

Community Church of Issaquah
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Four Amazing Women in the Bible

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When I began to think about strong and powerful women in the Church—and in this church. My mind began to drift toward the Bible and the women who are noted there with importance. I must admit that several women came to mind, and I wasn't sure how to narrow the field down to just four women so that I could have a message that didn't take hours to deliver. So, let me ask you this question, what woman in the Bible do you like best? That's not a rhetorical question. I'd like to know your answers.

Out of curiosity, I posted a question on Facebook asking my friends who they thought were the strongest examples in the Scriptures. Needless to say, I was flooded with responses, from both my Christian, Jewish and even Unitarian friends. Some of those they suggested were unknown to me or at least if I had read passages with their story in it, I had forgotten them. Here are just a few of those that were suggested. See if you know all of them.

Vashti	Esther	Jepthah's daughter	
Mary Magdalene	Judith	Holfernes	
The Woman at the Well		Jesus's mother Mary	
Miriam	Deborah	Ruth	Naomi Susanna
Jael	The Syrophenician Woman		Shiphrah
Puah	Noah's wife	Hannah	

Those are just a few of the women whose story might be a part of some Bible passages. For today's message, I've

narrowed my selections to four - two women from the Old Testament and two from the New Testament. Here they are.

In the second chapter of the book of Exodus, we find a very interesting story about a woman whose name isn't noted there but whose name appears several times later in the book of Numbers. The pharaoh at the time of this story felt very threatened by the tribes of Israel and ordered that all male Jewish babies be killed in order to stop the building of a stronger tribe. One mother feared for her baby son whom she kept in hiding until it was no longer possible, so she put him in a basket and put him into the Nile River near the place where the pharaoh's daughter bathed. Upon seeing the baby, the pharaoh's daughter took the child out of the water and back with her. A young girl was watching all this happen and approached the pharaoh's daughter telling her that the baby was Jewish and she could find a Jewish mother to nurse the child. What the pharaoh's daughter did not know was that the young girl was the baby's sister and the mother who nurtured the baby was actually his own mother, Jochebed. Having taken the baby from the water, the pharaoh's daughter named him Moses, meaning from the water.

After Moses had spent much of his adult life in hiding until God called him to lead the Israelites out of captivity, there is a beautiful story in the book of Numbers about his sister, whose name is Miriam, being the person who led the celebration of freedom at the Red Sea. She took a timbrel in her hands and all the women followed her with their timbrels and were dancing. Miriam sang, "Sing to the Lord,

for He is highly exalted. Both horse and driver he has hurled into the sea.” (Exodus 15: 20-21) That sounds like a happy ending, doesn’t it. Well, Miriam, who was considered a prophetess herself was also bold enough to speak out in opposition to her brother, Moses. In response, the Scriptures record that she was struck with leprosy.

So, what’s so strong about Miriam? She had a very important role in making sure that Moses was saved as a baby and she had a large role as a prophetess for the Tribe of Israel. She paid a high price for her boldness and strength. Do you want to hear another amazing story about a strong woman from the tribe of Israelites? If you were to read the fourth and fifth chapters of the book of Judges, you would encounter a fascinating woman named Deborah. She is noted as both a prophetess and a judge. Before Israel had kings, their top leaders were called judges and were actually military leaders who were sent by God to help rescue Israel from other enemy tribes.

When Deborah became the first and only female judge, Israel was not following God, but she led them back to Him. Once, God told Deborah to command one of the generals of the Israelite army, Barak, to go to battle against Sisera, the commander of the enemy. Believing God would deliver the enemy into the Israelite’s hands, Barak told Deborah he would only go if she went with him for safety. Deborah agreed to go, but informed Barak that the enemy would be delivered into the hands of a woman, not his. And that is exactly what happened. As a result, Israel enjoyed peace under Deborah’s leadership for more than 40 years.

History tells us that Deborah ruled Israel as their Judge for 60 years.

What is strong about Deborah? Here was a woman put in a leadership role for the nation of Israel when they had drifted away from following God. She listened to the Lord and in doing so led the people of the tribe of Israel back to God. She was strong, brave, and devotedly faithful to the Lord. As a result, she is noted in Jewish history as perhaps the strongest woman in the days before Christ.

So which women can we say are strong and important in the days of Christ? Trust me, there are very many. Are you familiar with Mary and Martha, the sisters of Lazarus? How about Joanna who was with Jesus's mother Mary and Mary Magdalene at the crucifixion and resurrection? Do you remember the woman who was honored by Christ for donating only pennies at the temple? We could go on and on, but I've chosen two that you might know or might not. The first is a woman named Lydia. Her story is found in the book of Acts, chapter 16.

In the days of Paul and his many missionary journeys, he encountered a most unusual woman. Here was a woman who broke the norm of a male dominated society and had her own very successful business. Lydia of Thyatira sold purple cloth. That doesn't sound very important, but keep in mind that purple was the color of royalty, and it was very well connected to wealth and people in authority. It seems evident that she was indeed very well connected in order to be as successful and wealthy as she was. What singles Lydia out other than her wealth and status? The

Bible records that she was the first documented person who converted to Christianity in what we now know to be Europe in her home country that is today Greece.

The many churches and converts of Paul's and other missions and ministries had been mostly in the Middle East or Asia, which we call Syria and Turkey now. The Scriptures record that Lydia, after her conversion, led her entire household to become Christians. That sounds impressive, doesn't it? But wait, there's more to the story. Not concerned about what the outcome might be for herself, she hosted Paul and his companions in her home while they spread the Gospel. Lydia is a strong example of a woman owning her own business but also an even stronger example of a woman doing her part in spreading the Word of God in her home city as she hosted the first church in Philippi in her home as we see in Acts 16. This was the very first church in what was then called Asia Minor. Did you get that? Hosted and led by a woman. Perhaps we shouldn't tell those who think women should not be in church leadership positions.

And finally, a woman who is mentioned only once in the New Testament in the book of Romans, Chapter 16, verses 1 and 2. Paul writes, "I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a servant of the church of Cenchrea. I ask you to receive her in the Lord in a way worthy of the saints and give her any help she many need from you, for she has been a great help to many people, including me." So, who was this woman named Phoebe? She was a person with some wealth and supported the believers who greatly needed financial assistance.

Perhaps her greatest role was one of more significance. Phoebe was chosen by Paul to carry, deliver, and read Paul's letter to the believers in Rome. Did you get that? A woman was the individual whom Paul chose to take his letter to the Roman faith community, to deliver it to that community called a church, and then to read it to them. Obviously, Phoebe was well educated and trusted by Paul and his companions to do the work of the Lord. She is a wonderful role model for women today who do the amazing work of the Lord. You and I are blessed to know many of those amazing women right here in this church.

These four examples of women who hold significant roles in our own faith foundation are but a small portion of women of strength and determination we benefit from knowing. Often, we underestimate the roles women play in our Christian faith, but also in the life of the church. This church is a strong example of that. We are blessed to have some very strong and dedicated women past and present who have led this congregation for decades and continue to do so to this day. The history of The Community Church of Issaquah will continue to be filled with the importance, the work, and the devotion of women. For a man like me who has been a passionate supporter of women all my life, nothing could make me prouder.

I'll end this message with a little paraphrase stolen from the movie *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. It goes like this: "The man may be the head of things, but the woman is the neck and can turn things any direction she chooses." And to that I can only say, "Amen."