

profiles

The following are examples of profiles found in The CEB Women's Bible. The contributors have written about named and unnamed women in the Bible, and these profiles are placed throughout the text. Following these examples are the Indexes of every profile included in The CEB Women's Bible. Additionally—in the finished Bible—there is a listing of every single woman, named and unnamed, in the Bible.

Woman Caught in Adultery

John 7:53–8:11

The story of the woman caught in adultery can be viewed as a text of terror or a text of liberation, or both. The story is not in the original version of the Gospel of John, since our oldest manuscripts of the Gospel omit it. Other ancient manuscripts place it after John 7:36, John 21:25, or Luke 21:38.

On the one hand, the text shows the precarious situation of any woman in a patriarchal society where a woman is not free to determine her own sexuality apart from a male authority figure, whether father or husband. We have certainly all read news stories of the stoning to death of women in our own times. In such societies, the woman does not have control of her own body; adultery is a broad term that does not always include the woman's full consent and can even include rape. A woman also pays a higher price for infractions (notice that no one is questioning the male adulterer). Jesus skewers the "good old boys" network where "boys will be boys" while women must remain pure.

As a liberating text, it raises the woman to equality with the judgmental religious authorities and invites all of them to leave their various sins (one being no better or worse than another) and embrace abundant life. Much ink has been spilled guessing at what Jesus wrote in the sand. What do you think?

–Jaime Clark-Soles

Mary Magdalene

Matt 27:55-56, 61; 28:1-11; Mark 15:40-41, 47; 16:1-8;

Luke 8:2-3; 24:10; John 19:25; 20:1-2, 11-18

Mary Magdalene serves as gratitude's unofficial spokesperson. Jesus changed the course of her life, freeing her from issues that had long tormented her. In return, she led the ranks of women who followed him and supported his work. She enabled Jesus' ministry in the best sense of the word.

Gratitude fueled her actions. With courage the fleeing disciples couldn't muster, Mary Magdalene stayed near the cross during his crucifixion. She and other women refused to abandon him even during that gruesome, soul-gouging event.

Gratitude drove her to the tomb near dawn, brokenhearted, clutching spices to anoint the corpse. The disciples cowered in a hidden room, mired in uncertainty, while Mary Magdalene put herself where she believed she was most needed.

The beauty of her faithfulness was rewarded with one of the most gripping scenes in the Bible. Mary Magdalene saw her Lord newly resurrected. Hers was the first name Jesus spoke. One of the last still with him when he died, she was one of the first to see him alive again. Mary Magdalene was a woman of action. She followed, observed, served, supported, provided, bent to look into the empty tomb, stood when she heard her name.

Genuine gratitude isn't stagnant. It moves. It acts. And it responds when Jesus says, "Go tell the others."
–*Cynthia Ruchti*

Tabitha

Acts 9:36-42

Tabitha (Dorcas) is the only woman in Acts to be identified by name as a disciple. Further, in Acts 9:36 the term used for "disciple" (mathetria) is the only occurrence of the feminine form of the word in the Christian New Testament.

In this account, being a disciple includes engaging in good works, showing compassion, and caring for those in need. The urgent request from the disciples in Joppa, the presence of crying widows, and Peter's decision to come to her to raise her from the dead suggests how integral Tabitha was to this community.

–*Kendra Weddle Irons*

Prominent Women from Antioch

Acts 13:50

Throughout the book of Acts, women of high social and economic standing supported the development of the early church (16:14-15, 40; 12:12). In Acts 13 we see that the same power wielded by prominent women was also used, in some cases, to persecute. In many ways and places, women were considered second-class citizens in the cultures represented in Acts, but it's important not to generalize about women's experience overall. In this text, it's clear that the women held considerable sway to be mentioned even before the city's leaders. Whatever power we have can be used for good . . . or for ill.

–*Ginger Gaines-Cirelli*

Lydia

Acts 16:14-15, 40

Although Lydia appears only briefly and has only one speaking line, she played a prominent part in the early church. As a Gentile God-worshipper, she had gathered at the place of prayer with other women who already worshipped the God of Israel. Lydia adopted Christianity and started the first church on the European continent, in the city of Philippi. She formed this church in her house with her family members and perhaps women who worshipped with her on the riverbank. Lydia, a successful businesswoman, used her financial and leadership gifts for the church. Her story parallels that of powerful men in Acts (the God-fearing centurion Cornelius in Acts 10; the synagogue official Crispus in Acts 18:8): she is the head of her home, and when she converts, so does the rest of her household. In the Philippian church Lydia sets the stage for ministerial leadership that includes women as equals, indicated later by Euodia and Syntyche serving among the church's co-leaders (Phil 4:2-3).

–*Jann Aldredge-Clanton*

Jephthah's Daughter

Judg 11:29-40

The human sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is one of the most horrific and heartrending stories in the Old Testament. The fact that Jephthah is praised in other biblical texts (1 Sam 12:11; Heb 11:32) highlights tradition's treatment of this painful story as one of sacrificial faith.

But if you pay attention to the story you recognize that God neither asked Jephthah to sacrifice his daughter nor praised him for doing so. This suggests that Jephthah made decisions based on his own ideas of what God desired, not on anything God had revealed. That a father's murder of his only daughter is lifted up as a model act of faith betrays something very broken within the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Even if we were to accept the traditional interpretation of the story, Jephthah's daughter should also be found in biblical lists among those of extraordinary faith. She knew and affirmed her father's vow and willingly offered her life in order to fulfill it. The assumption of the text, as with the similar story of Abraham and Isaac in Genesis 22, is that human sacrifice is a lesser evil than breaking a vow to God. The difference is that God intervened at the last minute to save Abraham's son, but God did not save Jephthah's daughter.

The text tells us that an annual tradition arose among Israelite women to recount the story of Jephthah's daughter. But to what end? It isn't difficult to imagine this practice as a way to indoctrinate women to allow themselves to be harmed by their fathers, brothers, or husbands—even to the point of death—because it's the faithful thing to do. Such ways of thinking persist even to our own day with women accepting abusers' violence without question, refusing to leave, and even choosing to return to men who will kill them.

It's certainly wishful thinking, but perhaps that annual gathering of ancient Israelite women existed for the purpose of speaking what is for us the unknown name of this brave daughter, and also to say, Never again.

–Wil Gafney

10 Secondary Wives of King David

2 Sam 15:16; 16:21-22; 19:5; 20:3

In the crisis of Absalom's coup, David fled Jerusalem with his entire household, "but he left ten secondary wives behind to take care of the palace" (15:16). Imagine their terror at not only being left in harm's way but also being tasked with tending the unguarded royal residence. These abandoned women, low-status members of David's harem, reappear in the narrative as dehumanized objects of the rebel's aggression when Absalom rapes them in a shockingly public manner (16:21-22). Their collective devastation haunts the notice in 2 Samuel 20:3 that, when David returned triumphant to Jerusalem, he removed these women—tainted by rape—from his household, placed them in a guarded residence, and made them live like widows for the rest of their days. Their presence in the David story is a memorial to all women who suffer sexual assault in war zones and who live with the stigma of that violence ever afterward.

–Jan Quesada

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