

THE MOST
IMPORTANT
Women
OF THE
BIBLE

Remarkable Stories of God's Love
and Redemption

AARON AND ELAINA SHARP



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Introduction

This book is all about the women of the Bible and the role they played in God's plan of redemption for humanity. This book is also coauthored by a husband and wife. Knowing this, it might come as a surprise to you that in a book about biblical women, coauthored by a woman with a master's degree in theology, a man wrote the Introduction.

Far too often when we talk about the role of women in the church, gender in general, or frankly any topic, everything seems to boil down to one word—*power*. Who has the power? Who wants the power? Who is being kept powerless? How do we speak truth to power? These questions seem to percolate at or just below the surface of a great number of issues today, particularly when the topic has anything to do with the sexes.

Over the course of my life, I have been blessed to be raised by, influenced by, married to, and friends with an extraordinary number of godly women. None of these women were perfect (though my coauthor certainly comes close), but there is one thing they all have in common—a focus on eternity.

Truth be told, I doubt that any of these women would have thought to describe themselves as eternally focused, but as an

observer I can tell you that the depiction is a true one. Even now, often years or even decades after the fact, the impressions left on me are unforgettable.

In my mind there is the image of a grandmother who never had much in the way of material possessions; whose husband succumbed frequently to temptations of adultery, alcohol abuse, and myriad other vices; who never stopped going to church; who never stopped praying for every single member of her family; who took what little money she had for a weekly hair appointment and gave it to the church's mission offering. Would that little lady have thought of herself as eternally focused? No doubt the husband, whose residence in heaven today is largely due to her prayers, would say so. When I think about it, I can picture the confused look on her face had anyone ever asked her if she was focused on eternity, but I can tell you as one of the many whom she loved and influenced that she most certainly was.

There is another image in my mind. This one is also of a grandmother. In many ways the two grandmothers' stories are similar. This one also prayed persistently until a husband accepted Christ, albeit at a much earlier period in life. Her love for God's Word practically radiated from her skin—she devoured new commentaries and was quick to pose theological questions to a seminarian grandson, even if some of them revolved around the eternal state of her beloved and long-since-departed dog. Today, there are men and women nearing retirement age who speak glowingly of the Sunday school lessons she taught when they were small children. Maybe she would never have used the phrase *eternally focused* in reference to herself, but that makes it no less an accurate description.

I could go on and on, but my mother will read this book expecting not to be a part of this Introduction (deserving though she may be), and my wife will coauthor the rest of this book,

no doubt removing anything I might write about her. These women who have made an impact on my life are merely the latest in a long line of women of faith who lived their lives for eternity. In the Bible we see an abundance of women who had a part to play in God's plan of redemption.

To twenty-first-century Christians, the women of the Bible can easily become two-dimensional characters in the black-and-white print of an old book. We must remember three facts about the life and times of the women who grace the Bible's pages. First, thanks to the sin of Adam and Eve in the garden of Eden, all of humanity was in desperate need of redemption. This need left every human being on planet Earth hopeless. Sin was a spiritual disease that humanity was unable to remedy by itself. Second, Jesus, through His death, burial, and resurrection brought about redemption. Where humanity was incapable of doing anything about its sin problem, God himself provided the answer in the person of His Son. Third, what we have today in the written Word of God is the story of redemption for humanity brought about by God. This redemption is promised by God at the beginning of Genesis, finds its culmination in the life of Jesus in the Gospels, and is proclaimed throughout the rest of the New Testament. The life of every man, woman, and child in the Bible either looks forward to the coming of redemption by Jesus, or it looks backward to the work of redemption that has already been done by Christ.

In that respect, just about every person in the Scriptures could be described as a participant in God's redemptive plan. Every person in the Bible is another brushstroke in the beautiful painting of redemption that God painted. Rather than looking at every single brushstroke in the painting, however, this book will focus primarily on the women God used to further His plan. It is impossible to tell the story of redemption without telling the story of women.

This book is not an exhaustive look at the women of the Bible, and some notable women were left out. Our look at the women who played a role in God's redemptive plan will begin where you might expect—in the garden of Eden. From there it will take us through Israel, Egypt, Greece, and various other locations. We will see sisters, wives, mothers, widows, queens, slaves, prostitutes, businesswomen, grandmothers, and a mother-in-law. What every one of these women has in common has a very important part to play in God's plan to redeem the human race, and to bring to himself a group of people that He would call His own. This is their story.

Eve

The First Woman, the First Sinner

Should God create another Eve, and I
Another Rib afford, yet loss of thee
Would never from my heart; no, no, I feel
The Link of Nature draw me: Flesh of Flesh,
Bone of my Bone thou art, and from thy State
Mine never shall be parted, bliss or woe.¹

—John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Scripture References

Genesis 2, 3, 4; 2 Corinthians 11; 1 Timothy 2

Biography

There is not a lot of agreement about when the first woman's beginning took place. The book of Genesis is not entirely clear

as to whether she was created with Adam on the sixth day of creation, or if God's special act of creating the first woman came after day seven. Good people disagree as to the timing, but one thing that is definitely clear is that the first woman's creation was unique.

God observed how the man living in the garden of Eden was alone, and His solution to this issue was to create a companion for Adam that would fit perfectly with him. Genesis 2:18 says, "I will make him a helper suitable for him" (NASB). Many English Bibles use the word *suitable* to translate the Hebrew word *kýnegdo*, which means "opposite to" or "corresponding to." The idea behind the creation of woman was that God would create a mate that matched the man in the garden in a way that completed him. It was as if they were two pieces of a puzzle that fit together perfectly.

God's method of creating a companion for Adam was to put him into a deep sleep, and then to remove a rib, which God then used to form Adam's companion. This act caused the first act of a smitten man writing a poem in honor of his soul mate. Adam declared, "This is now bone of my bones, and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man" (Genesis 2:23 NASB). The only two human beings on the planet were naked, unashamed, and "one flesh." The happy couple lived peacefully in communion with God and animals. The only thing they had to do was not to eat of one tree in the middle of the garden.

Of course, all would not remain perfect in the idyllic garden. A walking, talking serpent convinced the woman that just maybe God had lied, or was not serious about the one rule He had given them. She bought the snake's lies, ate the fruit, gave her husband a bite, and humanity capsized into the depths of sin. When confronted by God, Adam blamed his wife, and she in turn pointed her finger at the serpent's deception. God

responded by proclaiming curses on the snake and the world's first couple. For her part, God told the woman, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbirth, in pain you will bring forth children; yet your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you" (Genesis 3:16 NASB).

God made clothes for the couple out of animal skins to cover their nakedness, and it was at this point that Adam gave his wife the name *Eve* because she was going to be "the mother of all the living" (v. 20). Because of their now sinful natures, God drove Adam and Eve from the garden, never to return again.

Role in Redemption

For obvious reasons, Eve has never been the most popular biblical role model for women. Unfortunately for Eve, we don't know much about her, and what we do know is not good. Aside from being deceived by the serpent and committing sin, all we know is that she gave birth to three sons, the eldest of which murdered the middle brother in cold blood. Not exactly the legacy that most women are looking to leave.

Eve's reputation probably isn't helped any by the fact that the rest of the Scriptures have precious little to say about her. After naming her third son *Seth* at the end of Genesis 4, Eve passes from the scene and is never mentioned again throughout the entire Old Testament. She only gets two brief mentions in the New Testament, both of which are by the apostle Paul referencing her deception in the garden. In 2 Corinthians 11:3, Paul warns the believers in Corinth by saying, "But I am afraid that, as the serpent deceived Eve by his craftiness, your minds will be led astray from the simplicity and purity of devotion to Christ" (NASB). Then in 1 Timothy 2:13–14, while giving Timothy instructions about gender roles in church, he says, "For it was Adam who was first created, and then Eve. And it was not

Adam who was deceived, but the woman being deceived, fell into transgression” (NASB).

A cursory glance of what the Scriptures say, and do not say, might lead us to the conclusion that the only role Eve played in God’s plan of redemption was being part of the problem. A deeper look, however, gives us a glimpse of a bigger role that she played.

After their sin, God pronounced judgment on Adam, Eve, and the serpent. First, He addressed the snake, then Eve. God’s final words to the serpent included words that applied to Eve as well: “I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise you on the head, and you shall bruise him on the heel” (Genesis 3:15 NASB).

This passage is very noteworthy for a number of reasons. First, this is the initial promise of a redeemer. The Old Testament contains hundreds of prophecies of a coming Messiah, and right here, in the garden, in the aftermath of humanity’s fall into sin, is the first promise that God has a plan to redeem mankind. Second, this passage is striking because of who it is addressed to. In Genesis 3:15, God is still speaking to the serpent, but His words to the snake involve and have bearing on Eve as well.

In the New Testament, Eve is said to have been deceived by the serpent, but the responsibility for sin entering the world is laid at the feet of Adam, not Eve. Romans 5:12 says, “Therefore, just as through one man sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men, because all sinned” (NASB). Also, 1 Corinthians 15:22 tells us, “For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive” (NASB).

Adam’s culpability in the eyes of God is what makes the first promise of a Savior all the more telling. God’s promise was not that there would be enmity between the man and the serpent,

but between the woman and the serpent. It would be the seed of the serpent and the seed of the woman—not the man—that would continue in hostility. Even though God would ultimately hold Adam responsible for what happened in the garden, this promise is specifically focused on the woman’s role in bringing about redemption, which would now be necessary because of Eve’s actions.

Eve’s reputation as the woman who ate the fruit and plunged the world into sin is not untrue, but it is not the whole truth. Where the serpent brought forth deception God brought forth truth. Where the serpent sought to bring about destruction God promised to bring healing. Where the serpent brought death God vowed to bring life.

The snake intended his deception of Eve to be the downfall of humanity, and the ruin of Eve. From God’s perspective, however, the exact opposite would ultimately be true. God’s promise was from His perspective: Eve would not be remembered for *what she did*. No, God would act, and in so doing Eve would be remembered for *what God would do*.

God did not promise to give Eve or her offspring a second chance. He did not respond by asking or demanding that Eve somehow redeem herself, or by giving her a pathway to work her way back into His good graces. The first promise of a Savior, delivered to a devious serpent, about the woman’s place in God’s plan was solely and exclusively about what God would do for Eve.

From that point on, Eve, her husband, and all of their offspring would exist in a world where sin ran rampant. The faults of the first couple would exist and multiply in every generation that would come after them. Yet, in this darkest of moments, God’s promise shines forth as a beacon. Eve was not just the woman who sinned in eating the fruit; she was the recipient of God’s first promise of the coming of a Savior.

By the Numbers

Bible verses that mention Eve by name: 4

Bible books in which she is mentioned: 3

Women on the earth before Eve: 0

Talking snakes encountered by Eve: 1

Things We Wondered

What did Adam and Eve use to sew fig leaves together?

How many children did Eve actually give birth to?