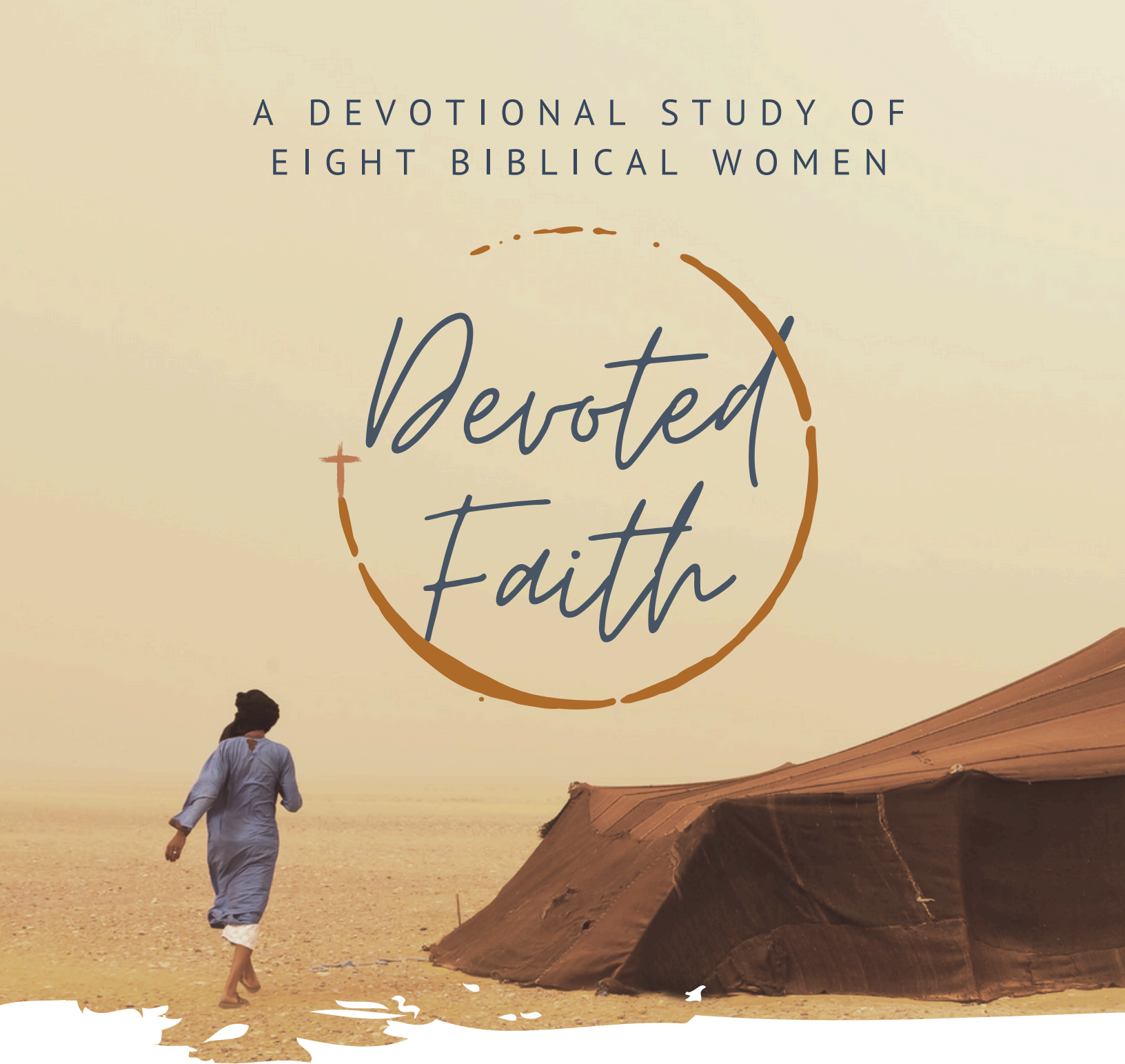


A DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF
EIGHT BIBLICAL WOMEN



Devoted
Faith

AMY FLATTERY

FOR INDIVIDUAL AND GROUP USE

WITH ACCOMPANYING VIDEOS
FILMED IN ISRAEL



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES



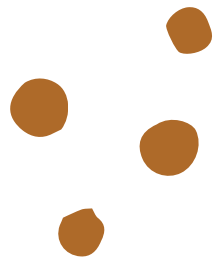
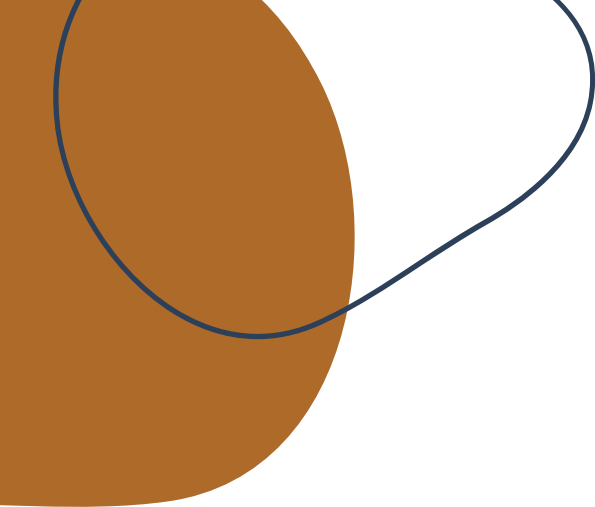
Devoted Faith

A DEVOTIONAL STUDY OF
EIGHT BIBLICAL WOMEN

AMY FLATTERY



CENTER FOR
HOLY LANDS STUDIES



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Before you begin, scan to watch the
Devoted Faith Introduction.
Or view at chls.link/dfintro

Hella,

Then Jesus answered her, "O woman, great is your faith!" Matthew 15:28

Before you begin. . .

How are you doing? Really, how are you? Are you filled with hope, anxiety, fear, joy, faith? Are you suffering? As I am sure you know, you can be all, a few, or none of these at the same time. Wherever you are in your daily walk with God, let's do a bit of it together.

As women of faith, we are not just born, we are developed. Day by day, we learn from our experiences and grow from our mistakes. We are continually making decisions on our life journey that express our faith and show our character.

Like me, you are on a journey with God, and He is intent on developing His relationship with you, one day at a time, one decision at a time. You are in a process of developing your faith in your Father.

What is faith?

Is faith a noun? Is faith a verb? Is it something believed or acted upon? In the Bible, and still today, we see faith in many gods, faith in idols, faith in people, faith in technology, and faith in leaders. People and faith in "things" will never live up to the pedestal upon which they are placed. But I can promise you there is One who will! Journey with God on a path of faith. He is the One who will never fail you.

I lived in Jerusalem for several years for postgraduate work. I walked the land and often considered the many people who walked it before me. They were people who existed and were not simply written about in stories. I could not have gained an intuitive understanding of their lives without first spending time in the land itself.

There are many women named in the Bible, some more known than others, who had a great impact on the biblical story. Theirs was a lifetime journey of faith, or a lack thereof. Some of these women grant us wonderful examples of faith and others not so much.

In this study, you will encounter a few women from the Bible who, for good or bad, exude examples of boldness, mercy, power, struggle, joy, and suffering. All these women give examples of how to live—or how not to live—by faith.

Together, we will look at a snapshot of the life of Sarah, Rahab, Jezebel, Ruth, Bathsheba, Hannah, Mary, and Salome. By considering these women and learning about each one's life in the place where they lived, we will gain an understanding of what they faced and how they approached and dealt with challenges.

Your journey of faith will be distinctive, just as it was for these women in their biblical time period. You, like them, are at your own point in your walk and relationship with God. Let's uncover and discuss truths learned from these biblical women of faith and open our hearts and souls to what God wants to say to us today.

Join me as we focus on relationship, character, and faith in the One who created you and covets your companionship. Join me as we reflect on examples of devoted faith.



Amy F. Clattery

Former Director, Center for Holy Lands Studies

The How-To

Videos from Israel

Videos filmed in the land of Israel are included at the beginning of each study session. They were filmed near the location of each story or event. The eight biblical women in this study existed in real places and at real times in history. The videos will help to give context to their lives, and insight and application to your life. You may find many comparisons! Before you begin your reading, simply scan the QR code with your phone camera to watch the video. Or enjoy them via the website link or digital download.

Bible Reading

At the beginning of each study, you will find the Bible reading selections. Consider dividing the reading into sections or begin your time with the full reading prior to digging in.

Personal and Group Reflections

Throughout the devotion you will have opportunity for personal reflection. These are interspersed throughout the eight-part study. Fill them in however you see fit. They are there for you. The dig deeper opportunities are located toward the end of each section. If you have time, you can answer the questions on your own or later if you are participating in a group setting.

Bonus Material

- **Map of Israel**
- **Ages of the Biblical Land of Israel**
- **Historical and Archaeological Periods**

Map of Israel



Ages of the Biblical Land of Israel

2000 BC	<p>The Period of the Patriarchs – SARAH</p> <p>This period, following the Flood, extends from Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and the sons of Jacob into the years of Israel’s migration to and captivity in Egypt.</p>
1350 BC	<p>The Exodus Period</p> <p>This period includes Moses’s leadership over the children of Israel from their exodus out of captivity in Egypt through their wanderings in the Negev for forty years.</p>
1310 BC	<p>The Conquest Period – RAHAB</p> <p>This period is associated with Joshua’s leadership of the Israelites, including conquering the land of Canaan and dividing the land between the twelve Israelite tribes.</p>
1300 BC	<p>The Period of the Judges – HANNAH, RUTH</p> <p>This is the period following the death of Joshua as the leader of Israel. It is categorized by the continual cycle of Israel falling under the forces of another people group in the region (due to their sin) and God sending a great deliverer to redeem them and set them in a state of autonomy once more. The period is finalized with the death of Samuel, the last named judge.</p>
1000 BC	<p>The Monarchy Period – BATHSHEBA</p> <p>This period encompasses the reigns of Saul, David, and Solomon over the kingdom of Israel.</p>
931 BC	

931 BC

The Divided Monarchy Period – JEZEBEL

Following Solomon’s death, Israel divided into two separate kingdoms: the Northern Kingdom known as Israel and the Southern Kingdom known as Judah. The kingdom of Israel fell first in 722 BC and the kingdom of Judah was dissolved under Babylon in 586 BC.

586 BC

The Persian Period

This period covers events during Israel’s exile and return to their land to rebuild both Jerusalem and the temple.

333 BC

The Greek Period

This period of Hellenistic control over the land of Israel began with Alexander the Great’s conquest, followed by roughly two hundred years of warfare as forces of two of his generals, the Ptolemies and Seleucids, fought over the land, passing it back and forth between their two kingdoms.

163 BC

The Hasmonean Period

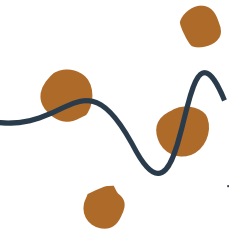
Following a successful revolt against the Seleucid Empire, the Jewish people enjoyed a short-lived dynasty of self-autonomy under the kings/priests of the Hasmonean family.

63 BC

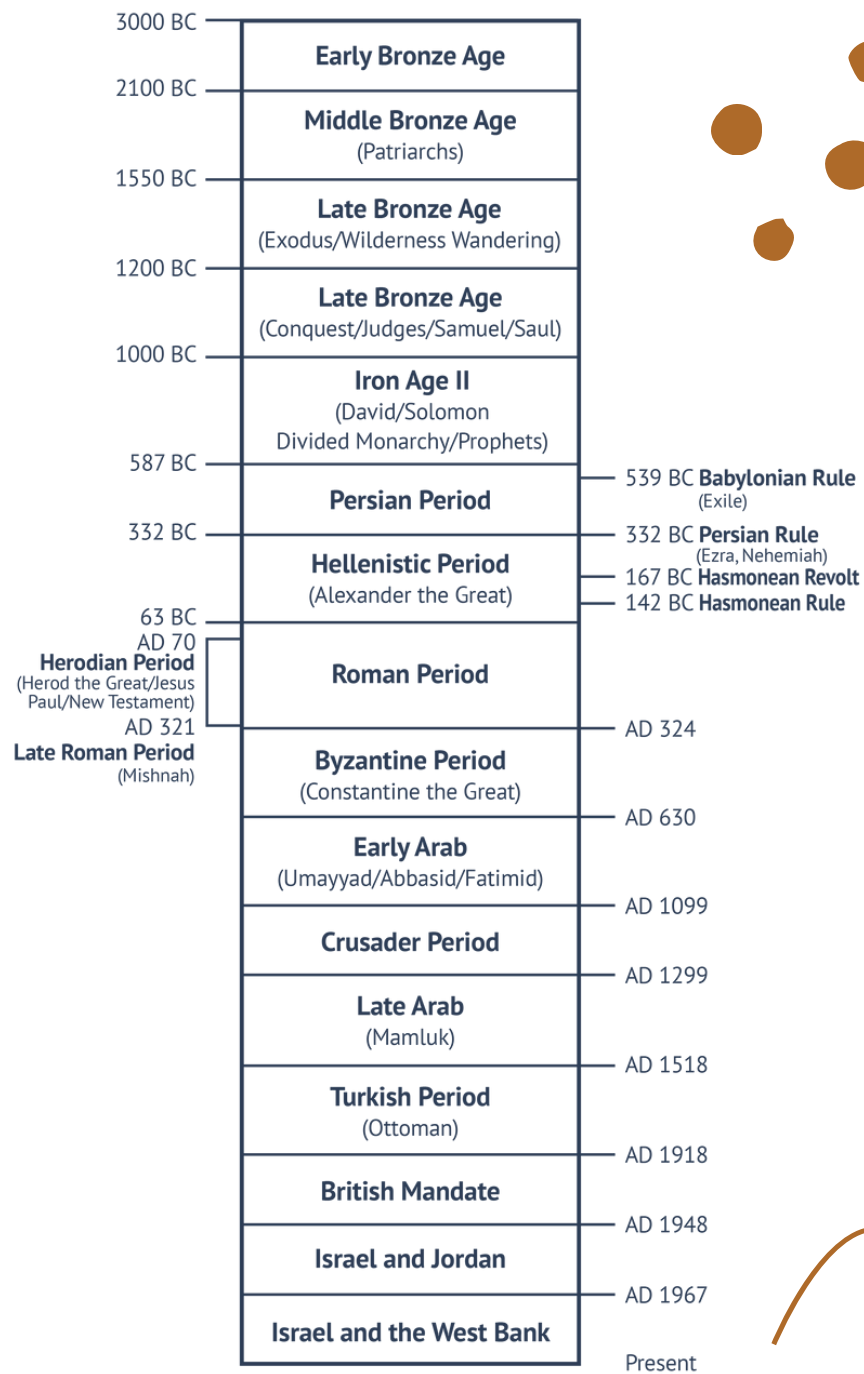
The Roman Period – SALOME, MARY

Beginning with Pompey’s conquest of Israel in 63 BC, Rome established dominance over the land and annexed it into the province of Judea. Rome ruled with a strong hand, inciting two Jewish revolts that eventually led to the removal of most of the Jewish people from the region of Jerusalem with only a diminished Jewish population remaining in the land. This era is often categorized as the setting of the entire New Testament and the life of Jesus.

AD 400



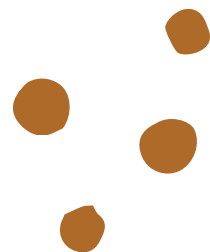
Historical and Archaeological Periods





1

Sarah



SARAH

*A Promise
Fulfilled*



*Before you begin, scan to watch the video on Sarah.
Or view at chls.link/sarah*

Bible Reading: Genesis 12, 16–23

***And by faith even Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise.
Hebrews 11:11 (NIV)***

Have you caught yourself reading through the Bible or, perhaps better said, reading over the verses without giving much thought to the details of those living within its pages? I have! In our hurried lives, it's of great benefit to take a few minutes to slow down and read between the lines.

For example, have you carefully read the story of Sarah and Abraham? Theirs is a story set in the Old Testament, during the early second millennium (around 1850 BC), nearly four thousand years ago. It is a story of obedience, hope, despair, promise, and finally, fulfillment. It's also a story filled with truths that still ring true.

After a long journey, Sarah and Abraham lived out their years in the biblical site of Beersheba, in Israel. The story of how they arrived at the location of Beersheba and the call God placed on their lives is recorded in the first book of the Bible, Genesis. It is a narrative of "Go." And then, "I will." It is a story set in obedience to God and, as a result, the fulfillment of His promises.

Sarah, initially called Sarai, was the wife and half-sister of Abram (*I know what you're thinking, but yes, they did this back then—it was normal!*), who was later renamed Abraham. Sarah was also the mother of Isaac, and we read his story later in Genesis. Sarah's name means *princess*, perhaps assuming that she had a higher standing than other women of her time.

God had plans for Sarah and Abraham. Genesis 12 records that God instructed Abraham, “Go from your country and your kindred and your father’s house to the land that I will show you. And I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you and make your name great so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and him who dishonors you, I will curse, and in you, all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (vv. 1–3).

What were Sarah and Abraham to do? Leave their family, home, and all they knew?

Yes. Indeed, this was the case.

They left their country, their people, and all things familiar to them, and they journeyed to an unknown land.

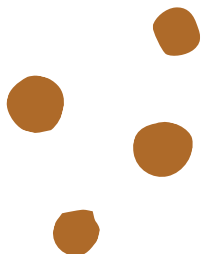
If called, would you, or have you made a similar sacrifice? Why?

Before settling in the location of Beersheba (see map), Sarah and Abraham were living in Ur in Mesopotamia. Sarah followed her husband as he followed God’s call. They left their home and their comfort zone for the land of Canaan, leaving a culture that Sarah knew so well. They departed from Ur, the land of the Chaldeans, and traveled to Haran, what would later be Babylon.

They traveled from place to place over several years with a considerable number of family members who traveled with them. They concluded their journey in Beersheba.

There are many occasions in the Bible story where God said, “Go, do, believe,” and then...I will *bless* you. We see this unfolding in the lives of Sarah and Abraham. God required obedience, trust, and faith, and later came the fulfillment of the promise.

Stepping out in uncertainty is *not easy*.



Have you had an experience of stepping out in obedience, not knowing the outcome or how you would do what was asked of you?

Are you at a point where you can look back and see the path where God has led you? How was He faithful in the process?

I wonder, did Sarah expect to be a partner to Abraham in the promise God made to him? She was brought into the story, into the journey, but seemingly indirectly. It hints that Sarah *might* be included and that she *may* be the mother of the nation; however, at this point, it was not a sure thing in her mind.

Sarah has been recognized as a somewhat contrary figure in the Old Testament. She appeared willing on the one hand to follow in the journey of faith alongside Abraham. On two separate occasions, under Abraham's wishes, she acted as his sister rather than his wife hoping to gain security and wealth for Abraham. At times, she also seemed harsh when interacting with her servant, Hagar.

We know from the Book of Genesis that Sarah was barren. She was old, and because of her advanced age, she no longer had the ability to fulfill the promise God had given to Abraham—to birth a great nation. Sarah's faith journey was entwined in the promise God gave to Abraham but was not yet given to her. Did Sarah have her own personal faith, or was hers the faith of her husband? Was she along for the ride or part of the story?

Take a quick synopsis of your life. How do you take responsibility for your own faith and relationship with God? Have you ever relied on someone else to fulfill that role for you?

I imagine there may have been some confusion regarding what God meant by “I will make you a great nation.” After all, in obedience, Sarah and Abraham left their home, their stability, and their sedentary life. They exchanged it all, at the call of God, for a nomadic life filled with movement and adversity.

God had already confirmed His promise to Abraham but not to Sarah. First, God told Abraham he would be the father of a great nation (Genesis 12:2). Second, God said that Abraham’s seed would be as the dust of the earth—“so that if one can count the dust of the earth, your offspring can be counted” (13:16). And later, when Abraham reminded God that he still had no legitimate heir, God promised that Abraham’s seed would be like the stars of the sky in number (15:1–6).

What did Sarah do?

Though barren and certainly suffering from the shame carried with being childless in that time period, Sarah also proved to be quite independent. As she was childless, she took the initiative and gave Hagar, her Egyptian servant, to Abraham in hopes of birthing Abraham a son. This act was customary during this time in history. Soon, Hagar bore Abraham a son named Ishmael. Does this mean Hagar was now the one to fulfill the future role as mother to the nations? Sarah and Hagar were not on the best of terms. Sarah’s plan backfired, and she resented Hagar and the child she bore to Abraham. Sarah mistreated Hagar and sent her away with the child into the desert.

It is not until Genesis 17:16 when the Bible tells us of God’s promise to Abraham about Sarah, “I will bless her, and moreover, I will give you a son by her. I will bless her, and she shall become the mother of nations; kings of peoples shall come from her.” (NIV)

Finally, this is where Sarah's journey of faith had led her. As we have witnessed, it was not a perfect journey. It was uncertain at times, yet God worked in and through suffering and disbelief, making Sarah a mother to the nations.

Sarah finally had confirmation that the promise to Abraham rested inside her. However, when the words of God were spoken, Sarah reacted in laughter. She was old. She was past the time of childbirth. How could she possibly fulfill the promise?

But God! Later in Matthew 19:26, Jesus told us, "with man this is impossible, but with God all things are possible."

Write about your "But God" moments! What once appeared impossible became possible by faith?

Sarah conceived and gave birth to her son Isaac when she was around the age of ninety. Can you imagine!

The Bible does not tell us much more regarding the life of Sarah. There was a point when God told Abraham to sacrifice his son, Isaac. Abraham was again obedient to God and at the last moment, God replaced Isaac with a ram. We do not know if Sarah knew of the near sacrifice of Isaac or its potential impact on her. Sarah passed away at the age of 127. She was mourned by Abraham and buried in the tomb of the patriarchs, not far from Beersheba.

What do we know? Sarah went. Sarah obediently followed when God said, "Go." We do know that God *did* make her the mother of nations. In fact, Sarah is mentioned in the faith "hall of fame" in Hebrews 11:11–12, "And by faith Sarah, who was past childbearing age, was enabled to bear children because she considered him faithful who had made the promise. And so from this one man, and he as good as dead, came descendants as numerous as the stars in the sky and as countless as the sand on the seashore."

Faith and obedience led Sarah and Abraham to a place of inheritance, an inheritance built and designed by God. By faith, Sarah conceived and considered God faithful to her. And from her womb, a nation was born.

In Judaism, it is common to push back and forth in relationship, as in “iron sharpening iron” (Proverbs 27:17). So too with God. Sarah and Abraham followed the directive of God, yet there are other instances in the Bible when there is dialogue with God regarding what path to take and why! Your relationship with God is just that—a relationship!

It can be as effortless as walking and talking to God daily and spending time in prayer and devotion. How would you characterize your relationship with your Father in heaven? How do you interact with God?

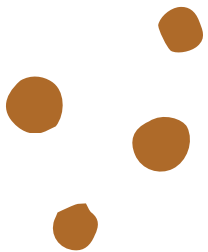
Sarah had a baby in her old age. The promise was fulfilled! What may seem impossible is not impossible for God. Is it imperative that you witness the fulfillment of your walk with God, the impact it has on others, the fruit? Like Sarah, you will likely not see the abounding result of your faith and obedience. But what you will have and experience is fulfillment *in* your relationship with God. Is this enough for you?

What does obedience to God mean to you? Write about those whom you are impacting through your obedience to the call of God on your life.



Hannah

2



HANNAH

*Pleading with
God*



*Before you begin, scan to view the video on Hannah.
Or view at chls.link/hannah*

Bible Reading: 1 Samuel 1–2

There was a woman who visited Shiloh who pled with God.

Why Shiloh?

As Shiloh was a central location in Israel, it became a meeting place for the first unified nation after Joshua divided the land between the twelve tribes. Shiloh was the place where the tabernacle rested along with the ark of the covenant. This was the tabernacle that Israel used throughout the entire journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The people of Israel came from all over the country three times a year to worship God there.

Shiloh was also the location for the story of Hannah found in 1 Samuel 1 and 2. Only two chapters in the entire Bible are dedicated to Hannah. In those few chapters, the story of Hannah gives us a wonderful example of a woman of prayer amid suffering.

Hannah, like many others, traveled to Shiloh from her home with her husband, Elkanah, to worship the Lord. The Bible tells us that she was much loved by her husband but downcast because she was barren, unable to have children (1 Samuel 1:5). To be barren in biblical times, was nearly a curse in the eyes of society. For women in the Bible, children, especially sons, were a blessing of worth and value. As Hannah was childless, she was mocked by her husband's other wife, Peninnah *Yep! Two wives. This was common during this biblical period.* In her distress, Hannah refused to eat and wept continually. Though consoled by her husband, the Bible says that Hannah "wept bitterly" (1 Samuel 1:10). This is the kind of grief you feel in your innermost being.

It was at Shiloh that Hannah made a vow to God. If God would grant her a son, she would lend him to God all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:11). Hannah's spirit was troubled, and she directed her troubled spirit to the only one who could help – God!

Eli, the priest in Shiloh, watched Hannah weeping and assumed she was drunk, and scolded her. Hannah let Eli know that her spirit was troubled. She was not drunk, but was pouring out her soul to the Lord! Eli did not know her prayer but told her to “go in peace,” letting her know that God would grant her petition (1 Samuel 1:17).

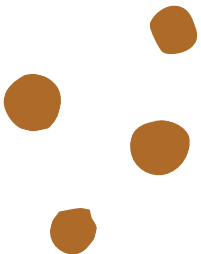
Like Hannah experienced, there are times in our lives when only God can understand our groans and distress. These are situations when words are just not enough to release to God what is inside us. God understands these groans! He hears them with perfect clarity. He cares, and as he did for Hannah, He responds when we cry out. At times, a response may seem absent, yet there is movement in heaven when we call upon the name of God!

When have you experienced distress?

Notice that Hannah prayed *until* she knew God had heard her. Some refer to this as “praying through.”

After Eli the priest told Hannah her prayer had been heard, did Hannah say, “Yeah, right”? Did she roll her eyes and say, “What do you know?” Nope. It is at this point that Hannah showed her devoted faith, her hope, and her trust in God.

Truly, the Bible expresses her reaction as she “went on her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad” (1 Samuel 1:18). Similar to, “Okay, sounds good. Thanks!” Hannah went from anxious and vexed, or irritated and agitated, to “no longer sad” in a very short time. Hers was an expression of sincere devotion and devoted faith. Once she knew she was heard, she let it stand. She stopped her weeping. She prayed through. Hannah knew she was heard and moved on in hope. She did not turn back. She fully expected that God understood her plea and had answered.



George Müller, a Christian evangelist who lived in the 1800s, purportedly said, “Faith does not operate in the realm of the possible. There is no glory for God in that which is humanly possible. Faith begins where man’s power ends.”*

Hannah did not have the power to answer her own prayer. But she knew the power of God and that He would answer.

What is your expression of faith once you know you have been heard? Do you move forward knowing that the God of the universe has heard you?

Indeed, shortly afterward, Hannah had a son, Samuel, whose name means, “God has heard.” Hannah kept Samuel until she weaned him, likely between the ages four to six. Then she took him to Shiloh, to the house of the Lord.

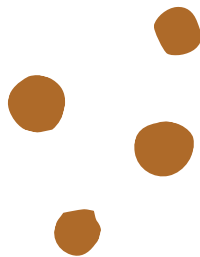
Hannah found Eli at the tabernacle and told him that Samuel was the answer to her prayer and that she was now “lending” him to the Lord. “As long as he lives, he is lent to the Lord” (1 Samuel 1:28).

The word lend, similar to loaned, assumes that whatever is lent, or loaned, will be returned, right? Not so for Hannah. If you are going to make a vow to God, be sure you know what you are promising. You may just get your answer. Be ready to do your part.

Write about an answered prayer that also required a response from you.

Hannah brought Samuel to the tabernacle, where Samuel became an assistant to the high priest, Eli, even though he had two sons. Samuel grew and played the role of a prophet of the Lord in the transition from the judges to King Saul and then King David.

Hannah prayed another prayer. In Judaism, the Song of Hannah in 1 Samuel 2 is regarded as a model for prayer. She began her prayer with personal gratitude as she bore a son by divine intervention and dedicated him to the Lord. She moved on to tell how God lifted and glorified the nation. Hannah assumed that God had the power and could and would intimately intrude and intervene in the lives of His people—and He did!



What can be learned from the life and actions of Hannah? Like many, Hannah had her own personal suffering. While some choose to turn to other means to appease their pain, Hannah wisely relied upon God as her source of strength. In her despair, Hannah turned to God.

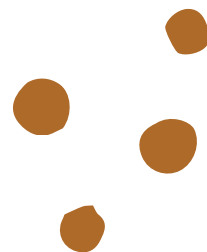
In times of suffering, do you turn to God? Do you know that God *is* the source of your strength? Write down your struggles and lay them before the Lord.

Hannah trusted God and made a noticeable shift when she knew she had been heard. She immediately believed and saw no further reason for weeping.

Write about prayers/conversations you have had with God. When you knew you had been heard, did you move forward in hope and faith? Do you feel like you need to remind God of certain prayers? Write about it below.



3 *Rahab*



RAHAB

*What Kind of
Faith Is This?*



*Before you begin, scan to view the video on Rahab.
Or view at chls.link/rahab*

Bible Reading: Joshua 2–6

But Rahab the prostitute and her father's household and all who belonged to her, Joshua saved alive. And she has lived in Israel to this day, because she hid the messengers whom Joshua sent to spy out Jericho. Joshua 6:25

The story of Rahab took place during an interesting period in history. After the children of Israel wandered in the wilderness for forty years and Moses died, God chose Joshua to lead His people into the land of promise, Israel. Joshua, as the leader of the people, sent spies into Jericho to look over the land before his planned invasion.

Upon entering the city, the spies encountered a Canaanite woman named Rahab. Canaanites were hated enemies of Israel. What's more, Rahab by profession was a prostitute. Yes, a prostitute—and God used her mightily! This is a good reminder that God alone determines the value of humanity. Our value to God is boundless—a "note to self" when shame and judgement invade our thoughts, attempting to sway our acceptance and encouragement of a repentant heart.

It seems likely that Rahab lived on or in the walls of the city, perhaps near the city gate, potentially a good location for her line of work. Ancient walls were often thick with homes built into the wall for the protection of the city. (These are referred to as casement walls.) You may recall this from our study video on Sarah.

Joshua's spies entered the home of Rahab. Due to her profession, her home was likely a place where people entered and exited frequently. It seems Rahab knew their language enough to communicate with them.

The spies were seen by others, and their presence reported to the king of Jericho. He hastily sent soldiers to Rahab's home. He wanted those spies! The king was aware that the Israelites were preparing to invade the land. He had heard the stories of the miraculous parting of the Red Sea, of the victories that God had

given the Israelites, and how God had promised Israel the land.

Rahab hid the spies under stalks of flax that she had spread on her roof, and there they stayed until their escape. She misled the king's guards and sent them after the spies (who were still in her home), letting the guards know that certainly they could overtake them. The guards took off in the direction Rahab had pointed them, intending to chase them down.

Why did Rahab help the spies? Like the king, Rahab had also heard the stories of the God of the Israelites. Word of impending doom tends to spread quickly. She told the spies that she knew that God had given them the land in which she was living. She told the spies that her fellow Canaanites lived in dread because of the stories that had reached their ears. Then Rahab showed her faith and her righteousness.

Rahab was bold. She was not afraid of what the king or his men would do to her if she was found out but, rather, she had fear for the Lord. Her statement was a strong one! She proclaimed, "For the Lord your God, he is God in the heavens above and on the earth beneath" (Joshua 2:11).

What kind of faith is this? Would you be able to do what Rahab did? How do your choices show you are more devoted to God than to the fear of man?

Rahab had devoted faith in the God of Israel. As a Gentile, Rahab was not raised to believe in the God of the Israelites; in fact, quite the opposite. Yet, she is proclaimed in the New Testament books of Hebrews and James as righteous and one who had faith. It is truly amazing. A woman, a prostitute, an unknown person to the Israelite people was known to God! God's Spirit was unceasingly at work in Rahab.

Rahab acted faithfully and petitioned for protection for her and her family. She cut a deal with the spies—"I'll save your life, you save mine." The men agreed to act faithfully and sympathetically toward all those who gathered in Rahab's home. Rahab was instructed to lower a red cord out of her window, the window from which the spies escaped. So, it came to be. Israel attacked and overcame Jericho.

The home with the red cord was not attacked, and those inside were saved.

Due to her kindness, righteousness, and faithfulness, Rahab's family was safeguarded on that day of attack and welcomed to live among the Israelites for the remainder of their lives.

Rahab was a woman known to God. Are you aware that you, like Rahab are known intimately to God? He is the God who sees you; therefore, you can know you have *great* value. List your value!

Rahab had to make some quick decisions. The wrong decision could cost her life. But God had other plans. God granted hope and a promised future to Rahab and her family.

With righteous faith, Rahab turned away from all things familiar to her because of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. It seems that even prior to the event with the spies, Rahab was in the process of becoming a believer in the one true God.

She took a chance on two strangers who were the precursor to the destruction of everything she had known. She not only saved herself but the lives of her father, mother, brothers and sisters, and her extended family.

Do you have this kind of faith? Rahab's devoted faith saved her life as well as her family members.

And God dealt righteously with Rahab. For Rahab, God was the God of new beginnings and second chances, not just for her but also her family. God brought good out of her circumstance. God showed intentional care for this woman. He had plans for Rahab and plans for her family.

Do you want to know something? Our Gentile Rahab from Jericho is mentioned in the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, and what's more, Rahab is an ancestor of Jesus!

There is a list described as the heroes of faith in the Book of Hebrews that lets us know Jesus had a background a lot like yours and mine. His lineage was not filled with perfection. However, it was filled with those who believed.

God used those we may consider as sinners, ordinary people, and even outsiders in the lineage of His Son. Do not underestimate God's ability to work through you as well. List some ways that God has worked through your life and the life of your family to promote His Kingdom.

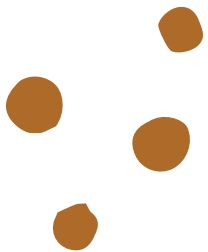
Guess what! History is still being written. Rahab changed her world by her faithful actions. Who is the next woman of God who will change the world? Who is the next woman who will be obedient to the nudge of the Spirit?

Notice, Rahab did not seek out her situation. The spies could have met another person along the way. Rahab was, by no intention of her own, placed in her situation. She chose what was righteous and, in her faith, God saved her.

Rahab did not let her circumstances keep her from being faithful and obedient to her calling. She did not let her past keep her from boldly serving God. Do not let your past or your circumstances keep you from courageously serving God. List some ways you have done this or are currently overcoming circumstances to live well before the Lord.



Bathsheba

A large, light brown number '4' is positioned behind the text 'Bathsheba', serving as a background element for the title.

BATHSHEBA

*Repentance, Mercy,
and Redemption*



Before you begin, scan to view the video on Bathsheba.

Or view at chls.link/bathsheba

**Bible Reading: 2 Samuel 11–12;
1 Kings 1–2**

It happened, late one afternoon, when David arose from his couch and was walking on the roof of the king's house, that he saw from the roof a woman bathing; and the woman was very beautiful. 2 Samuel 11:2

Have you heard the story of David and Bathsheba? It reads as a story packed with scandal and sin. It shows the depth of human depravity and lust, *but* there is a light of mercy, redemption, and hope born out of the events that unfolded.

The story began on a hill in Jerusalem, at the location of what is now known as the City of David. Bathsheba, an Israelite woman, was married to Uriah. He was known to be one of David's mighty warriors (2 Samuel 23:8–39). Due to his position, Uriah and Bathsheba lived near the palace of David (2 Samuel 11).

Second Samuel 11 tells us that Bathsheba was outside bathing as an act of purification. What does *purification* mean? There are many reasons a woman would purify herself. In this instance, it could have been as she finished her menstruation cycle. Bathsheba was a very young woman, likely between thirteen and sixteen. Her purification was not a purification from sin as we may think today but, rather, from a common monthly event that she did according to Torah observance. (Also note, the Bible does not say she is bathing naked.)

King David saw Bathsheba and desired her. He called for her, and their relationship resulted in a pregnancy.

Whoa! We just zoomed right through that. The relationship between Bathsheba and David has caused many discussions in the world of biblical study. We like conclusions. We like to know who to blame. Our imaginations run wild. Did Bathsheba want David to see her? Was it seduction? Did David have relationship with Bathsheba against her will?

What do we know? We don't know if Bathsheba deliberately displayed her body to David. Her "motives" if any, seem rather unintentional; however, we do not have a description of her intention or emotions. We do know that she was old enough to be married to Uriah, yet young enough that she did not yet have children. In those times, women usually became pregnant soon after their marriage. We need to also consider that the lay of the land, terrace housing that descended downward, made it obvious how David was able to see her. Any further gaps in the story that might fill in the blanks would be our own interpretation.

We do know the time is spring. Second Samuel 11 tells us it was the spring of the year. It was a time when kings go to battle, but the text tells us, "David remained in Jerusalem." Did Bathsheba think David was also away at war, as would have been customary? It was afternoon, David just arose from the couch, saw her, and wanted her. *Note: This is a good reminder to not be idle or let your eye wander.*

David, knowing she was married to Uriah, his mighty warrior, still sent for her and took her for his own. Was she an innocent victim or someone who hoped to seduce David with her beauty? Her husband was away, how could she refuse the king's request? If the king sent for you, can you refuse? So many questions!

Regardless of the unknowns, we do know this was a sinful act, and sin placed both David and Bathsheba in a situation that was unjust before the Lord. Bathsheba became pregnant. Because of this, and to hide his immorality, David called Bathsheba's husband home from battle in hopes that he would sleep with his wife and seemingly be the father of the baby. Instead, Uriah slept outside the door. He was not going to spend time with his wife while other men were out fighting a war. This resulted in Uriah carrying a note with his own death warrant written on it back to his commander. David had him sent to the front line of battle to assure his death.

Uriah was killed, and David took Bathsheba as his wife.

**David went to great lengths to hide his sin. However, his sin was not hidden from God. When has your sin had an impact on others?
What did you do about it?**

Wait, the story doesn't not end there!

There was a penalty to this sin. God sent a prophet named Nathan to David. Nathan called out David for his iniquity, making David aware that there would be consequences. Though David was the only one called out, but both David and Bathsheba suffered the effects of the sin. A person's sin is never just on their own self. It has far-reaching arms that bring suffering to all in its path.

It was then that evil entered the house of David, for what was done in secret had public consequences. After the child's birth, the baby fell ill and died.

Notice something—Bathsheba lost her purity, her husband, and her baby, all in one year. This is a significant amount of grief to encounter for a young woman.

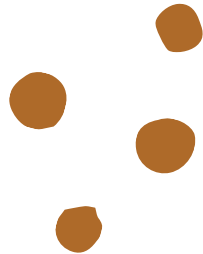
However, the story continues. Bathsheba, now the wife of David, conceived another son, and she became the mother of a great king, Solomon. God saw fit, in His sovereignty, to redeem Bathsheba. Though Solomon was not the intended king or next in line for the throne, as David's favored wife (and under her influence and the influence of the prophet Nathan), their son Solomon was chosen to rule following David.

With honest and evident repentance before the Lord, and turning away from evil toward devoted faith, good was born out of something negative. God took what Satan meant for evil and used it for good, in ways that we cannot fully comprehend.

Write some examples from your life when God has taken what was meant for harm and instead used it for His purpose.

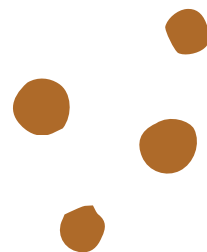
Solomon, viewed as pure before the Lord, was allowed to build the temple of God, where worship of God took place for generations. He was instructed by his father, David, to “be strong, act like a man, and observe what the Lord your God requires: Walk in obedience to him, and keep his decrees and commands, his laws and regulations, as written in the Law of Moses. Do this so that you may prosper in all you do and wherever you go” (1 Kings 2:2–3).

Moreover, from the lineage of David and Bathsheba, the Messiah was born.





5 *Ruth*



RUTH

Does Your Character Precede You?



*Before you begin, scan to view the video on Ruth.
Or view at chls.link/ruth*

Bible Reading: Ruth 1–4

*In his sermon, "The Romance of Ruth," W. A. Chriswell declared, "God doesn't evaluate human beings and human events as we are prone to evaluate them. A historian will note the crowning of a great king, but according to Matt. 10:29, God will note the fall of a tiny sparrow. A historian will chronicle the marching of armies and the conquest of nations, but the Lord will note the tears of poor humble peasant women like Naomi and Ruth, in the book of Ruth."**

I think Ruth is someone with whom I would want to be friends.

Ruth is the eighth book in our Bible. It is one of only two books in the Bible named for women. It is a very short book that centers around Ruth's life in Bethlehem, and the events that transpired between her and Boaz.

Prior to Ruth's arrival in Bethlehem, she lived in the land of Moab, a foreign land east of the Dead Sea. The Bible tells the story of a man, his wife, and their two sons who left the land of Judah to go to Moab to find food. There the man died, leaving his widow Naomi, and their two sons. Both men married Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. Then the two sons died which left the three women to fend for themselves. What were the three women to do? Where should they go? How would they survive? Their situation left them to deal with significant adversity.

Naomi heard that the famine that drove their family to the foreign and pagan land of Moab had subsided. Naomi, though residing in a foreign land, had held to her belief in the one true God and she desired to return to Bethlehem, in Judah. Ruth and Orpah had to decide whether to stay in Moab or move. Ruth alone decided to move with her mother-in-law, thereby discovering the blessing of God. It seems a seed of faith had been planted and grew in Ruth.

⁴²* W. A. Chriswell, "The Romance of Ruth," January 11, 1987, video, <https://wacriswell.com/sermons/1987/the-romance-of-ruth-dedication-of-youth-building/>.

In Ruth 1:16–18, Ruth discloses her true intentions: “Don’t urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go, I will go, where you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God. Where you die, I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if even death separates you and me. When Naomi realized that Ruth was determined to go with her, she stopped urging her” (NIV).

Ruth, a Gentile, converted to the One True God of her husband and mother-in-law and accepted this belief as her faith, giving up her familiar multigod religion. This was a considerable step of faith for Ruth! The fact that she held on to her faith when her world fell apart around her only grew her faith and her character.

**Have you experienced significant upheaval in your life?
What has it done to your faith?**

Ruth chose to move to an unknown land, with people of whom she was not familiar, unsure as to how they would be provided for or if she would be welcomed. She left behind her family, her people, and everything familiar to her.

In our lives, there are times when we must leave what is comfortable for the unknown to be obedient to the call of God.

**When have you left what is familiar and comfortable because of
the call of God on your life?**

In Ruth chapter 2, the story moves from Moab to Bethlehem. Ruth found herself working in a field to survive and to feed Naomi. Ruth picked up leftover grain in the field being harvested. As a foreigner, she was not sure how she would be treated. But her character preceded her.

Does your character precede you?

Boaz, a relative of Naomi, was the owner of the field where Ruth gathered grain. He heard about Ruth, spoke to her regarding her character, and said, "May the Lord repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge" (Ruth 2:12).

In fact, Boaz later said that "all my fellow townsmen know that you are a "worthy woman" (Ruth 3:11). Notice, God's hand was on Ruth and Naomi, and the Lord provided both a place of safety. Enter the kinsman-redeemer! The role of kinsman-redeemer was established in Leviticus 25. A kinsman-redeemer is a male relative who had the responsibility to act on behalf of a relative who was in trouble, danger, or need of vindication.

Through a sequence of events planned by God, Boaz redeemed the land that belonged to Naomi's husband. He restored Naomi and then married Ruth. Boaz showed favor toward Ruth by redeeming and restoring her inheritance as a widow.

Boaz and Ruth's story is an illustration of redeeming that which was lost.

It was not common or even lawful for a Jew to marry a Gentile. Boaz saw Ruth and her character, and showed concern and care for her. Ruth expressed thanksgiving for the favor she found in the eyes of Boaz. This is a wonderful picture in the Old Testament of God's love toward all people, even those viewed as outsiders. Remember, the Messiah came from the lineage of a marriage between a Jew and a Gentile: Ruth and Boaz had a son they named Obed. He was the father of Jesse. And he was the father of King David, from whom we find the lineage of Jesus, our Savior.

Ruth's story is one that progressed from sadness and loss, transitioning to a new land, a new people, and a love for God. Out of this story emerged a woman of great faith, a woman of noble character, and a woman who played a role in the lineage of Jesus. This is not a story of one event but a *lifetime of events* where God remained faithful, even during suffering.

It is often during times of suffering that your relationship with God can produce a depth of character and faith that can and will transform your life. It is almost an unspeakable relationship that is difficult to convey in words. In pain, we all have a choice to fall into the arms of God, wrestle with Him, hang on to Him, and let Him carry us until we can walk.

In difficult circumstances, do you seek and depend on God or run from Him? Have you learned that if you run, you will continue to run and not find what you seek? Write about an applicable situation in your present or past that is an example of leaning hard into God.

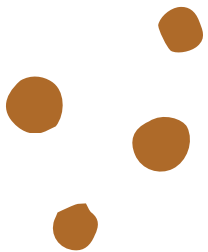
God's promise is that He will not fail you. Crawl, walk, and scrape your way through your suffering. Do not ignore it, do not hurry through it, but grow deeply with God while *in* it. Like Ruth, you can do it.

Ruth made a choice. She chose God. She chose a path that was not without suffering, but she chose to walk it with God.

Have you had an experience of growing deeply during suffering? Recall some lessons you have learned or are learning.



Jezebel



JEZEBEL

*Don't Be a
"What If"*



*Before you begin, scan to view the video on Jezebel.
Or view at chls.link/jezebel*

**Bible Reading: 1 Kings 16–21;
2 Kings 9**

And the corpse of Jezebel shall be as dung on the face of the field in the territory of Jezreel, so that no one can say, "This is Jezebel." 2 Kings 9:37

Do you follow God? If so, what does that path look like in your life? Better yet, would I know, sitting next to you, that you have a relationship with our Father in heaven? How about if we are driving in a car with heavy traffic or in the checkout line at the grocery store? I must admit that I would not always want to be under a watchful eye.

Let's consider an example of someone who did *not* follow God. She was someone with wealth and privilege—she had it all! Her name was Jezebel. But life did not turn out so well for her in the end.

Much of the story of Jezebel takes place in the Jezreel Valley. The area of Jezreel was the main territory ruled by King Ahab and Queen Jezebel in the ninth century BC. This was a time when the people of Israel were split into two nations, Israel to the north and Judah to the south. Israel suffered internal differences and fell to frequent invasions. However, this was a time when Israel was following the belief in the one true God.

When Ahab became king of Israel and married Jezebel, a Phoenician princess, their marriage created a political alliance between Israel and Phoenicia in the area of modern-day Lebanon. It seemed that Jezebel had an educated childhood. She grew up worshipping many gods in a polytheistic culture (belief in many gods).

Jezebel had an unmatched amount of power in her husband's life, effectively changing the religion of the Northern Kingdom from God-centered worship to worship of many gods. There was even a temple and altar built to Baal in the middle of a God-fearing population! Jezebel held significant influence and was certainly not a silent queen, arriving at her position with a great deal of power and backing from her father's kingdom.

Why talk about Jezebel?

Often when looking for examples, we run to inspiring women, those who have conquered, ruled, been seen, were humble, and served God fearlessly—the world changers!

List some of these women in your life. How have they impacted you?

What about those who live outside of the will of God? Can we also learn from them? *Yes!* We can learn what *not* to do and how *not* to live. There are negative behaviors and actions that we can easily slip into if we are not paying attention and if we are not in a continual relationship with our Father in heaven.

Jezebel was not in a relationship with God. She was in a relationship with false gods, power, and greed. She fought against the people of God. This is well documented in the story of Elijah and the prophets of Baal and in the story of Ahab and Naboth's vineyard. (You will read about this in your Bible reading.)

**List how poor decisions and actions have impacted you.
How do you navigate bad situations?**

As Israel's queen, Jezebel continued to worship Baal, which flew in the face of the people of Israel. She ordered the murder of hundreds of prophets of God and fully supported the prophets of Baal and Asherah. Enter Elijah, a prophet of God. He prophesied that a drought would come upon Israel. Indeed, the drought did follow – across the land ruled by Ahab and Jezebel.

In the story of Elijah on Mount Carmel, Elijah by an act of God embarrassed Jezebel—big time! At this point, her influence was weakening. A miracle happened. If you know the story, you will recall that there was a drought in the land. Baal's priests built an altar to Baal. They cried out all day, and Baal did not answer their prayers. Elijah called to God, and immediately fire fell from heaven, and the altar and all its surroundings were licked up in flames. Then, rains soon came. There is so much more to unfold in the story.

Fire falling from heaven was miraculous! Jezebel, a witness to all God had done should have fallen to her knees in repentance. Instead, she chose to double down and ordered the death of Elijah, and he fled. She chose vengeance. Her pride got in the way.

When have you allowed pride to get in the way of repentance toward God and others? What was the result?

Following the events on Mount Carmel, King Ahab, Jezebel's husband, coveted the land and vineyard of a common landowner, Naboth. Ahab offered to purchase the property from Naboth, but Naboth refused the king's request as it was his ancestral land. Ahab whined about it, truly pouted! Jezebel would have none of it. She had Naboth condemned to death, stoned and killed, and Ahab secured his land.

Because of Jezebel's actions against Naboth, Elijah prophesied that she would be killed and that dogs would eat her dead body. After the death of Ahab, Jezebel was thrown out a window, and the dogs ate her flesh so that she was unrecognizable, an unfortunate and unnecessary end to a life.

Jezebel's faith was not in God.

Below are ten lessons we can learn from Jezebel and her lack of devoted faith in God.

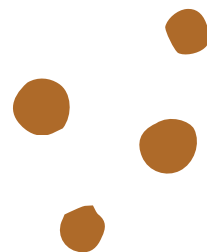
1. When someone (an Elijah in your life) speaks, listen.
2. Jezebel had time to repent, and she chose not to. When you see your error, change your ways.
3. Know what it is to be humble.
4. Do not cause suffering around you; do not exact revenge.
5. Do not practice idolatry with the *things* in your life. Your hope is in God.
6. Be alert and prayerful.
7. What if Jezebel had chosen differently? Don't be a "what if."
8. Pride led to her fall. Even in the face of the miracles of God, she would have none of it.
9. Jezebel is legendary for the wrong reasons. Be legendary for the right reasons.
10. You are legendary to God—and that is more than enough.

You see, God is the Master, we are not. God is trustworthy, merciful, and loving. God is also a jealous God. He is the one to run toward in thankfulness, weariness, suffering, pain, joy, heartache, and need.

You always have a choice. Which one will you or have you made? We know in the face of history that pride comes before a fall. Remember to whom you belong and remember that you are legendary to God.



7 *Salome*



SALOME

*Leading from
Behind*



*Before you begin, scan to view the video on Salome.
Or view at chls.link/salome*

**Bible Reading: Matthew 20:20–24,
27:56; Mark 10:35–40**

*Are you a leader? Yes, you likely are. We are all leading someone, whether it be a thousand-person staff, a child, or a friend. In his autobiography, Nelson Mandela once wrote that “a leader is like a shepherd. He stays behind the flock, letting the most nimble go out ahead, whereupon the others follow, not realizing that all along they are being directed from behind.”**

Who are you leading?

Did you know that a shepherd leading his flock leads from behind and not from the front? If you are out front, how can you see if anyone follows or if anyone is in danger, or if anyone is veering off a path toward danger? How can you lead when you cannot see those you are leading?

Some professed leaders would rather be out front and remain there to gain prestige and glory for themselves and to have the best seat at the table. What does that say about their character? And in heavenly terms, does it give them a better seat at the table?

Shepherding is a form of servant leadership, a type of leading where a leader can see the individual and the group. This type of leader is a person who has great character and knows how to put others first with the hope of teaching, guiding, and steering them toward a positive outcome. Shepherding is a leadership style of gentle prodding, one created in love and for the betterment of those being shepherded. We will come back to this later.

For a moment, let's visit the first-century town of Magdala. It is the location of some of the most interesting finds of first-century life around the Sea of Galilee. The discoveries allow us to understand the lives of Jesus' followers, specifically those who were not only involved in shepherding but also fishing. Two men in

* Nelson Mandela, *Long walk to Freedom: The Autobiography of Nelson Mandela* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1995), 22.

particular are men you may have read about in your Bible, James and John, known as the sons of Zebedee. Theirs was a family of fishermen.

In Mark's Gospel, the sons of Zebedee were fishing with their father on the Sea of Galilee. Jesus approached them and told them to follow Him, to learn from Him, to be His disciples. *At that moment*—not after a long wait—they left their father with the other hired men in the boat and followed Jesus. (Side note, it was common for a teacher to have disciples, learners who followed their master to develop and grow.)

Did James and John just ditch their dad? Sometimes we neglect the reality of what was happening. To have hired men, you must first have a successful business. Zebedee's sons did not leave their father empty-handed, but with the remaining hired workers.

Magdala was one of the wealthiest cities in the region. Archaeologists have found excavated basins coated in salt that were used to salt fish so they could be sold in other regions and around the known world. This brought the city wealth and made the fishermen along the lake some of the most prominent figures inside Jewish society. Zebedee was one of the prominent figures. He was one of the foremost business owners in the region. So much so that Zebedee was known to the Jewish leaders in Jerusalem by name.

I have briefly introduced you to Zebedee and his sons, James and John, but I want you to meet their mother, Salome. She was the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John. She was devoted to her husband, her sons, *and* to Jesus. After Jesus called her sons, she also traveled with Jesus during His ministry in the Galilee and to Jerusalem.*

Can you imagine traveling with Jesus, listening to His words, watching His miracles, and witnessing His care for each person with whom He came in contact? Salome was a faithful follower up to the end of Jesus' life. She, along with Mary the mother of Jesus and a few other women, witnessed the suffering of Jesus on the Cross and was one of the first women to the tomb that Sunday morning of His resurrection!

It is likely that the family fishing business of Zebedee and Salome funded a portion of the ministry of Jesus. The journey James, John, and Salome took with Jesus, sitting at His feet and learning, held great value and blessing for the family.

Salome was ambitious as a mother, ambitious for her sons! Of course, she wanted the very best for them, a natural parental hope. In this line of thought, Salome requested of Jesus, "Say that these two sons of mine are to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left in your kingdom" (Matthew 20:21).

This is a gutsy request! What exactly was Salome asking for? To what kingdom was she referring? Was she thinking heaven, or was this request one intended for

the near future—a kingdom that was not far off, an earthly kingdom?

Though Jesus had told His followers of His coming death and resurrection, this wasn't completely understood by His disciples and the women who traveled with Him. Salome, like many others in the first century, may have looked at the role of the Messiah as a king, a ruler, a prophet, and a priest. Salome held out hope that the Messiah would overthrow the oppressor, Rome, and her sons would hold a place of honor.

To be honest, Salome should have known better. Jesus' patient response to Salome was the statement, "You do not know what you are asking" (Matthew 20:22). The request for two to be placed in a higher level above the other disciples—and, in turn, everyone—caused confrontation between the two brothers and the disciples. Jesus, as was common, used this as a teaching moment.

Jesus presented to Salome, the other women, and the disciples a shift in thought, a shift in their tendency to place themselves before others.

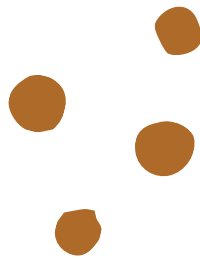
Jesus, in the presence of Salome, called the disciples to himself and said, "You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. It shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be your slave, even as the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:25–28).

Jesus, as a shepherd leader, was teaching Salome and those with Him how to live their lives and, in turn, teaching us. To lead and to live a godly life modeled after the life of Jesus, we must always look toward and imitate the life of Jesus.

Jesus had to decide how He was going to live His life and lead those around Him. Jesus chose a form of servant leadership that benefits all of us. In your daily life, how do you express your faith in God?

To lead as Jesus did, we must access a far different type of leadership than what we see in the world around us. We must lead like a shepherd.

Salome took the admonishment that Jesus gave her well. She continued to travel with Him. She watched over Jesus during His crucifixion and was present on the day of His resurrection. I imagine she learned that Jesus was and is the best example of a servant leader. Salome learned this through His spoken words and actions. She experienced it firsthand through His death on the cross, and she witnessed it by His resurrection. The servant leadership of Jesus conquered death so that we may live. I know no better example of shepherding than this.

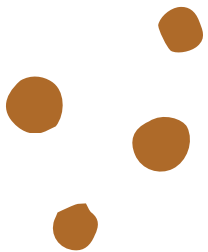


**Though Salome's name is not directly mentioned in the text, through text comparison and deduction, we have more than reasonable certainty that Salome is indeed the mother of James and John. At the Cross, Matthew and Mark list three women observers. Mark 15:40 names the third as Salome, and Matthew 27:56 names the third as "the mother of the sons of Zebedee." As Matthew likely used Mark's Gospel as source material for his own, this is likely his modification to connect this third female witness to people earlier in his Gospel.*

Further, John 19:25 lists four women at the Cross. Of those four, the only one that could be Salome is the one identified as "His mother's sister."



8 *Mary*



MARY
*The Faithful
Mother*



*Before you being, scan to view the video on Mary.
Or view at chls.link/mary*

Bible Reading: Luke 1–3

And the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”
Luke 1:30–33

Are you a person of character the combination of traits and qualities that distinguish you as a person, your morals, your integrity?

We all want to say, yes!

This may be a difficult question to contemplate as it requires focus, obedience, and courage. If you think about it, wherever you are and whatever you are doing, you are either walking well before the Lord or you are not. There is no in-between. At all times, by your actions, you are either exalting the name of God or the opposite, desecrating the name of God. You either have godly character or ungodly.

Does having godly character mean life will be easy and without pain? No! But abiding in the will of God is far better than the distance that sin creates between God and us.

I want to talk to you about Mary, the mother of Jesus. She was a woman of courage and of character. Her life was not one of ease. She certainly suffered, but her character, faith, and piety allowed her to be chosen by God to be the mother of the Messiah, Jesus.

Mary lived in Nazareth, also the hometown of Joseph and later Jesus. Nazareth had about four hundred people during the time of Jesus and spanned an area about the size of two to three football fields. Not very big as far as our standards go today.

Mary had a common Jewish name—Miriam, after the sister of Moses (Numbers 26:59). We find that she had a devout heart toward God. We know from Scripture that she observed the law of Moses. She held strict adherence to the Law. She took part in annual pilgrimages to the temple for the purpose of purification, something she could have done once in her life, but she chose to go immediately after the birth of Jesus. She was related to priests, and she married a godly and equally devout man named Joseph.

Are you passionate about your faith? Does your daily walk show that you have devoted faith, like Mary? How?

Mary was likely around the age of twelve or thirteen when she was told by an angel that she would give birth to the Son of God. The New Testament Book of Luke, chapter 1, tells us that the angel Gabriel was sent from God to Nazareth, to a virgin from the house of David named Mary who was promised to Joseph. Gabriel greeted her as a “favored one” (v. 28). The Bible says that she was “greatly troubled” (v. 29). I can only imagine. The angel told her not to be afraid, and that she had “found favor with God” (v. 30). I am not sure if there is a more wonderful statement in all the world!

She was told that she would conceive a son, whom she should name Jesus, and that Jesus would be great and called the Son of the Most High. He would take the throne of David and reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom would never end (Luke 1:31–33).

If I were Mary, I would have had a few questions at that point. How about you?

Mary did have a question. She asked, "How will this be since I am a virgin?" She was told that the Holy Spirit would come upon her and the power of the Most High would overshadow her, and the child to be born would be called holy—the Son of God (Luke 1:35).

As we have learned from this study of women, nothing is impossible with God.

Her response could have been that of Sarah who laughed at the words of God. Instead, Mary's question was not one of doubting laughter, but rather, "How will God make this happen—I am a virgin." As in, "Okay, I will do this, but how will You do this?" Mary's response was one of acceptance and reverence: "Behold, I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word" (Luke 1:38).

Mary was chosen! She did not say, "What will people think of me?" What will Joseph say? What will my parents say? My siblings? Will anyone understand? Will people believe me?" I mean, really, is this how the people expected the Messiah to arrive?

How would you respond if you had been in Mary's position?

Mary conceived and carried Jesus until His birth in Bethlehem. After the birth of Jesus, the shepherds who were in the field nearby visited the baby. They proclaimed what they had been told by the angels who visited them in the field that the Messiah had been born. The Bible tells us that Mary pondered these things in her heart.

Pondered means to consider something deeply and thoroughly, to meditate on, to weigh carefully in your mind, and to consider thoughtfully. By pondering, Mary showed patience and wisdom. She did not proclaim, "Yeah, that's right. I just birthed the Savior of the world." Instead, in holiness, in quietness, tucked away in a home with her husband by her side, she thought on the events that had taken place.

Mary did not have the full story. She did not know what was to come. She did not know what *kind* of messiah Jesus would be. Many wanted the Messiah to be a prophet, a priest, or a king. Instead, Jesus taught, loved, healed, and saved—not just the people of that time, but those for eternity.

As much as we must wait upon the Lord, so did Mary. Step-by-step, she played the role that God had intended for her. Her actions showed enormous trust and faith. She quietly pondered, she waited on God, she was patient in her actions, and she was responsible in the situation in which she was placed.

Like Mary, we do not have the full story. How do you practice faithfully waiting upon the Lord in your daily life?

Mary was chosen by God not only to carry the Messiah, but to also *be* His mother. She seemed to know some of what was to happen, as she treasured the words said about Jesus in her heart. She certainly had to navigate the issue of parenting –parenting the Son of God! She nursed Him, played with Him, trained Him up, taught Him. She kept Him from harm and danger initially, but ultimately she had to let Him go—to trust she had done enough, to enable Him to fulfill the life that both she, Joseph, and God expected Him to live.

Mary played a role in preparing Jesus for the message He was to carry to the world, and she suffered a great loss in His crucifixion. She was present for much of the ministry of Jesus, and she watched her righteous Son die at the hands of unjust men, not knowing that three days later He would rise again, conquering death.

Mary was steadfast. She retained her character, her devoted faith.

What is your character (the nature of a person, your morals, your ethics)? Do you need to show the world who you are, or, like Mary, do you ponder and take time to allow God to work His way and His will in your life? Do you proclaim yourself, or do you proclaim the will of our Father in heaven by your morals, your ethics, and your actions? How?

Have you ever stopped long enough to think that at all times you are either proclaiming the name of God or defaming the name of God? It is a sobering thought! This week, month, or year, how have you proclaimed the name of God with your life or defamed it?

How can you remind yourself to do your best to proclaim God in relationship with Him and to the world?



We are all on a journey of faith. As you walk through your life, devotion to your faith, spending time with the Lord, and growing in your relationship with God will only strengthen you during good or difficult experiences in your life.

There is so much more to write and discover about people in the Bible. Open the Scriptures daily and let the lives of the people in its pages speak to you. Let His Word seep in and impact how you relate to the world. To do so is a wonderful expression of Devoted Faith.

I pray you are richly blessed!

About the Author

Amy grew up in Lynden, Washington. She attended Calvin College and earned a B.A. in biblical studies and theology. In 1997, she moved to Jerusalem, Israel, to pursue an M.A. at Jerusalem University College. She studied New Testament backgrounds and Jewish history of the Second Temple Period. In 2002, she moved to Belgium where she lectured at Continental Theological Seminary. Amy co-founded the Center for Holy Lands Studies in 2011 and became the director of CHLS in 2016. Currently, Amy serves as the Director of Operations for U.S. Missions for the Assemblies of God. As an author and public speaker, she presents at events around the United States and still teaches on various trips to the lands of the Bible. Amy is an ordained minister with the Assemblies of God. She is married to Dr. Mark Flattery, president of Network211. Together they also serve as Assemblies of God world missionaries. Most importantly, they have six amazing kids and a growing brood of grandchildren.

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