

The Role of a Prophetess

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If you look at the subject of spiritual leadership in the Bible, whether you're looking at ancient Israel in the Old Testament or the New Covenant Church in the New Testament, if you're studying the subject of spiritual leadership, you can't help but notice it's a very male dominated subject. The majority of examples we find in both the Old and New Testament are examples of men in designated leadership roles. However, there is a major exception to this, and that is the role of a prophetess. What we're going to do today is take a look at this particular role and see what we can learn about this specific role that was exclusively filled by women. So, if you'd like a title for this sermon, it's:

The Role of a Prophetess

Now to start off with, I'd like to just establish a foundation that the major leadership roles for ancient Israel were exclusively defined as roles for men. To start off with, turn over to Numbers 18, and we'll see here the establishment of the Levitical Priesthood. I'm sure you're probably aware, throughout ancient Israel's existence from the time they were established as a nation and left out of Egypt the Priesthood was the major spiritual leadership of the nation throughout their history. This was specifically defined as a role for men. So, if you start reading here in Numbers 18, in verse 1.

Num 18:1 *"Then the LORD said to Aaron: "You and your sons and your father's house with you shall bear the iniquity related to the sanctuary, and you and your sons with you shall bear the iniquity associated with your priesthood. 2) Also bring with you your brethren of the tribe of Levi, the tribe of your father, that they may be joined with you and serve you while you and your sons are with you before the tabernacle of witness." (NKJV)*

Notice it's specifically the sons of Aaron that we're talking about. In fact, if you study the subject of the Priesthood, oftentimes you'll see them generally referred to as the "sons of Aaron" because you had to be a descendant of Aaron, and specifically a son in that lineage, to fill the role of a Priest. Continue in verse 3.

"3) They shall attend to your needs and all the needs of the tabernacle; but they shall not come near the articles of the sanctuary and the altar, lest they die—they and you also. 4) They shall be joined with you and attend to the needs of the tabernacle of meeting, for all the work of the tabernacle; but an outsider shall not come near you. 5) And you shall attend to the duties of the sanctuary and the duties of the altar, that there may be no more wrath on the children of Israel. 6) Behold, I Myself have taken your brethren the Levites from among the children of Israel; they are a gift to you, given by the LORD, to do the work of the tabernacle of meeting. 7) Therefore you and your sons with you shall attend to your priesthood for everything at the altar and behind the veil; and you shall

serve. I give your priesthood to you as a gift for service, but the outsider who comes near shall be put to death.” (NKJV)

So, you can see there that the criteria wasn't just being male. You had to specifically be a descendant of Aaron, but it was specifically the sons of Aaron. So, it was an exclusively male role.

This was also true of the role of kings. For several hundred years of Israel's history, they didn't actually have kings. They had a system of Judges. But later they then demanded a king, and God basically gave this to them as a concession. Because He warned them upfront that this is not going to go well if you have a king like other nations, but they insisted on that. So, He gave them a king and warned them how that was going to go in the long run. But long before that ever happened, God foresaw that it was just a matter of time before the people were going to demand a king. So, He told Moses from the beginning what the criteria was that someone would need to meet to fulfill the role of a king. If we take a look at this, we'll see, again, it was exclusively a male role. So, to see that, turn over to Deuteronomy 17 and we'll start reading in verse 14.

Deu 17:14 *“When you come to the land which the LORD your God is giving you, and possess it and dwell in it, and say, ‘I will set a king over me like all the nations that are around me,’ 15) you shall surely set a king over you whom the LORD your God chooses; one from among your brethren you shall set as king over you; you may not set a foreigner over you, who is not your brother. 16) But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the LORD has said to you, “You shall not return that way again.’ 17) Neither shall he multiply wives for himself...” (NKJV)*

Notice it has to be exclusively a male role if you're saying he can't have multiple wives.

“...lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. 18) “Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from the one before the priests, the Levites. 19) And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the LORD his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes, 20) that his heart may not be lifted above his brethren, that he may not turn aside from the commandment to the right hand or to the left, and that he may prolong his days in his kingdom, he and his children in the midst of Israel.” (NKJV)

Now, as I mentioned, the Priesthood was primarily a spiritual leadership role. The king was often typically more of a secular leadership role. But both of them -- as we can see from the criteria -- were exclusively male roles. But that doesn't mean that there weren't roles that were specifically for women. As I mentioned, the role of a Prophetess. We're going to see a number of these. In fact, five of them, that are mentioned throughout Israel's history, where women are specifically mentioned being in the role of a

Prophetess. So, what we're going to do now is take a look at each of these women and see what these examples tell us about their roles.

Now the first individual mentioned in the role of a Prophetess is Miriam. She's the sister of Moses and Aaron. Now turn over to Exodus 15, and we'll take a look at her example. Again, that's Exodus 15, and we'll see here that Miriam is only mentioned in the Bible a couple of times. So, we don't have a whole lot of information in regards to her role. But we're going to see what we can glean from her example here. Now, we're going to pick up here in Exodus 15. We'll start reading in verse 20, but just to set the context here. By chapter 15, the Israelites have come out of Egypt. They've made their journey out of Egypt. They've crossed the Red Sea. They've just been through the event where Pharaoh's army is drowned in the Red Sea. Now they're out of Egyptian territory, and they're having a celebration. As you can imagine, they're all very happy because now they're out of Egypt. They're completely out of Egyptian territory. They're no longer being chased by an army with the threat of death, and they're rather happy and they're having a celebration.

Now, the first part of chapter 15, you can see is what's called the "song of Moses". Moses is kind of leading the people here in this song of celebration. But to pick up here in verse 20, this is where it tells us about Miriam, and it tells us that she is a prophetess.

Ex 15:20 *"Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances. 21) And Miriam answered them: "Sing to the LORD, For He has triumphed gloriously! The horse and its rider He has thrown into the sea!" (NKJV)*

So, you can see it's a song of celebration here. Now, it doesn't really tell us much else about Miriam's role and what exactly she did in fulfilling the role of a Prophetess. What it tells us here -- it's obviously a picture of her being a leader among the women of the Israelites. But it doesn't really tell us much else. Did she ever prophesy and foretell the future or reveal God's will? It doesn't really tell us if she ever did. We'll see when we look at some of the examples of other women, there are examples of them communicating God's will and such, but with Miriam, we only have limited information.

However, there is another example that does give us some insight into her role. Let's turn over to Numbers 12. What we're going to see here is kind of how to place her role in terms of comparing her role to the role of Moses and Aaron. Because what we're going to see here in Numbers 12 is a story where Miriam and Aaron are basically criticizing Moses. They're kind of getting on his case and judging him in regards to a marriage that he had, and they get chastised by God for doing this. But we can see from the example of what takes place here and the correction that God gives them, they're basically trying to kind of equate themselves with Moses' role and they get slapped down for this. But what we're going to notice here is Miriam in particular takes the brunt of the punishment. We're going to kind of put together after we read through this why that might be the case because it kind of tells us some details about her role. This is in Numbers 12 in verse 1.

Num 12:1 *"Then Miriam and Aaron spoke against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married; for he had married an Ethiopian woman. 2) So they said, "Has the LORD indeed spoken only through Moses? Has He not spoken through us also?" And the LORD heard it."* (NKJV)

Now, first of all, let's notice what they state here in verse 2 is actually true. Because they're both saying, "Does God only work through Moses? Doesn't He work through us as well?" Well, we've just seen that Miriam is a Prophetess. It directly states that in the Bible. Aaron is also the High Priest. We just saw earlier that the Priesthood is his lineage, where Aaron is the first High Priest. So, does God work through the two of them? Well, yes, obviously. They both have designated roles that the Bible describes. But let's just notice here how they kind of overstep their bounds in those roles. So, let's pick up in verse 3.

"3) (Now the man Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth.) 4) Suddenly the LORD said to Moses, Aaron, and Miriam, "Come out, you three, to the tabernacle of meeting!" So the three came out. 5) Then the LORD came down in the pillar of cloud and stood in the door of the tabernacle, and called Aaron and Miriam. And they both went forward. 6) Then He said, "Hear now My words: If there is a prophet among you, I, the LORD, make Myself known to him in a vision; I speak to him in a dream. 7) Not so with My servant Moses; He is faithful in all My house. 8) I speak with him face to face, Even plainly, and not in dark sayings; And he sees the form of the LORD. Why then were you not afraid To speak against My servant Moses?" (NKJV)

Notice they're trying to equate themselves as equals with Moses' role, and God doesn't see it that way. He slaps them down for this and points out the differences here. Now, just as a side note here, notice He mentions that He speaks "face to face" with Moses. Now oftentimes, we interpret that statement the way we use the phrase in English. When we say we're talking "face to face" with someone, we mean we're looking into the whites of each other's eyes. Now, if you read through Moses' writings, particularly in the book of Exodus, you'll see obviously that's not what was intended here because there's a point at Mount Sinai where Moses asks, "Can I see your face?" And God tells him, "No, you can't see My face and live to tell the story. That's not a possibility."

Because it's not really what the Hebrew expression means there. It's translated as "face to face". It's more about direct communication. I won't go into all the details of that today, but if you have any questions about that, there's a study paper on my website called "Seeing and Hearing God". If you're watching this on YouTube, if you just look at the link below this video, you'll see a link that takes you straight to my website. It's SearchingTheScriptures.org, and you'll see a study paper there that covers that in detail. But just pick up here in verse 9, and let's notice that Miriam takes the brunt of the punishment because both her and Aaron have obviously misbehaved here because God called them both out. But notice who gets the brunt of the punishment here.

9) *"So the anger of the LORD was aroused against them, and He departed.*
10) *And when the cloud departed from above the tabernacle, suddenly Miriam became leprous, as white as snow. Then Aaron turned toward Miriam, and there she was, a leper.* 11) *So Aaron said to Moses, "Oh, my lord! Please do not lay this sin on us, in which we have done foolishly and in which we have sinned.*
12) *Please do not let her be as one dead, whose flesh is half consumed when he comes out of his mother's womb!"* 13) *So Moses cried out to the LORD, saying, "Please heal her, O God, I pray!"* 14) *Then the LORD said to Moses, "If her father had but spit in her face, would she not be shamed seven days? Let her be shut out of the camp seven days, and afterward she may be received again."* 15) *So Miriam was shut out of the camp seven days, and the people did not journey till Miriam was brought in again.* 16) *And afterward the people moved from Hazeroth and camped in the Wilderness of Paran."* (NKJV)

So, notice here, Miriam and Aaron both are obviously involved in misbehaving. They both get called out. But Miriam is the one who gets struck with leprosy and who gets ostracized for seven days. Well, why did she get singled out in this regard? Now, again, we have to speculate a little bit here, but I think we can back this up from Biblical example. As you notice here, Miriam has a designated role as a Prophetess, and Aaron has a role of being the High Priest. But there's also a part of these roles that Aaron takes part in part of Moses' role in terms of the negative reaction when the Israelites are upset.

Because just like most things in life, roles come with an upside and a downside. Oftentimes, we talk about the fact that rights and responsibilities go together. That there's not just privileges and rights, there's also the negative side. There's the burden that comes with roles as well. Well, if you read through the examples in Moses's writings, whenever the Israelites get upset, they're oftentimes venting their frustrations at Moses. There are times that they're literally picking up stones and ready to kill him. Well, you'll see oftentimes, Aaron is included in that. He gets the brunt of the negative reactions as well. You never see Miriam associated with that. She's never mentioned in the context of everyone picking up stones and they're ready to stone Miriam. You also never see her demanding her "equality" in that sense as well. So, she wants to have the say here and be able to criticize Moses, but she's not taking the flack of the people that comes with his role. She is the one overstepping her bounds the most, which is why I think she was kind of targeted for the most punishment.

But now, as I mentioned, there are multiple women that are mentioned in the Bible that are specifically designated as Prophetesses. Now, the next one we're going to look at is Deborah, and we'll find Deborah in Judges 4. Turn over to Judges 4. Now, we'll see not only is Deborah described as a Prophetess, but she's also described as a Judge. She's very much an exception to the rule in that regard as well. And the reason I say that is because if you look at all the Judges listed out throughout the book of Judges and even in 1 Samuel, there's over a dozen individuals that are specifically described as Judges. But Deborah is the only one that's a woman. All of the rest of them are men. So, she's

very unique in that way as well. But just to notice her role here, let's read through Judges 4, and we'll start here in verse 1.

Judges 4:1 *"When Ehud was dead, the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD. 2) So the LORD sold them into the hand of Jabin king of Canaan, who reigned in Hazor. The commander of his army was Sisera, who dwelt in Harosheth Hagoyim. 3) And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD; for Jabin had nine hundred chariots of iron, and for twenty years he had harshly oppressed the children of Israel. 4) Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lapidoth, was judging Israel at that time."* (NKJV)

Notice that she's described as a Prophetess and a Judge. Again, she's very much an exception to the rule when it comes to being a Judge because all the rest of them were men. Verse 5.

"5) And she would sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the mountains of Ephraim. And the children of Israel came up to her for judgment. 6) Then she sent and called for Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh in Naphtali, and said to him, 'Has not the LORD God of Israel commanded, 'Go and deploy troops at Mount Tabor; take with you ten thousand men of the sons of Naphtali and of the sons of Zebulun; 7) and against you I will deploy Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army, with his chariots and his multitude at the River Kishon; and I will deliver him into your hand?'" (NKJV)

Now notice, Deborah has just told him, "God's already telling you how the movie's going to end. You're going to win." But let's notice Barak's response to this.

"8) And Barak said to her, 'If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go!'" (NKJV)

Notice, he's timid. He's afraid of going without her. In verse 9.

"9) So she said, 'I will surely go with you; nevertheless there will be no glory for you in the journey you are taking, for the LORD will sell Sisera into the hand of a woman.' Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh." (NKJV)

Now as you notice here, she's basically telling him there's going to be consequences for this for you because you didn't have the courage to just go into battle, and you're insisting that a woman go with you. Now again, the reason I mention this, and we won't take the time to turn to Deuteronomy 20. But if you read Deuteronomy 20, it gives the instructions God gave to Israel for going to war and the rules that were associated with it. You'll see He specifically designates men as the ones who were supposed to go into battle and fight the wars, and deal with the horror of war and risk being killed and maimed and such.

Because again, as I mentioned, you always have to look at it from a balanced perspective and realize it's not just about rights and being able to be in charge. It's also the downside as well. The majority of leadership roles were for men, but men were also the ones that got sent into battle and had to risk their lives and potentially be killed or maimed in the battle. God never described women being commanded to go into battle. They sat back and were protected. We'll see in this case, Barak, even though Deborah's just told him, "God says you're going to win", he doesn't have the faith to do that. He wants Deborah to come with him. That's why she's saying, "Well, there's going to be a consequence. You're going to lose the glory of being able to kill the leader of the opposing army." We'll see here as we read through the rest of the chapter, he's actually killed by a woman. And pick up in verse 10.

"10) And Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh; he went up with ten thousand men under his command, and Deborah went up with him. 11) Now Heber the Kenite, of the children of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, had separated himself from the Kenites and pitched his tent near the terebinth tree at Zaanaim, which is beside Kedesh. 12) And they reported to Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. 13) So Sisera gathered together all his chariots, nine hundred chariots of iron, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth Hagoyim to the River Kishon. 14) Then Deborah said to Barak, "Up! For this is the day in which the LORD has delivered Sisera into your hand. Has not the LORD gone out before you?" So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. 15) And the LORD routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. 16) But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth Hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not a man was left. 17) However, Sisera had fled away on foot to the tent of Jael, the wife of Heber the Kenite; for there was peace between Jabin king of Hazor and the house of Heber the Kenite. 18) And Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my lord, turn aside to me; do not fear." And when he had turned aside with her into the tent, she covered him with a blanket. 19) Then he said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a jug of milk, gave him a drink, and covered him. 20) And he said to her, "Stand at the door of the tent, and if any man comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there any man here?' you shall say, 'No.' " 21) Then Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and took a hammer in her hand, and went softly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went down into the ground; for he was fast asleep and weary. So he died." (NKJV)

As Deborah told him, "You're going to lose the glory of killing the commander of the opposing army. He's going to be delivered in the hands of a woman." Well, this is what she was referring to. In verse 22.

"22) And then, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him, and said to him, "Come, I will show you the man whom you seek." And when he went into her tent, there lay Sisera, dead with the peg in his temple. 23) So on that day

God subdued Jabin king of Canaan in the presence of the children of Israel. 24) And the hand of the children of Israel grew stronger and stronger against Jabin king of Canaan, until they had destroyed Jabin king of Canaan.” (NKJV)

So, you can see here in Deborah's example it gives us a lot more detail than it does in regards to Miriam. We can see here that as a Prophetess, Deborah communicates God's will just like many of the Prophets that are described throughout the Bible where they're speaking on behalf of God and communicating to other individuals, "Here's the message that God has given to me to deliver." Well, Deborah does that. She fulfills this. She even again served as a Judge of Israel in a role that was typically fulfilled the majority of the time by men. Possibly one of the reasons she's in that role, we saw with Barak, the timidity that he had. He wouldn't go into battle without a woman with him. It wasn't really a courageous thing for him to do, and in line with God's instructions for how Israel was supposed to do battle. Possibly the weakness of men at the time was why God placed a woman in this role. But either way, God clearly inspired the role of Deborah and used her in this way.

Now, the next person that we're going to look at is Huldah. She's actually in the time of the Kings. So, let's turn over to 2 Kings 22. This is another example where it gives us a lot more detail as to the role that she fulfilled as a Prophetess. Because we're going to see Huldah, similar to Deborah, just like the Prophets, would speak, "Here is God's will, and here's what He has sent me to communicate to you." She does that very thing as well. Now, just to get the full context of her story, we're going to start in 2 Kings 22 and in verse 3.

2 Kings 22:3 *“Now it came to pass, in the eighteenth year of King Josiah, that the king sent Shaphan the scribe, the son of Azaliah, the son of Meshullam, to the house of the LORD, saying: 4) “Go up to Hilkiah the high priest, that he may count the money which has been brought into the house of the LORD, which the doorkeepers have gathered from the people. 5) And let them deliver it into the hand of those doing the work, who are the overseers in the house of the LORD; let them give it to those who are in the house of the LORD doing the work, to repair the damages of the house— 6) to carpenters and builders and masons—and to buy timber and hewn stone to repair the house.” (NKJV)*

Now, obviously, the house that they're referring to here is the Temple. Now, that's the house of the LORD. This is God's Temple that they're referring to here. In verse 7.

“7) However there need be no accounting made with them of the money delivered into their hand, because they deal faithfully.” 8) Then Hilkiah the high priest said to Shaphan the scribe, “I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD.” And Hilkiah gave the book to Shaphan, and he read it.” (NKJV)

Now, that's a very telling statement there. Now think about this. This is the High Priest communicating, "We found the Book of the Law." What were they using prior to that? I mean, this kind of tells you the state of the nation, and even the spiritual leadership. The

High Priest is supposed to be a significant spiritual leader here, and he's saying to the king's messenger here, "Go tell the king." It's kind of like today saying, "We found the Bible. Maybe we should actually read it." That's literally what's going on here, where the High Priest in God's Temple is saying, "We were reconciling all the money and taking care of the money, and we happened to find a copy of the Book of the Law." I mean, this tells you the state of the spiritual leadership of what was going on at that time.

"9) So Shaphan the scribe went to the king, bringing the king word, saying, "Your servants have gathered the money that was found in the house, and have delivered it into the hand of those who do the work, who oversee the house of the LORD." 10) Then Shaphan the scribe showed the king, saying, "Hilkiah the priest has given me a book." And Shaphan read it before the king." (NKJV)

This is also kind of an interesting tale of their priorities here. They were collecting the money and distributing the money. That seemed to be important to them, and along the way, "Oh, we found God's word. We found the Book of the Law." That would be like today saying, "We're at Church and we're taking care of the money, and we just stumbled on a copy of the Bible. Maybe we should actually read it." That's literally what's happening here. In verse 11.

"11) Now it happened, when the king heard the words of the Book of the Law, that he tore his clothes. 12) Then the king commanded Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam the son of Shaphan, Achbor the son of Michaiah, Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king, saying, 13) "Go, inquire of the LORD for me, for the people and for all Judah, concerning the words of this book that has been found; for great is the wrath of the LORD that is aroused against us, because our fathers have not obeyed the words of this book, to do according to all that is written concerning us." (NKJV)

Not only have they not obeyed it. They've completely ignored the book to the point that it was noteworthy to say, "We found a copy of it." In verse 14.

"14) So Hilkiah the priest, Ahikam, Achbor, Shaphan, and Asaiah went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvah, the son of Harhas, keeper of the wardrobe. (She dwelt in Jerusalem in the Second Quarter.) And they spoke with her. 15) Then she said to them, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Tell the man who sent you to Me, 16) "Thus says the LORD:..." (NKJV)

Notice she's speaking on behalf of God. She's communicating His will just like the Prophets did.

"... 'Behold, I will bring calamity on this place and on its inhabitants—all the words of the book which the king of Judah has read— 17) because they have forsaken Me and burned incense to other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands. Therefore My wrath shall be aroused against this place and shall not be quenched.' " 18) But as for the king of Judah, who sent

you to inquire of the LORD, in this manner you shall speak to him, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel: 'Concerning the words which you have heard— 19) because your heart was tender, and you humbled yourself before the LORD when you heard what I spoke against this place and against its inhabitants, that they would become a desolation and a curse, and you tore your clothes and wept before Me, I also have heard you," says the LORD. 20) Surely, therefore, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace; and your eyes shall not see all the calamity which I will bring on this place.' " " So they brought back word to the king. (NKJV)

So, you can see here, Huldah is again functioning very much in the same way that we would see with a Prophet. She's communicating God's will. Giving the warning that you need to repent. That you need to turn to God or communicating that God's going to destroy the nation. Send you into captivity. She's doing very much the same thing that we see the Prophets do. In fact, another interesting thing about her story is that Huldah and Jeremiah were contemporary with each other. Now you don't see Jeremiah mentioned in her story, and you don't see her mentioned in Jeremiah's story. But if you compare the references referring to being in Judah under King Josiah and the years associated with it, they were obviously contemporary and they overlapped with one another.

Now, another example we need to look at is the example of Isaiah's wife. Now, turn over to Isaiah 8. This is the fourth lady we're going to take a look at. Now, in this particular case it's debated as to whether Isaiah's wife fulfilled the role of a Prophetess similar to what we saw with Deborah and Huldah, or if maybe she's referred to as a Prophetess simply for being Isaiah's wife. You'll see as we read this in context why that's the case because we're not even given her name here. She's just very briefly mentioned. No real details are given about her or anything that she did. The reference to calling her a Prophetess is only in the context of her becoming pregnant and giving a son to Isaiah. Again, it's just kind of a brief drive-by reference that is there. So, a lot of commentaries and scholars kind of debate, "Well, did she fulfill the role of a Prophetess in other ways, or is this term applied to her simply because she's Isaiah's wife?" It's hard to know because again, the Bible just doesn't really tell us much else about her. But just to read her account, let's notice here in Isaiah 8 in verse 1.

Is 8:1 *"Moreover the LORD said to me, "Take a large scroll, and write on it with a man's pen concerning Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz. 2) And I will take for Myself faithful witnesses to record, Uriah the priest and Zechariah the son of Jeberechiah." 3) Then I went to the prophetess, and she conceived and bore a son. Then the LORD said to me, "Call his name Maher-Shalal-Hash-Baz;" (NKJV)*

So, you can see that we're not given her name. She's referred to as a Prophetess, but it's just in the context of she bore this son. We're not told anything else about her. Just to finish the thought, continue on in verse 4.

“4) for before the child shall have knowledge to cry ‘My father’ and ‘My mother,’ the riches of Damascus and the spoil of Samaria will be taken away before the king of Assyria.” (NKJV)

So, you can see it's just kind of what you might call a drive-by reference, where she's just kind of briefly alluded to -- referred to as a Prophetess -- and we're not told anything else. So, it's debatable. Was this a formal role that she fulfilled or is she kind of referred to as a Prophetess simply for being Isaiah's wife and bearing a son? It's really hard to tell because the Bible just doesn't tell us much else.

Now, to look at the fifth example, this is actually recorded in the New Testament. But I think as we're going to see here, if we look at the timing, it really kind of fits more in an Old Covenant Israel context. But turn over to Luke 2. We'll see here a lady named Anna who is specifically referred to as a Prophetess, and it tells us a little about how she functioned in this role. But we also need to pay attention to the timing of this role. Because again, as I mentioned, this is recorded in the book of Luke which as we all know is obviously in the New Testament. But in terms of where this would fit, in terms of the divisions of Old Covenant Israel versus the New Covenant Church, we would obviously have to place this more appropriately connected with Old Covenant Israel.

Because if you read through Luke 2 here, what you'll see is this is in the timing of Christ just being born and just having been circumcised on the eighth day according to Biblical command. We know John the Baptist is just a few months older, about approximately six months older than Christ is. As the New Testament tells us, John kind of technically starts the ministry of Christ because he starts preparing the way for Him and starts baptism and proclaiming that Christ is going to come and be the savior for mankind. Well, at the time that we have this reference to Anna, both John the Baptist and Christ Himself are less than a year old. I mean, they're infants. They're not even speaking yet, let alone having their own ministry. But just with that timing in mind, let's start reading Luke 2 in verse 36.

Luke 2:36 *“Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; 37) and this woman was a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served God with fastings and prayers night and day. 38) And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem.” (NKJV)*

So, you can see that she obviously was sharing with others that she knew who Christ was, and this child is going to be the savior of mankind. He's going to be the sacrifice for everyone. Again, we don't have much else described in terms of her role, but we obviously know she's directly referred to as a Prophetess.

As we can see here, we've covered five different women that are specifically mentioned as Prophetesses. Now again, we're not going to take a look at every woman that's

referred to in the Bible as a false prophetess. Because as I mentioned, just like how men can be a true prophet or a false prophet who took that title upon themselves and are not acting on behalf of God's instructions, well, there were women who did the same thing. Human nature doesn't discriminate. But again, we'll briefly touch today on an example of a false prophetess, but we're not going to look at all of them.

But as we notice here, as I mentioned, even Anna, if we look at her role as a Prophetess, really fits more in Old Covenant Israel as opposed to the New Covenant Church. Because if we look at the spiritual leadership roles that are laid out for the New Covenant Church, we don't have the role of a Prophetess. We don't even have the role of the Levitical Priesthood in the New Covenant Church because the roles are very uniquely different. Because in ancient Israel, you had the Priesthood. You had the High Priest, and the other Priests that assisted him. Their main duties were animal sacrifices related. Working specifically at the Temple. Well, in the New Covenant Church, we don't have animal sacrifices. We are the Temple. We don't have to go to a Temple to worship. So, it's a totally different setup, and it has a different focus.

But as we're going to see here when we look at the roles of the spiritual leadership in the New Covenant Church, we don't have a Priesthood. We have totally different roles that are articulated, but these roles are very specifically defined as male roles. To see that, turn over to Ephesians 4. In Ephesians 4, we'll see here where Paul lists out the various roles of the New Covenant Ministry. This is in Ephesians 4 in verse 11.

Eph 4:11 *“And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, 12) for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13) till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14) that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15) but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— 16) from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.” (NKJV)*

So, you can see here, we've had the various roles of the New Covenant Ministry defined here. But if you'll notice, it describes kind of the purpose for all of this. It's very much in the context of teaching correct doctrine. That's what it's focused on. What we're going to see here is when we look at where Paul described the qualifications for these roles, it's specifically defined as male roles. In fact, the Bible also is going to show us here in Paul's writings that formal teaching in services and a designated teaching role, was something that was exclusively for men. Because Paul directly says this is not a role for women. He even gives us a reason why. But just to notice that, turn over to 1 Timothy 3. This is 1 Timothy 3, and we'll start reading here in verse 1. We're going to see here the qualifications he lists out for someone being ordained into the ministry.

1 Tim. 3:1 *"This is a faithful saying: If a man desires the position of a bishop, he desires a good work."* (NKJV)

Now Paul states right up front that we're talking about roles for men. Pick up in verse 2.

"2) A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife,..." (NKJV)

Again, that's a criterion obviously only a man is going to meet being the husband of one wife.

"...temperate, sober-minded, of good behavior, hospitable, able to teach; 3) not given to wine, not violent, not greedy for money, but gentle, not quarrelsome, not covetous; 4) one who rules his own house well, having his children in submission with all reverence 5) (for if a man does not know how to rule his own house, how will he take care of the church of God?); 6) not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil. 7) Moreover he must have a good testimony among those who are outside, lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil." (NKJV)

So, as I mentioned, you can see here how Paul from the very beginning of listing these criteria, says this is a role for men. And even as he describes it, it becomes very obvious that he is defining this exclusively as a role for men. But again, as I mentioned, notice that one of the qualifications of this was being able to teach. Because it is a teaching role. Well, just prior to where Paul defines these qualifications for us, he specifically tells us that formally teaching in services in a designated teaching role is not a role for women. Just notice here in the latter part of chapter 2. This is what Paul has addressed right before he addresses the roles of the ministry. This is in 1 Timothy 2 in verse 8.

1 Tim 2:8 *"I desire therefore that the men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting; 9) in like manner also, that the women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with propriety and moderation, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or costly clothing, 10) but, which is proper for women professing godliness, with good works. 11) Let a woman learn in silence with all submission. 12) And I do not permit a woman to teach or to have authority over a man, but to be in silence. 13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14) And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression. 15) Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control."* (NKJV)

Now notice here, he's speaking specifically about a formal teaching role. Because in the verses right after this, what is he addressing? The roles of the ministry. So that's obviously what he's referring to here, being a formal teacher in services. He's not saying that women can't teach children, or they can't teach other women or being in less formal roles in that regard. He's specifically referring to having authority over men or, again, a

formal teaching role in Church is what he's referring to here. But then notice he also gives us a reason for why he said this, and this is in verse 13 and 14 here.

"13) For Adam was formed first, then Eve. 14) And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression." (NKJV)

Now, what he's referring to here is the Genesis 3 story in the Garden of Eden. Now, this is a subject that gets our feminist culture today just really riled up, but let's just look at the reality of what Paul has stated here. He's saying that the reason that he's saying that a woman shouldn't teach is because Eve was deceived, but Adam wasn't. Well, just look at the dynamics of what took place there. What Satan did in Genesis 3, he played upon Eve's emotions. Basically, what Paul's getting at here is the fact that women by design and by God's intent from the beginning was that women were to be more emotional. Men are less emotional. Both of those come with an upside and a downside.

But how did Satan play upon Eve? Very much the same way the feminist movement plays upon women to this day. He convinces her that God's trying to cheat her out of "equality". Because what does he say to her? "Well, God knows if you eat of that fruit, you'll be just like Him. You'll be equal with Him. So, God's trying to cheat you out of "equality". He's trying to oppress you, but here, eat this fruit. It's empowering." It's the exact same sales pitch that we hear today. "You're a victim. You're being cheated out of equality, and here's your empowerment." It was a way to suck her in. Well, it worked.

Well, he then used her to play upon the man's weaknesses. Because both of them had their inherent weaknesses. But this is what Paul is referring to here as to why he's saying a woman shouldn't formally teach or have roles in the ministry. Again, it doesn't mean that women can't be valuable assets and have valuable insights. Even in regards to spiritual knowledge. We'll address that here in a minute. He's just saying that specifically for the leadership roles in the New Covenant Church, he says that that is a role for men and not for women. Now, before we go any further here, I'd like to just also clarify some common misunderstandings with verse 15 here.

"15) Nevertheless she will be saved in childbearing if they continue in faith, love, and holiness, with self-control." (NKJV)

Now, notice the words "she" and "they". "She" is obvious if you just read the prior verses. It's referring to Eve specifically. "They" is referring more broadly to women or mankind in general. Because when it's saying that "she shall be redeemed through childbearing," it's not that there's something magical about a woman having a child, and that somehow is going to redeem her. This is referring to the Genesis 3 story. Well, there's a prophecy there talking about how Christ is going to descend from Eve because Eve is the mother of all of mankind. It descended from her. All of us that exist today and have existed throughout human history. You can trace our lineage back to Eve as our great-great-great-great-great-grandmother, because everyone came from her. Well, this is referring to Christ being her descendant, and that's how salvation would come to not only her, but to everyone. That is what this verse is referring to here.

But now, as I mentioned previously, the Bible not only gives us these five women that it mentions specifically as Prophetesses. It also tells us that there are women who are false prophetesses. Just like there are men in the Bible who are described as being false prophets, there are women who are described as false prophetesses. If we look at one example of this in Revelation 2, this also kind of further backs up what we just saw here with Paul's instructions in terms of formal teaching roles in the Church of God being specifically a male role. Notice here in Revelation 2, and we're going to look at verse 18 here. We're kind of breaking into the letters to the seven Churches, and this is specifically the letter to the Church of Thyatira. But let's just notice a reference here, starting in verse 18.

Rev 2:18 *"And to the angel of the church in Thyatira write, 'These things says the Son of God, who has eyes like a flame of fire, and His feet like fine brass: 19) 'I know your works, love, service, faith, and your patience; and as for your works, the last are more than the first. 20) Nevertheless I have a few things against you, because you allow that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophetess, to teach and seduce My servants to commit sexual immorality and eat things sacrificed to idols.' (NKJV)*

Notice it says, "she calls herself a prophetess." Christ isn't saying she's a prophetess. He's saying she claims that title. It's just like anyone who claims a title that God didn't give them. She's fraudulent. But notice how He criticizes the Church. He says, "You allow her to teach." In other words, obviously in this context, it's referring to a woman who's been given a formal teaching role. There were two issues here. It wasn't just that she was encouraging and trying to lead people into sin. But you allowed her to teach in the first place. Again, this is not saying that women can't have meaningful insights into the Bible. Again, we'll discuss that here in a moment. We're referring to, again, inherently the fact that what John is recording here -- quoting Christ himself -- is backing up exactly what we read of Paul there in 1 Timothy, saying that a formal teaching role in services is not a role for women.

Now again, this is not something to somehow oppress or to put down women. Because oftentimes in our society today if you even talk about this subject people get very riled up as if you're being sexist and oppressing women. Well, the Bible has tons of examples of people overstepping their bounds. We have false prophets. We have false ministers in the New Testament that are described. If you look in the Old Testament, there are examples of kings who then tried to not just be a king they tried to take on the role of a priest. Pushed themselves into the Temple and tried to perform sacrifices. Some even got leprosy for doing this. It wasn't just the issue of men versus women. It was individuals overstepping the role that God defined for them.

Because even just take the role of the Priesthood, because we covered earlier the Priesthood was specifically a male role. It wasn't just a male role. They had to be the descendants of Aaron. They had to be the "sons of Aaron". In my last sermon, I covered the story in the book of Kings where Israel and Judah separate and there's a division and they become separate nations. Well, one of the things that we talked about -- I kind

of highlighted that point -- when Jeroboam becomes king of the northern ten tribes, he appoints people as priests who were not Levites. They were illegitimate priests, and this led the nation astray. Again, this isn't just a sexism issue of men versus women. It's the issue of people taking on roles that God didn't give them. Because again, you couldn't just be a Priest just because you're a man. You had to be a "son of Aaron". It was a very exclusive thing because that's how God defined the roles. Well, He has defined divisions between some roles that are for men and some that are for women. It's just respecting God's design is what we need to pay attention to here.

Well, let's also address another subject that oftentimes gets confusing as well. Because if we look at here in 1 Corinthians 11, we'll see another subject here where Paul is addressing the issue of different roles between men and women and some of the inherent differences that God's instructed. But it also uses the word "prophesying" and sometimes people kind of scratch their head over this one and use that as a basis to kind of challenge whether we have the role of Prophetesses in the New Covenant Church or not. So, let's look at this particular subject. This is in 1 Corinthians 11. We'll start reading here in verse 2.

1 Cor 11:2 *"Now I praise you, brethren, that you remember me in all things and keep the traditions just as I delivered them to you. 3) But I want you to know that the head of every man is Christ, the head of woman is man, and the head of Christ is God."* (NKJV)

Now, pay attention to the word "head" as we read through the next couple of verses here. You can tell here in verse 3 that the way the word "head" has been used, the obvious meaning is one having authority because it refers to that "the head of Christ is God", and "the head of a man is Christ", and such. Well, it's referring to one who has authority over is what it's referring to.

But now, we're going to notice as we read through the rest of these verses here, it's also going to start using the word "head" to refer to our physical head, the part of human anatomy. There's going to be sentences where it uses it both ways. Where we have the word "head", but one time it's used as the part of our anatomy and the other time it's used as one having authority. That's key to understanding what's being said here. So, let's pick up in verse 4.

"4) Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonors his head." (NKJV)

Now as we're going to see here as we read through these verses, when it's referring to a head being "covered", it's talking about hair length. It's getting at the basic point of nature that men are intended to have short hair -- a more masculine look -- and women are intended to have long hair, to have a feminine demeanor to them. In fact, these verses are going to even tell us that a woman having longer hair is a sign of submission. That's God's design for the roles between men and women. But notice here when it's talking about a man doing this with his head "covered". He's talking about a man having

long hair, inappropriately long hair. But it's using the word "head" here in two different ways. Because it's referring to, if his head is "covered", his physical anatomy, his cranium. If his hair is inappropriately long, he's dishonoring his "head". Well, the previous verse referred to his "head" as Christ. So, who it's referring to is who he is dishonoring. Now, notice verse 5.

"5) But every woman who prays or prophesies with her head uncovered dishonors her head, for that is one and the same as if her head were shaved." (NKJV)

When it said being "shaved", again, it's referring to a woman not having appropriately longer hair. Again, there's no exact measurement that the Bible gives us. But it's the basic idea that women have longer hair. They have a feminine demeanor to them. Men have much shorter hair. It's a more masculine look. But it's referring to here that if a woman has inappropriately short hair, she's dishonoring her "head". It's referring to her husband, is what it's referring to here. Now, continue in verse 6.

"6) For if a woman is not covered, let her also be shorn. But if it is shameful for a woman to be shorn or shaved, let her be covered." (NKJV)

Again, notice we're referring to hair length.

"7) For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man. 8) For man is not from woman, but woman from man. 9) Nor was man created for the woman, but woman for the man. 10) For this reason the woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels. 11) Nevertheless, neither is man independent of woman, nor woman independent of man, in the Lord. 12) For as woman came from man, even so man also comes through woman; but all things are from God. 13) Judge among yourselves. Is it proper for a woman to pray to God with her head uncovered? 14) Does not even nature itself teach you that if a man has long hair, it is a dishonor to him? 15) But if a woman has long hair, it is a glory to her; for her hair is given to her for a covering. 16) But if anyone seems to be contentious, we have no such custom, nor do the churches of God." (NKJV)

Now, just in reference to verse 16 there, notice he talks about people being contentious. Now, if you just make a general observation of people that you've known throughout your life. Again, this is kind of a general truism I've noticed and it's not going to apply in every single case. But if you notice the behavior of women, for example, that you see in our culture today. If they have just really short kind of a butch masculine type of hairdo that doesn't look feminine at all, what do you tend to find more often than not in terms of their personality? They're kind of contentious, combative individuals. They're people who are kind of sow discord wherever they go. Well, similar is kind of true of men who have kind of a long-haired, feminine, hippie kind of style to them. They tend to be people who just rebel against all authority in general. Whether it's legitimate authority or not. Who are just more contentious and want to stir up trouble. He's basically saying

here in verse 16 -- he's pointing out this kind of generality among people. When we defy those basic standards that God has put into nature, it's kind of rebellion and contention.

Another thing I'd just like to clarify about this, because if you notice, as we read through this, in both cases when it referred to men and to women, it talked about "praying and prophesying". Now typically, when we hear the word "prophesying" in English, we think about foretelling the future. The Greek word here that's translated into English as "prophesying" can have that meaning, but it can also have a broader meaning as well. I think it's important to understand that to fully grasp what these verses are referring to here. Because it's not just specifically talking about someone who's prophesying and foretelling the future. Notice it mentioned "praying or prophesying". Praying is obviously, typically, it's a very private thing that we do in our own homes, away from anyone else. It's just a conversation between ourselves and God. Well, let's also notice here the meaning of the Greek word that's translated as "prophesying" in English. As we're going to see here, it has a little broader meaning than how we typically think of this word.

Now, the word here is transliterated into English as "propheteuo". It's Strong's # 4395 and the definition I'm going to give you comes from The Complete Word Study Dictionary of the New Testament by Spiros Zodhiates. Now, I'm only going to read some excerpts from his definition because it's a lot longer than this. But what I want you to see is that it includes what we typically think of as prophesying -- foretelling the future in advance. That is included in the definition, but it has other meanings as well. Here's just some excerpts from Zodhiates.

"To foretell things to come...; to declare truths through the inspiration of God's Holy Spirit whether by prediction or otherwise...To tell forth God's message..."

In other words, this can just be relaying spiritual knowledge is what this can refer to. Now again, the word does include the meaning of prophesying as we typically think of it. It can also mean just sharing Biblical understanding. To give you an example of this, turn over to Acts 18. We're going to see here an example that includes a lady that is mentioned in the New Testament several times and spoken of very highly. This is in Acts 18 and verse 24.

Acts 18:24 *"Now a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man and mighty in the Scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25) This man had been instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things of the Lord, though he knew only the baptism of John. 26) So he began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Aquila and Priscilla heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately. 27) And when he desired to cross to Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him; and when he arrived, he greatly helped those who had believed through grace; 28) for he vigorously refuted the Jews publicly, showing from the Scriptures that Jesus is the Christ."* (NKJV)

Obviously, the focus here is this guy named Apollos, but notice how Aquila and Priscilla pull him aside and share more understanding with him that Apollos doesn't have at that point. Now Aquila and Priscilla are a married couple that are mentioned in the New Testament several times. They're mentioned several times throughout Acts 18. They're also mentioned in a couple of Paul's epistles. He speaks very highly of them. Now, Aquila is the husband. Priscilla is his wife. But notice they pull him aside here. It doesn't say that just Aquila kind of brought Apollos up to speed on things he didn't understand. It says Priscilla is involved as well. It very much describes her as having an active role. Now again, she's not up in the synagogue giving a sermon and preaching to everyone. She's not declaring herself as an Elder, but she obviously is involved in this. She has insights and understanding that she can share with Apollos that he doesn't have.

My point here is just because the Bible says that women shouldn't have a formal teaching role and have authority over men -- like being in a role in the ministry or teaching in services -- doesn't mean that the Bible is just telling women to sit down and shut up and never share their opinion -- never having a valuable thought. That's not true at all. That is not how the Bible depicts this. It just defines for us that there are roles that God has defined for men. There are roles He's defined for women. Again, anyone overstepping the bounds of their role is violating God's instructions. We all just have to accept those limitations. Also realizing, just like with Moses and with Miriam, typically, roles that come with, you might say, more rights or privileges, also come with more responsibilities -- with a downside. Just like with Moses, where he got to take all the criticism of the Israelites as well.

Just to share with you a personal example of this, I clearly see that the women can have very valuable insights as well. A couple of years ago, I did a sermon on the famine of the word that's mentioned in Amos 8. The point I made with that sermon is, throughout my lifetime, growing up in the Church of God, the perspective on that reference there in Amos 8 was the famine of the word was a famine of preaching God's word. No one would be proclaiming it at the end time. But that's NOT what the verse actually says. It says it's a famine of the hearing of the word. Well, I had grown up for most of my life just assuming what I had been taught from childhood was correct. That that's referring to a time when it would never be preached.

Well, several years prior to when I gave that sermon, I was visiting a congregation up in Illinois and I was speaking on the day of Pentecost. The subject of my sermon that day was how the Holy Spirit gives us spiritually the eyes to see and the ears to hear. In other words, the ability to understand spiritual knowledge. I wasn't thinking about the book of Amos at all. But right after I concluded services that day and finished my sermon, there was an elderly widow lady in the congregation that came up to me and started a conversation with me. She pointed out to me, she goes, "James, have you ever noticed that that verse in Amos that we always talk about the famine of the word, it doesn't say the preaching of the word? It says the hearing of the word. Maybe that has the same meaning as what you just addressed today."

That thought had never crossed my mind until she said that. I mean, I could feel my reaction. I looked like one of those characters in the cartoons when something shocking happens and their jaw pops down, their mouths open, and their eyes bug out. I could feel myself responding like that, because it had never occurred to me until she pointed it out. Well, that ultimately resulted in me studying the subject and giving a sermon on it.

My point being that God gives his Holy Spirit to women as well, and they can have very valuable insights to God's word as well. He's just defined spiritual roles, again, with designated criteria just like He did in ancient Israel with the Priesthood being not just men but being the descendants of Aaron. It's just something we should respect. God has defined a lot of roles of spiritual leadership. Again, they're not always defined by gender. Sometimes they're defined by lineages or a variety of criteria. It's something we should just appreciate as far as God's design. Because God uses men and women as He sees fit and has placed us all in different roles. What we should focus on is fulfilling whatever role that God has given us and doing that to the best of our ability.