



## WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY ABOUT WOMEN IN MINISTRY?

Pastor A. L. Moss, Sr., M.Th.

Introduction: I've heard a host of reasons why women shouldn't lead in ministry: 'women are too emotional;' 'they might tempt men with their bodies;' 'they have periods;' 'they can't handle the workload,' and 'a woman's voice is too soft.' These answers reveal that most objections that people have about women preachers and pastors are not really related to scripture, but rather stem from their own assumptions about gender. The Bible has more to say about women in leadership positions than we are often led to believe.

In I Timothy 2:11, the content of this verse is often taken out of context and is easily misunderstood. In traditional Judaism, women were not allowed to study the Law. It is clear that Paul does not mean that women are to remain silent, meaning 'soundless,' as in some older translations. The same Greek word, *hesuchios*, is used in several places where total silence is clearly not implied.

(Read I Timothy 2:2; I Thessalonians 4:11, and I Peter 3:4.). Rather, the term implies peacefulness, stillness, or calmness. In that time, religious expression could be loud, showy, and hysterical. This is exactly what Paul wishes to avoid.

The most important content to understand is that of verses 9 and 10, where Paul encouraged women not to dress in flashy, showy ways. Instead, they were to dress modestly. This verse presents the same basic principle, as applied to action rather than to clothing. The goal is peacefulness and self-control. How can women be forbidden to speak and yet prophesy and speak in tongues? (Joel 2:28)

So, let's set the record straight as we cut the Word straight. Jesus Christ used women in ministry – period! If God can use a rock to cry out praise, He can use a woman; if God can use a donkey to speak, He can use a

woman. And, finally, if Christ can use a rooster, He can use a woman! I rest my case. (Luke 19:40; Numbers 22:26-28, and Matthew 26:34, 35.)

## **THE ACTS OF PHILIP MANUSCRIPTS**

The Acts of Philip survives only in much later manuscripts, and are mostly short. There were other portions of Phillip's manuscripts, but they remain lost. However, Philip's associates, like Bovon, compiled narratives about four female apostles. Their names were Mariamne, Irene, Nino, and Thecla. The idea that Philip wanted to convey was that female apostles were rather ordinary during the early era of the Jesus movement.

Mariamne was also another name for Mary. According to Philip, Mariamne was his sister, but it is uncertain whether this means his blood sister or his spiritual sister. Also, some scholars say this Mary/Mariamne could have been Mary and Martha's sister, or Mary Magdalene, or perhaps Mary of Bethany. However, those arguments are very much fragmented.

Mariamne was considered an apostle by Philip, who was also an evangelist that baptized people. Mariamne stood beside Jesus and held the register of the regions while Jesus handed out mission assignments. Because Philip was afraid, Jesus sent Mariamne to evangelize with him. Mariamne was preaching, persuading, and influencing people to enter a house where Philip and Bartholomew were preaching. She carried the same duties and privileges of an apostle as did the men, and she was called an apostle. Men and women pairings were common. Philip would preach and baptize the men and Mariamne would preach and baptize the women.

Irene is known in the Eastern Church as Saint Irene of Macedonia, who, according to Eastern tradition, was baptized in the first century by Timothy, after which she became an evangelist and an apostle.

Irene converted over ten thousand pagans by traveling to various cities, preaching about Jesus Christ, working miracles and healing the sick. Irene led prayer meetings, casting out demons and raising the dead. According to the narrative, just before Irene was to be married, Timothy came with a letter from Paul concerning her father, who was the king of the city of

Magedon. Her father had been murdered, and died as an unbeliever. The king had not supported Irene, as she proclaimed herself a bride of Christ. He disagreed with her acts of breaking idols, and raising the dead. However, when he died, Irene turned to the east, lifted her hands high and prayed for her father, and he was raised from the dead. Thereafter, Irene remained in the city performing signs and wonders, preaching and teaching the Word of God, and baptizing many new believers. She was also a student of the apostle Paul.

Nino was also in Philip's early manuscripts. She evangelized Iberia (Georgia) in the early fourth century. She was called 'The Apostle' and 'Joy of the Son of God.' Nino baptized 40 women in a monastery on her way to Iberia, and she preached the gospel, as well. There is not much more known about her.

Thecla was one of the best known early Christian women who was revered in both the eastern and western Mediterranean areas as a first century evangelist who had learned from the Apostle Paul and then evangelized on her own in Asia Minor. Tertullian said, "Thecla's ministry was so significant that Christ put people into her hands." When Thecla met up with Paul in Myra, Paul told her to "go and teach the Word of God!" Paul additionally instructed Thecla that Christ had chosen her for those days. He assured her that she was in the apostolate and that Christ put into her hands cities that not yet heard the Word, nor had any in them been baptized. Finally, just before she died, her life was summarized in the statement, "she enlisted many people into Christ's army and enlightened many with the Word of God."

### **Women Who Often Get Overlooked**

Anna was a prophet (Luke 2:36), as were the four daughters of Philip who also prophesied (Acts 21:9). Prophets are truth tellers who deliver God's message to the world. In other words, they are preachers – preachers who pack a punch.

There is also Phoebe, a deacon (Romans 16:1), and Junia, who the Bible describes not only as an apostle, but as an outstanding one. (Romans 16:7) Priscilla, along with her husband, is named by Paul as a co-worker in

Christ. In Acts 18, Priscilla teaches Apollos, a man with a thorough knowledge of scripture. (Acts 18:24-26)

The very first Christian preachers in the gospels were all women (Luke 4:9). Mary and Mary Magdalene were the first to learn of Jesus' resurrection, and they were the first to share the news. (Mark 16:9, 10; Matthew 28:8-10, and John 20:17, 18) If the women had kept silent in the church, there wouldn't be a church.

In John 4:28 and 39, we have the woman at the well. In Judges 5:7 we have Deborah, a judge who ruled as a military leader and prophet of Israel. (2 Kings 22:11-20). In 2 Chronicles 34:14-33 there is Huldah, a prophetess who was sought out by King Josiah and his men to inquire of the Lord about the contents of a scroll that contained the Law of the Lord given to Moses. Exodus 15:20 gives us the story of Miriam, who was named a prophet. She has the distinction of being the *first* prophet.

**Question: Do prophets have to speak?**

There is Esther in Esther 7:3; Joanna (Luke 24:1-11); Mary, the mother of James (Luke 24:1-11); Phoebe (Romans 16:1, 2); Mary, the mother of Jesus (Luke 1:46); Martha; Chloe; Lydia, and Junia.