

Ten Women Leaders in the Bible

Inspiring examples from the pages of Scripture

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In many traditions of the Church, there has been confusion and controversy about the roles of women in ministry. While people still debate what Paul meant in a few passages, there is strong evidence throughout Scripture that God intended women to take a leadership role. Here are 10 examples of women leaders in the Bible:

1. Judge

Judges 4 and 5 tell of the great leader Deborah. She was not only a judge, but also a prophet. Some try to argue that God called Deborah only because Barak refused to go to battle without her (Judges 4:8-9). But that ignores the fact Deborah held court before this male military leader came on the scene (Judges 4:5).

2. Exodus Leader

When the children of Israel miraculously crossed the Red Sea, Miriam was one of the first to pick up an instrument and lead in worship (Exodus 15:20). But this wasn't her only ministry role. Micah 6:4 names Miriam as a leader of the nation, along with Moses and Aaron.

3. Reformer

In 2 Kings 22, King Josiah finds the long-lost Book of the Law. Knowing the kingdom was in need of revival, he gathered some of the most trusted prophets. Although there were more prominent prophets on the scene at the time, like Jeremiah and Zephaniah, it's interesting that Huldah the prophetess had a leading role in the restoration.

4. Queen

A whole book of the Bible tells the story of this fearless leader. Esther risked her own life to save the lives of the Jewish people. And each year at Purim, Jews everywhere still reflect on Esther's story.

5. Disciple

While the twelve male disciples of Jesus are more familiar to most, Mary of Bethany was one of many women who followed Jesus (Luke 8:1-3). Sitting at the feet of a teacher, or rabbi, was a privilege normally reserved only for men. Yet in Luke 10:39 we find Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, assuming the posture of a student of the Lord. Mary Magdalene was the first person Jesus sent with the message of hope.

6. Witness

Although often confused with Mary of Bethany, Mary Magdalene was the first to see the risen Lord (John 20:14). It was Mary who received the task of proclaiming Jesus' resurrection to the other disciples, specifically the men. She was the first person Jesus sent with the message of hope. Some say this makes Mary the first apostle, or "sent one."

7. Businesswoman

Upon arriving in Philippi, Paul first went to the Jews. He found no synagogue, but he did find women praying at the river. Lydia, a merchant, responded to the message of Christ and offered hospitality to Paul and Silas (Acts 16:14-15). The believers later gathered at the home of this businesswoman and Early Church leader (Acts 16:40).

8. Deacon

Little is known about Phoebe except that she held the title of "deacon" (Romans 16:1). But many scholars believe Phoebe's role was to take Paul's letter to the church in Rome where she would have read it to the believers and even answered questions they may have had. What an amazing responsibility!

9. Teacher

Priscilla, along with her husband Aquila, was a business owner in Corinth who gave Paul lodging and perhaps a job. She was also a great teacher (Acts 18:26). It's of note that Luke lists Priscilla first, which may indicate she was the lead teacher of the two.

10. Prophets

This last one is actually more than one. And in fact, their story continues. Joel 2 foretold a time when God would pour out his Spirit on all flesh: "Your sons and daughters will prophesy" (verse 28). On the Day of Pentecost, Peter confirmed that time had come. And it is still true today! Any daughter of God has the full rights and privilege to declare His Word, testify to His salvation, and prophesy by His Spirit.