "to call to mind a single feminist theologian, whatever her phase of development may be, who does not find the image of the Father-God a challenge and a direct confrontation" (Catharina Halkes, "The Themes of Protest in Feminist Theology against God the Father," in J.-B. Metz and E. Schillebeeckx, eds., *God as Father?*, Concilium:Religion in the Eighties, 143 [New York: Seabury Press, 1981], p. 103). One of the most outspoken was the radical, post-Christian, lesbian feminist Mary Daly in her book, *Beyond God the Father*, p. 17: "If God is male then male is God."

⁸ "God Himself . . . had separated Abraham from his idolatrous kindred, that the patriarch might educate his family apart from the seductive influences . . . in Mesopotamia, and that the true faith might be preserved in its purity by his descendants." *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 141, 142.

1 Controversy story of how culture influenced or God's ways won out in the hearts
2 of the people.

- 3 1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*. God's first and highest choice for government
4 was through the family, where the father gently leads and the mother
5 governs and nurtures wisely. This is what has commonly come to be
6 known as the patriarchy: father was both patriarch and priest in one
7 person. These roles were bestowed by birthright, and the patriarch
8 received direct guidance from God who was Father and Leader
9 supreme.⁹ This family rule was meant to protect women, not denigrate
10 them. Biblical laws protected women from abuse, rape, and being
11 enslaved in marriage.¹⁰
- 12 2. *Prophets and Kings*. Later God allowed the tribes to choose a king,
13 though it was seen as a rejection of His fatherly, informal theocracy (1
14 Samuel 8:7).¹¹ Although Israel's monarchy was still to be a theocracy at

⁹ Patriarchy has been under fire recently in some quarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church with a YouTube video gone viral. Trisha Famisaran, "Repenting of Patriarchy and Heterosexism."

¹⁰ For example, as one answer to Dr. Famisaran's thrusts that women were traded like cattle and slaves in marriage, see Ellen G. White's comments on the dowry in *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 188, 189. God's way was to protect and provide for women.

¹¹ "The days of Israel's greatest prosperity had been those in which they acknowledged Jehovah as their King—when the laws and the government which He had established were regarded as superior to those of all other nations. Moses had declared to Israel concerning the commandments of the Lord: 'This is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations, which shall hear all these statutes, and say, Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' Deuteronomy 4:6. But by departing from God's law the Hebrews had failed to become the people that God desired to make them, and then all the evils which were the

1 heart, with God as primary Leader, the history of that monarchy is a sad
2 story of the failures of God's people to follow the Lord fully. Here God
3 desired to lead His people through the direct guidance of the prophets
4 and priests in advising the kings. They rebelled at every turn, constantly
5 seeking the idolatrous customs and cultures of the surrounding nations.
6 Eventually God allowed both the northern and southern nations to be
7 taken into captivity as judgment for the perversions of God's people.
8 God's governance was thwarted and undercut.¹²

9 Women of Influence

10 Amid the tumults of the Old Testament narrative are many stories of women.
11 Let us briefly examine a few of the women of the Old Testament to understand
12 their leadership functions and the power and influence they exerted.

result of their own sin and folly they charged upon the government of God.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 605.

¹² “The Lord had, through His prophets, foretold that Israel would be governed by a king; but it does not follow that this form of government was best for them or according to His will. He permitted the people to follow their own choice, because they refused to be guided by His counsel. Hosea declares that God gave them a king in His anger. Hosea 13:11. When men choose to have their own way, without seeking counsel from God, or in opposition to His revealed will, He often grants their desires, in order that, through the bitter experience that follows, they may be led to realize their folly and to repent of their sin. Human pride and wisdom will prove a dangerous guide. That which the heart desires contrary to the will of God will in the end be found a curse rather than a blessing.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 605, 606.

1 **Eve.**¹³ God created man and woman in His own image. He did not create two
 2 males or two females. Together the first family was to constitute God’s perfect
 3 image in marriage and procreate to fill the whole earth. Together they were to have
 4 dominion.

5 Eve was not leader, Adam was.¹⁴ But she ultimately led Adam into temptation.
 6 So Eve was a woman of influence, yet she was not head.¹⁵

7 Eve has been said to have been a priest. However, grammatical gymnastics
 8 have been used to draw this inference. Eve did not qualify as a patriarchal priest,
 9 for she was not a patriarch. We should also note that God had not even set up the
 10 Levitical priesthood yet. Eve could not be a priest. It is anachronistic even to imply
 11 such.¹⁶

¹³ Genesis 3:20, 4:21; 2 Corinthians 11:3, 1 Tim. 2:13.

¹⁴ Paul was clear that Adam was leader of the first home (1 Timothy 2:12-15) and leader of humanity. Even though Adam was not first in sin, he was held accountable for the first sin (1 Corinthians 15:22).

¹⁵ “Eve had been perfectly happy by her husband’s side in her Eden home; but like restless modern Eves, she was flattered with the hope of entering a higher sphere than that which God had assigned her. In attempting to rise above her original position, she fell far below it. A similar result will be reached by all who are unwilling to take up cheerfully their life duties in accordance with God’s plan. In their efforts to reach positions for which He has not fitted them, many are leaving vacant the place where they might be a blessing. In their desire for a higher sphere, many have sacrificed true womanly dignity and nobility of character, and have left undone the very work that Heaven appointed them.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 59.

¹⁶ It was suggested that Eve was a priest because of biblical linguistics and clothing. (Jacques B. Doukhan, “Women Priests in Israel: A Case for Their Absence,” *Women in Ministry*, pp. 29-43.) However, these arguments are anachronistic, as no priesthood had even been assigned in Genesis 3 and 4. For further discussion, see P. Gerard Damsteegt, “Eve, a Priest in Eden,” *Prove All Things*, pp. 123-129.

1 **Sarah.**¹⁷ On her way to becoming mother of the faithful, Sarah had huge
 2 lessons of faith to learn. When she could not birth the promised child (or any child
 3 for that matter), she proffered her maid, Hagar, instead of waiting in faith, knowing
 4 that God would finally come through in His own way. Finally, in their old age,
 5 God gave Sarah and Abraham their promised seed, Isaac. Sarah becomes a symbol
 6 of living by faith and not by works in spite of her faithless example (Galatians
 7 4:22-31). However influential her life, Sarah was never priest or leader of the
 8 family. “Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord” (1 Peter 3:5-6).

9 **Jochebed.**¹⁸ God uses woman to implant character traits in her young children
 10 as she tenderly nurses her little ones and gently guides and nourishes her family.

11 Moses had a godly Hebrew upbringing by his birth mother before the
 12 polytheistic Egyptian education could impact him. Jochebed was a lowly slave, but
 13 through Providence she was allowed to rear baby Moses in the ways of God,
 14 despite evil Pharaoh’s commands.¹⁹ For she was safe under the umbrella of
 15 another, unnamed woman, whose heart the Lord touched: Pharaoh’s daughter.

¹⁷ Genesis 11:29, 30, 31; 12:5, 11, 17; 16:1-3, 5-8; 17:15, 17, 19, 21; 18:6, 9-15; 20:2, 14, 16, 18; 21:1-3, 6, 7, 9, 12; 23:1, 2, 19; 24:36, 67; 25:10, 12; 49:31; Isaiah 51:2; Romans 4:19; 9:9; Hebrews 11:11; 1 Peter 3:6.

¹⁸ Exodus 2:1-10; 6:20, Numbers 26:59.

¹⁹ “How far-reaching in its results was the influence of that one Hebrew woman, and she an exile and a slave! The whole future life of Moses, the great mission which he fulfilled as the leader of Israel, testifies to the importance of the work of the Christian mother. There is no other work that can equal this.” *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 244.

1 It was not until about the age of twelve²⁰ that Moses was taken to the royal
2 palace to live with this adoptive mother and was given the formal Egyptian
3 education that would train him to be a possible future pharaoh. However, residual
4 influences from his birth mother's early training proved to be stronger than the
5 higher education of the Egyptians. When Moses came of age he chose to identify
6 himself with the people of God instead of becoming the future monarch of Egypt
7 (Hebrews 11:24-27)—all thanks to his mother, Jochebed.

8 **Miriam**²¹ was the older sister of Moses and stood watch over the small basket
9 boat. As an adult she led the women in the Song of Moses. While Moses was the
10 definite chosen leader and Aaron and his descendants were appointed as priests,
11 Miriam as prophetess was richly endowed with the gifts of poetry and music, and
12 “in the affections of the people and the honor of Heaven she stood second only to
13 Moses and Aaron.”²²

14 Unfortunately, a major crisis in leadership transpired when Miriam and Aaron
15 registered their bitter discontent, claiming that Moses as leader of the people was
16 power hungry and taking all the glory to himself. After all the complaining and
17 grumbling of the multitudes, Moses now faced an even nastier, more personal
18 assault when his own brother and sister, jealous for more power, attacked him so

²⁰ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 244.

²¹ Exodus 15:20, 21; Numbers 12:1, 4, 5, 10, 15; 20:1; 26:59; Deuteronomy 24:9; 1 Chronicles 4:17; 1 Chronicles 6:3; Micah 6:4.

²² *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 382.

1 wrongly. God was not happy and severely punished this mother in Israel for her
2 insubordination in asserting herself with envy above the place that God designed
3 for her and causing disaffection in the camp.

4 Apparently Miriam was responsible for this rebellion, as she was the one who
5 was banished and scourged with leprosy—a symbol of sin and rebellion.²³

6 Later a similar rebellion for leadership power erupted when Korah “aspired to
7 the dignity of the priesthood. The bestowal upon Aaron and his house of the
8 priestly office, which had formerly devolved upon the first-born son of every
9 family, had given rise to jealousy and dissatisfaction.... He finally conceived the
10 bold design of overthrowing both the civil and the religious authority.”²⁴ After the
11 terrible judgment on the instigators of this rebellion, ultimately the rod of Aaron
12 “settled the question of the priesthood.”²⁵ To this day, Aaron’s rod that budded is
13 in the Heavenly Sanctuary in the ark next to the ten commandments²⁶ as a reminder
14 in the last days that God’s order of leadership is still valid for His Remnant

²³ Others afflicted with leprosy punitively were Gehazi (2 Kings 5:23-26) and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:18-20). Both persons demonstrated greed and covetousness. Speaking of Miriam, Ellen White says: God “saw that the heart was leprous with sin, and he caused the plague of the heart to be revealed in the dreadful judgment of physical leprosy” (Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1892).

²⁴ Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*, November 12, 1903.

²⁵ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 403. “After this miracle of divine power, the authority of the priesthood was no longer called into question. This wonderful rod was preserved to be frequently shown to the people to remind them of the past, to prevent them from murmuring, and again calling in question to whom the priesthood rightfully belonged.” Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1115.

²⁶ Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 32. This idea was mentioned to me by Teresa Horning.

1 church—to prevent them from calling in question to whom the priesthood
2 rightfully belongs.²⁷

3 **Daughters of Zelophehad,**²⁸ came before Moses and the other leaders
4 requesting that, even though their father had no sons to inherit his portion of land,
5 his four daughters be allowed to possess his inheritance. Here was a problem of the
6 tribal distribution of lands. If a woman with rights to land from a given tribe
7 married out of her tribe, her land could be absorbed by her husband of the other
8 tribe, and eventually a tribe might lose all their properties. Therefore should the
9 inheritance properties be transferred only to men, the heads of household, so it
10 would always remain in the tribe?

11 God's answer: No. Daughters should also be allowed their rightful land. "The
12 daughters of Zelophehad speak right: thou shalt surely give them a possession of
13 an inheritance among their father's brethren" (Numbers 27:7). Here we find that
14 God is concerned about fairness of distribution to women as well as men.

15 [Parenthetically, this teaches me God is interested in seeing that a woman is
16 paid justly for her work. This means the wage scale in practice in the Seventh-day
17 Adventist Church should constantly be re-examined. Is it right to base
18 remuneration on ordination of either men or women? No cloud of simony should
19 rest over that holy ceremony. Experienced women workers should receive the

²⁷ Ellen G. White Comments, *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1115.

²⁸ Numbers 26:33; 27:1, 7; 36:2, 6, 10, 11; Joshua 17:3; 1 Chronicles 7:15.

1 same amount of pay as experienced men.. We have erred in the past in our
 2 remuneration scales towards single women. This was not right. But much has been
 3 done to ensure that pay scales are more fair.]

4 The Daughters of Zelophehad and God’s instruction on their right to receiving
 5 properties ought to be instructive for us today on how to pay women workers
 6 fairly. Salary should not be based on ordination.

7 **Deborah**²⁹ is described as a prophetess. She lived during a time of apostasy in
 8 the time of the judges. “There was dwelling in Israel a woman illustrious for her
 9 piety, and through her the Lord chose to deliver His people. Her name was
 10 Deborah. She was known as a prophetess, and in the absence of the usual
 11 magistrates, the people had sought to her for counsel and justice.”³⁰

12 Note, the Bible does not state that she sat at the city gate³¹ where usually the
 13 elders met to decide on cases and give judgments, and where all the legal matters
 14 were settled. Deborah did not “judge” in the usual manner. Rather, people came to
 15 seek her at home, under the palm tree of Deborah (Judges 4:5), instead the public
 16 place like at the gate of the city.

17 Deborah gave “judgment” (Hebrew mishpat) to the people privately when they
 18 came to her. When the text says that “Deborah ... was judging Israel at that
 19 time” (Judges 4:4), the Hebrew verb shâphat, “to judge,” in this context does

²⁹ Judges 4:4, 5, 9, 10, 14; 5:1, 7, 12, 15.

³⁰ Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God*, p. 37.

³¹ cf. Deuteronomy 21:19; 2 Samuel 15:2; and Ruth 4 where the elders and judges met to offer judgments and legal advice. Thanks to Dr. Michael Hasel for this insight.

1 not mean “to rule or govern,” but rather has the sense “decide controversy,
 2 discriminate between persons in civil, political, domestic and religious
 3 questions.” That is evident because the next verse tells how she was “judging”:
 4 she “used to sit . . . under the palm tree of Deborah” and “the people of Israel
 5 came up to her for judgment.” This is not a picture of public leadership like that
 6 of a king or queen, but private settling of disputes through both arbitration and
 7 judicial decisions. If we decide to take this as an example for today, we might
 8 see it as justification for women to serve as counselors and as civil judges. But
 9 the text of Scripture does not say that Deborah ruled over God's people.³²

10 She was not a priest or elder, but as a prophetess, Deborah had a message from
 11 the Lord to the one who was then judge of the land—the fifth judge of the book of
 12 Judges. She deferred to Barak, who had “been designated by the Lord Himself as
 13 the one chosen to deliver Israel, and had received the assurance that God would go
 14 with him and subdue their enemies.”³³

15 Note, she did not rise up to call out and lead the armies herself, but challenged
 16 Barak to do as God seems to have already instructed him to do. Barak, faithless
 17 and reticent to obey, replied that he would only go if she went, to “thus support his

³² Wayne Grudem, *Evangelical Feminism & Biblical Truth* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers Inc., 2004), p. 133. He says, “The book of Judges treats Deborah somewhat differently from the other judges used by God to deliver Israel. In each case God or the Holy Spirit is specifically said to call or empower the judge: Othniel: “the LORD raised up a deliverer for the people of Israel, who saved them, Othniel the son of Kenaz” (Judges 3:9); Ehud: “the LORD raised up for them a deliverer, Ehud, the son of Gera, the Benjaminite, a left-handed man” (3:15); Gideon: “And the LORD turned to him and said, ‘Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?’” (6:14); Jephthah: “Then the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh” (11:29); Samson: “And the woman bore a son and called his name Samson. And the young man grew, and the LORD blessed him. And the Spirit of the LORD began to stir him in Mahaneh-dan” (13:24–25). By contrast, we read of Deborah: “Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time” (4:4) (p. 135).

³³ *Daughters of God*, p. 37.

1 efforts by her influence and counsel.”³⁴ Deborah consented, but she told Barak that
2 the credit for the victory God would give would consequently go to a woman.

3 Even though Deborah would go with the army, the Bible never calls Deborah a
4 mighty warrior or general of the troops. It is Barak who (finally) summons the
5 troops from Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, who in turn follow him (Judges
6 5:10). When the Lord routed Sisera, Deborah the prophetess had a message from
7 the Lord to Barak: “Up; for this is the day in which the Lord hath delivered Sisera
8 into thine hands! is not the Lord gone out before thee?” But then it was Barak who
9 led the armies “down from Mt. Tabor, and ten thousand men after him” (vs. 14). It
10 was Barak who led the charge “by the edge of the sword” (vs. 15).

11 Barak led the troops, but as Deborah predicted, accolades for victory and the
12 slaying of the Canaanite Sisera went to Jael, another woman, who was not even an
13 Israelite! And though Deborah and Barak were both celebrated in the Song of
14 Deborah, it was Deborah who was extolled not as a judge, not as a mighty warrior,
15 but as a mother to her people (Judges 5:7).

16 However, ultimately in the book of Hebrews, not Deborah, not Jael, but weak,
17 vacillating Barak is finally celebrated in the annals of the once-faithless-who-
18 finally-grow-the-faith God requires to conquer nations (Hebrews 11:32).

³⁴ Ibid.

1 Deborah was courageous and godly, and did everything she could to bring
2 revival to God’s people in a very dark time. She was never priest or elder, but was
3 God’s instrument, being, as she called herself, a mother in Israel.

4 **Abigail**³⁵ was the diplomatic, wise wife of the wicked Nabal. When a servant
5 advised her that her husband had refused hospitality and insulted David and his
6 men, she quickly packed the mules with supplies in an attempt to pacify the angry
7 men. A mindlessly submissive woman would have hidden behind even an evil
8 husband, allowing him to dig his own grave along with hers. But this righteous
9 woman of influence understood the true principle of submission—“as it is fit in the
10 Lord”³⁶—and with kindness, graciousness, and gentleness ministered to the furious
11 David and his ranks.

12 Upon meeting him, Abigail “fell before David on her face, and bowed herself to
13 the ground, and fell at his feet, and said, ‘Upon me, my lord, upon me let this
14 iniquity be, and let thine handmaid, I pray, speak in thine audience’” (1 Samuel
15 25:23, 24).

³⁵ 1 Samuel 25:3, 14, 18, 23, 32, 36, 39, 40, 42; 27:3; 30:5; 2 Samuel 2:2, 3:3, 17:25; 1 Chronicles 3:1.

³⁶ Colossians 3:18. “From this history, we can see that there are circumstances under which it is proper for a woman to act promptly and independently, moving with decision in the way she knows to be the way of the Lord. The wife is to stand by the side of the husband as his equal, sharing all the responsibilities of life, rendering due respect to him who has selected her for his lifelong companion.

“The Lord would have the wife render respect unto her husband, but always as it is fit in the Lord. In the character of Abigail, the wife of Nabal, we have an illustration of womanhood after the order of Christ, while her husband illustrates what a man may become who yields himself to the control of Satan.” *Daughters of God*, p. 43.

1 Here Abigail falls on her face (emphasized three times), apologizes for her
2 husband's foolish "iniquity," and humbly takes full blame for all his actions. As a
3 "son of Belial" and a "fool," she explains, he cannot be held responsible for his
4 own actions, so Abigail begged David not to hold them against him. She took all
5 the blame on herself, as if it were all her fault: "I pray thee, forgive the trespass of
6 thine handmaid" (1 Samuel 25:28).

7 By taking responsibility for this huge mistake and submitting as a mere servant,
8 this wealthy woman apologized for an action she herself did not even do, and thus
9 she averted the pending disaster on Nabal's household.

10 Her submissive, sweet, non-violent confrontation shamed the future king of
11 Israel because it exposed his retaliatory motives. Without her intervention, David
12 and his men would probably have slain the entire household of Nabal. Abigail's
13 righteous actions won her the respect, then love, of David. After her husband's
14 premature death, David sent for her to come marry him, so he could care for her
15 the rest of her life.

16 Abigail demonstrates the depths of submission with godly wisdom. Far from
17 being independent and non-submissive, her actions were the epitome of submission
18 to her husband, taking all responsibility for a poor decision she never agreed with!
19 She took his blame and worked quickly to avert disaster to him and his estate.

1 **Jezebel**³⁷ **and Athaliah**³⁸ tried to turn Israel away from God during the revival
2 and reformations of Elijah and Elisha.

3 King Ahab married Jezebel, daughter of the Sidonian King Ethbaal, high priest
4 of Baal (1 Kings 16:31).³⁹ When she moved to Samaria she brought with her 450
5 priests of Baal and 400 priests of Asherah who were said to “eat at her table,”
6 which probably means she personally supported all these priests. They in turn
7 established lewd idolatry all over the kingdom and took the nation of Israel into
8 pagan worship. Not only was she providing the opportunity to worship Baal, she
9 seemed to be committed to stamping out the worship of the true God, for she killed
10 many of the prophets of God (1 Kings 18:4). God sent a drought to call his people
11 to repentance.

12 Carmel was an all-out struggle for religious supremacy between God and Baal,
13 Elijah and Jezebel (through her hundreds of prophets). When fire comes down on
14 Elijah’s altar of the Lord, the people exclaim, “The Lord, He is God!” Elijah has
15 the priests of Baal all slain. Understandably, Jezebel was furious, and sent a death
16 threat to the terror-stricken Elijah: “So let the gods do to me, and more also, if I
17 make not thy life as the life of one of them by tomorrow about this time” (1Kings
18 19:2). Elijah ran for his life.

³⁷ 1 Kings 16:31, 18:4, 13, 19; 19:1, 2; 21:5, 7, 11, 14, 15, 23, 25; 2 Kings 9:7, 10, 22, 30, 36, 37; Revelation 2:20 ff.

³⁸ 2 Kings 8:26; 11:1, 2, 3, 13, 14, 20; 1 Chronicles 8:26; 2 Chronicles 22:2, 10, 11, 12; 23:12, 13, 21; 24:7; Ezra 8:7.

³⁹ Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 114.

1 Later, when her weak, wishy-washy husband lusted after the vineyards of a
2 neighbor, Jezebel took action to kill the righteous Naboth in order to append his
3 properties to the royal palace grounds.

4 Strong-willed, evil, manipulative, unrepentant, Jezebel the prophetess becomes
5 the ultimate symbol of treachery, idolatry, and immorality in Revelation
6 (Revelation 2:20ff).

7 Her daughter Athaliah was worse! She actually became ruling monarch of
8 Judah. She coached her son King Ahaziah in evil ways (2 Chronicles 22:3). When
9 he died, she annihilated any remaining heirs to the throne (at least, so she thought)
10 and proceeded to rule the land single-handedly. But unbeknownst to her, her
11 grandson Joash, the heir to the throne, was preserved in the inner temple for six
12 years by Ahaziah's sister, Jehosheba. At the coronation of Joash, Athaliah's
13 screaming of "treason!" backfired, and she herself was slain outside the temple at
14 the Horse Gate. So ended the ruthless rule of the sole feminist monarch recorded in
15 Scripture.

16 **Huldah**,⁴⁰ a prophetess during the monarchy of Josiah, was highly regarded by
17 the king and his counselors. She gave prophetic messages from God to the king.
18 However, she was not anointed and was never an elder or priest. Yet she was

⁴⁰ 2 Kings 22:14, 2 Chronicles 34:22.

1 highly respected by the king and his counselors and gave wonderful counsel to the
2 godly king during a terrible time in the history of Judah.

3 Like our own Ellen White, Huldah was a prophetess and was a godly woman of
4 great influence. A prophetess speaks on behalf of God as His messenger. Her word
5 has authority because it is God's Word. She is not an elder or priest, yet her
6 message could not be more authoritative, because the Lord speaks through her. The
7 office of prophet was not a rulership position, yet God surely used prophetesses as
8 well as prophets in time of crisis in sacred history.

9 **Esther**,⁴¹ the lovely orphaned Jewish girl, became the queen of Ahasuerus of
10 Persia. When the wicked Haman worked out a ploy to eliminate all Jews, Esther's
11 adoptive Jewish father, Mordecai, sent her a special message. He said Esther had
12 providentially become queen for this time; if she kept her mouth shut and
13 pretended not to be Jewish, God would still deliver his people, but she and her
14 household would not survive (Esther 4:13, 14). God had worked ahead to bring this
15 woman of character to an incredible place of influence to deliver His people.

16 Queen Esther called a fast, and took the great risk of going in to see the king
17 unbeckoned. The rest of the book tells how Haman's plot was foiled through what
18 we take to be providential interventions.

⁴¹ The book of Esther.

1 Esther, God's woman of the hour, acted bravely and decisively to influence the
2 king to call for Haman's death sentence (who died, ironically, on gallows he had
3 erected for Mordecai). Mordecai was elevated to prime minister of the land, and he
4 and Esther figured out a way to deliver the Jews in spite of the unchangeable law
5 of the Medes and the Persians. The Jewish people still celebrate their deliverance
6 through Esther during Purim.

7 Yet, for all her courage, God did not choose to deliver the nation by calling
8 Esther to be a priest or an elder. But she was a vital key to the deliverance of God's
9 people from the genocide designed by God's enemy.

10 **Conclusion.** It would be impossible in this short paper to mention all the Old
11 Testament women.

12 And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Rebekah,
13 Rachel, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba, as well as others such as the woman of
14 Shunem. "Women received their dead raised to life again. Others were tortured,
15 not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Still others
16 had trial of mockings and scourgings, yes, and of chains and imprisonment.... And
17 all these, having obtained a good testimony through faith, did not receive the
18 promise."⁴²

⁴² cf. Hebrews 11:32, 35ff.

1 Women were highly influential and important in the history of God's people.
2 Some had godly influences on their children to the third and fourth generation.
3 Some faithfully transmitted the Word of God to those inquiring. Some were strong
4 to do righteousness when all the men around were cowardly. Some women were so
5 evil the nation of Israel never really recovered. The stories of these women are
6 instructive examples of faith and unfaith.

7 These were women of influence, all. Not priests, not elders, but yes, they were
8 women of influence for good or evil.

9

10

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12