

# **Women in Ministry From a Biblical Perspective**

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## **Psalm 68:11-12**

**11** Adonai gives the command; the women with the good news are a mighty army. **12** Kings and their armies are fleeing, fleeing, while the women at home divide the spoil.

## **Historical Roles of Women in Jewish Ministry -**

“Bernadette Brooten has studied inscriptional evidence in ancient synagogues and noted that women served as heads of synagogues (*archisynagogos*), leaders, and elders (*presbuterai*) within the Jewish community, all very public roles. What the texts don’t always tell us, archaeology does. There, in these sayings, inscribed on the stone sarcophagi and tombs of ancient Jewish women, we are told that they held many of the leadership roles within the synagogues that have been traditionally ascribed only to men.” From Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1982). History show five areas that women served in ancient synagogues: Head of the Synagogue, Leader, Elder, Mother of the Synagogue, and member of the Priestly Class.

## ***Older Covenant reasons for Women in Ministry –***

### **God created an “Equal” for man -**

#### **Genesis 2:18**

**18** ADONAI, God, said, "It isn't good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him."

The word “rib” means side and the phrase “help meet” means equal. Someone to help Adam meet all of the challenges he would face in the future. Adam and Havah would face them together.

**Hebrew - `ezer (Strong's 05828) – a female helper  
Miryam (Prophet) -**

**Exodus 15:20-21**

**20** Also Miryam the prophet, sister of Aharon, took a tambourine in her hand; and all the women went out after her with tambourines, dancing,  
**21** as Miryam sang to them: "Sing to ADONAI, for he is highly exalted! The horse and its rider he threw in the sea!"

**Micah 6:4**

**4** I brought you up from the land of Egypt. I redeemed you from a life of slavery. I sent Moshe, Aharon and Miryam to lead you.

Miryam was a Prophet, who led her people out of Egypt and in song and in dance.

**Kingdom of Priests (Men & Women) –**

**Exodus 19:6**

**6** *"and you will be a kingdom of cohanim (priests) for me, a nation set apart. These are the words you are to speak to the people of Isra'el."*

All Isra'el, men and women, were called to bring the Good News of the Messiah to the rest of the world, which would entail teaching and preaching. This *calling* on the Israelites was a biblical *command* directly from ADONAI.

**God will pour out His Spirit on ALL flesh (Men & Women) -**

**Joel 2:28-29**

**28** "After this, ***I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity.*** Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will see visions; **29** and also on male and female slaves in those days I will pour out my Spirit.

God will pour out His Ruach on ALL humanity. One of the ways He will pour it out is through the gift of prophecy. As we see in the B'rit Chadashah, the office of Prophet is part of the five-fold ministry. "Furthermore, he gave some people as emissaries, some as prophets, some

as proclaimers of the Good News, and some as shepherds and teachers.” – Ephesians 4:11. Could this be what ADONAI was referring to in this passage? Rav. Sha’ul gave instructions on this gift being used in the Congregation in I Corinthians 14.

### **D’vorah (Woman Judge & Prophet) –**

#### **Judges 4:4-5**

**4** Now D'vorah, a woman and a prophet, the wife of Lapidot, was judging Isra'el at that time. **5** She used to sit under D'vorah's Palm between Ramah and Beit-El, in the hills of Efrayim; and the people of Isra'el would come to her for judgment.

#### **1 Chronicles 17:6**

**6** Everywhere I traveled with all Isra'el, did I ever speak a word to any of the judges of Isra'el, whom I ordered *to shepherd my people Isra'el...*

#### **1 Chronicles 17:10**

**10...** as they did from the time I ordered judges *to be over* my people Isra'el;

### **Many times the Word of God refers to both genders, male & female -**

The Talmudic sages were well aware that the Hebrew word in Deut. 11:19, (*bneikhem* “your sons,” or, better translated, “your children”) refers to both males and females. It is universally acknowledged that the grammatical function of the male gender in Hebrew is that of a common gender, encompassing both male and female. Professor Sh’muel Safrai from the Hebrew University says the Mishnah specifies areas within the Temple which non-priests were allowed, but does not differentiate between men and women. The Wycliffe Bible Commentary says, “Discrimination on the grounds of sex was foreign to the spirit of the Older Covenant.”

### **Hulda (Prophet) –**

#### **II Chronicles 34:22**

**22** So Hilkiyahu and those the king had ordered went to Huldah the prophet, the wife of Shalum the son of Tok'hat, the son of Hasrat, keeper of

the wardrobe - she lived in the Second Quarter of Yerushalayim - and spoke with her about this.

The Southern Gate of the Temple was named after this same Huldah. This is a pretty impressive honor. The same steps where it is believed that Kefa gave his stirring message on Shavu'ot and 3,000 came to faith and were immersed!

## **Ester (Queen of Persia & Champion of the rights of the Jews)**

### **Ester 9:29-32**

**29 Then Ester the queen, the daughter of Avichayil, and Mordekhai the Jew, gave full written authority to confirm a second letter about Purim. 30** He sent copies of it to all the Jews, to the 127 provinces of the kingdom of Achashverosh, ensuring their peace and security **31** and requiring the observance of these days of Purim at their designated times, as Mordekhai the Jew and Ester the queen had enjoined them, and as they had established for themselves and their descendants concerning the matters of fasting and lamenting. **32 At Ester's order these matters of Purim were confirmed and put in writing in the book.**

Ester was the Queen of Persia and authority to put laws into writing.

## ***Newer Covenant reasons for Women in Ministry –***

### **Luke 11:27-28**

**27** As Yeshua was saying these things, a woman in the crowd raised her voice to call out, "How blessed is the mother that gave birth to you and nursed you from her breast!" **28** But he said, "Far more blessed are those who hear the word of God and obey it!"

This verse seems to raise Torah observance for women above motherhood. In order to observe Torah, a woman must study it. In Luke 10 Yeshua talks about the importance of Torah study versus waiting tables. Yeshua would be considered a true champion of women's rights by today's standards. The Newer Covenant as well as the Older Covenant show no gender specific practice with respect to Torah study.

Yeshua, after his resurrection, appeared to women first in all four Gospels. (Matt. 28:1-10; Mark 16:9-11; Luke 24:10-11; Yochanan 20:11-18). The

whole message upon which the gospel was based, the resurrection of Yeshua, was first put in the hands of women. The writers of the Gospels say that Yeshua sent the women to testify directly to the apostles themselves.

Mark states that the apostles were rebuked by Yeshua when they refused to take the women's testimony seriously.

### **Mark 16:14**

**14** Later, Yeshua appeared to the Eleven as they were eating, and he reproached them for their lack of trust and their spiritual insensitivity in not having believed those who had seen him after he had risen.

Was the Great Commission given by Yeshua in Matthew 28 only for men?

### **Matthew 28:19-20**

**19** Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim, immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, **20** and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age."

In the Book of Acts and Sha'ul's letters, women are depicted as apostles, prophets, ministers, proclaimers of the gospel, teachers, disciplers, home congregational leaders, businesswomen, and influential rulers over large households that included adult male servants (Acts 2:17-18; 5:14; 12:12; 16:13-14, 40; 17:4, 11-12; 18:25-26; 21:9; cf. Eph. 4:11; Rom. 16:1-2, 7. The Gospels, Acts, and Sha'ul's letters show that women were fully involved in the roles that leaders would have. We see women preaching, proclaiming, leading, teaching, discipling, and exercising powerful influence. This is what would be done by what we consider today as Ordained Clergy.

## **Examples of women leaders in the Newer Covenant -**

### **Miryam (Talmid) -**

#### **Luke 10:39 & 42**

**39** She had a sister called Miryam who also sat at the Lord's feet and heard what he had to say.

**42** But there is only one thing that is essential. Miryam has chosen the right thing, and it won't be taken away from her.

Miryam sat at the feet of Yeshua as any Talmid would who was there for instruction by the Rabbi. She understood the importance of Torah and even though it was not required for a woman to study it, it was not forbidden.

### **Evodia & Syntyche (Evangelists & Congregational Leaders) -**

#### **Philippians 4:2-3**

**2** I beg Evodia and I beg Syntyche to agree with each other in union with the Lord. **3** I also request you, loyal Syzygus, to help these women; for they have worked hard proclaiming the Good News with me, along with Clement and the rest of my fellow-workers whose names are in the Book of Life.

Rav. Sha'ul recognizes Evodia and Syntyche as leaders of this work in Philippi. The "work" that he is referring to means what is required in preaching and teaching. Note that Sha'ul talks about them laboring with him and not under him. Gerald F. Hawthorne in the Word Biblical Commentary, says that Sha'ul is using a metaphor which means "to fight together side by side." They may have even helped found this Body of Believers with him. The name Syzygus, which means mate or partner, could also be one of the leaders of this work.

### **Nympha (Congregational Leader) -**

#### **Colossians 4:15**

**15** Give my greetings to the brothers in Laodicea, also to Nympha and the congregation that meets in her home.

### **Priscilla (Teacher & Congregational Leader) -**

#### **Acts 18:26**

**26** He began to speak out boldly in the synagogue; but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the Way of God in fuller detail.

#### **Romans 16:3-5**

**3** Give my greetings to Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers for the Messiah Yeshua. **4** They risked their necks to save my life; not only I thank

them, but also all the Messianic communities among the Gentiles. **5** And give my greetings to the congregation that meets in their house.

In ancient literature, when one name is placed before another it often symbolized a place of order. In the Greek, Pricilla is always mentioned first, that she was the spiritually gifted one and probably the leader of the Messianic congregation that met in the home of her and her husband Aquila.

### **Lydia (Apostle & Leader of a Minyan of Women) -**

#### **Acts 16:13-15**

**13** then on Shabbat, we went outside the gate to the riverside, where we understood a minyan met. We sat down and began speaking to the women who had gathered there. **14** One of those listening was a woman from the city of Thyatira named Lydia, a dealer in fine purple cloth. She was already a "God-fearer," and the Lord opened up her heart to respond to what Sha'ul was saying. **15** After she and the members of her household had been immersed, she gave us this invitation: "If you consider me to be faithful to the Lord, come and stay in my house." And she insisted till we went.

Rav. Sha'ul is seen here discussing and interpreting scripture with women. Lydia was one of the first women in the Newer Covenant to accept the Good News.

### **Phoebe (Shamash) -**

#### **Romans 16:1-2**

**1** I am introducing to you our sister Phoebe, shamash of the congregation at Cenchrea, **2** so that you may welcome her in the Lord, as God's people should, and give her whatever assistance she may need from you; for she has been a big help to many people - including myself.

The Greek word *Diakonos* (Hebrew - shamash) is translated as minister in 23 other places in the Newer Covenant. In verse 2 the Greek word *Prostates* (helper), according to Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon, means to set over, to rule, superintend, preside over, protect and care for. Phoebe was a leader in the Messianic Community who nurtured the Body of Messiah and Sha'ul.

## **Tavita (Talmid) –**

### **Acts 9:35-36**

**35** ... Now in Yafo there was a talmidah named Tavita **36** (which means "gazelle"); she was always doing tzedakah and other good deeds.

## **Hannah (Prophetess) –**

### **Luke 2:36-38**

**36** There was also a prophet named Hannah Bat-P'nu'el, of the tribe of Asher. She was a very old woman -- she had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage **37** and had remained a widow ever since; now she was eighty-four. She never left the Temple grounds but worshipped there night and day, fasting and praying. **38** She came by at that moment and began thanking God and speaking about the child to everyone who was waiting for Yerushalayim to be liberated.

## **Junia (Emissary) –**

### **Romans 16:7**

**7** Greetings to Andronicus and Junia, relatives of mine who were in prison with me. They are well known among the emissaries; also they came to trust in the Messiah before I did.

Sha'ul recognized Junia as an Apostle. John Chrysostom commenting on this verse said "Oh how great is the devotion of this woman, that she should be even counted worthy of the appellation of apostle." He used Junia's sermon to the women of Constantinople as a sermon illustration showing encouragement to these women. From Berndadette Brooten, Junia, The Apostleship of Women, Women Priests (New York: Paulist Press, 1977)

## **Rav. Sha'ul makes his arguments for Women in Ministry -**

We've covered the scriptures in the Tanakh and the B'rit Chadashah that give scripture basis for Women in Ministry in the Word of God. Now let's take a look at what is commonly shown as Rav. Sha'ul's two reasons for women NOT being involved in ministry.

### **1 Corinthians 14:34-35**

**34** let the wives remain silent when the congregation meets; they are certainly not permitted to speak out. Rather, let them remain subordinate, as also the Torah says; **35** and if there is something they want to know, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak out in a congregational meeting.

Sha'ul is talking about women who are learners and not teachers. The is being addressed here is not about women teachers but a specific problem with women learners who seem to be speaking out of turn in some way. We cannot take this passage and use it to contradict the majority of Rav. Sha'ul's teachings in the B'rit Chadashah about women in ministry. It would contradict Sha'ul's own comments in 1 Corinthians 11:5 about women praying or prophesying in the assembly. Women cannot both be silent *and also* pray and prophesy!

### **1 Timothy 2:11-12**

**11** Let a woman learn in peace, fully submitted; **12** but I do not permit a woman to teach a man or exercise authority over him; rather, she is to remain at peace.

### **Greek - authenteo (Strong's 831) – Domineer or Usurp Authority**

The Greek word “authenteo” or “exercise authority” is better rendered “domineer over” and is an extremely negative term for authority. This verse argues against a leadership model that employs domination or usurping of power. It does not prohibit women from exercising proper authority — only against them domineering or usurping authority.

As we can clearly see, neither of these supposed prohibitions against Women in Ministry hold water. Rav. Sha'ul gives no biblical basis for Women NOT to be leaders in any area of ministry.

We have looked at the Tanakh and the B'rit Chadashah and have seen women in both covenants participating and leading ministry. What we have to decide is whether the prohibition of Women in Ministry is a man thing or a God thing. Strictly looking at what has been done by the Jewish or Christian culture is NOT enough to say that Women cannot be part of ministry leadership. I believe the Word of God shows they can. It is now up to us to decide if they will be!