

## ***Agents of Hope: God's Great Missionaries***

### ***Women of Mission***

Lesson #10 for September 6, 2008

Scriptures: Luke 8:1-3,41-55; John 4:1-40; Acts 16:14-16; 18:1-3,24-28; Romans 16:3-5.

1. Just as there was a wide variety of male characters in Scripture, there was also a wide variety of female characters.

They include good and bad queens, righteous maids, praying mothers, powerful leaders, influential wives, generous givers, prostitutes, prophets, deaconesses, gracious hosts, and faithful supporters and friends of Jesus. (*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*, August 30, 2008)

Should female prophets be called "prophetesses"? The only female deacon mentioned in the Bible (Phoebe, Romans 16:1) was called a "deacon." There were no "deaconesses" in the Bible!

2. This lesson is about some of the many women who played important roles in Scripture. It is clear that certain women were heavily involved in supporting and advancing the cause of Jesus and His disciples as well as the cause of the new church.
3. Read Luke 8:1-3. Why were those particular women named? Were they all wealthy and able to support Jesus, His disciples, and His mission?
4. Men left their jobs and appeared to abandon their families to follow Jesus. Can you think of any reason why women should not have been attracted to Jesus to the same degree? How much do we know about Mary Magdalene, Joanna (the wife of Chuza), and Susanna? In the patriarchal society of Jesus' day, did those women need permission from their husbands or fathers to help support Jesus and His disciples? Was some of the money that Mary contributed to the cause of Jesus ministry derived from her former "profession"? Such an offering from a "sinful" source was forbidden in the Old Testament. (Deuteronomy 23:18) Was Chuza's wife possibly healed of demons just as Mary was?
5. One interesting possibility is that Chuza (Joanna's husband) is the man from Herod's government who came to Jesus in Cana to ask Him to heal his son. (John 4:46-54) If Jesus healed her son, it might be easier to understand why she would be willing to support Him with her means. The Greek suggests that Chuza was the personal financial manager for Herod! There have been a number of very well-to-do SDAs in modern times who have chosen not to give generously to the cause. What if they had? Does God lack money? Is money the limiting factor in the progression of "God's work"?
6. Our lesson makes an important point about the fact that the women were last at the cross and then first at the tomb on Sunday morning. (*DA* 774.1; 788.1) What were the factors that contributed to that? Did they love Jesus more dearly? Were they considered insignificant by the Roman authorities? Were they less likely to be arrested by the Roman authorities? Were they less likely to be noticed by the Jewish authorities? Where were the disciples at this time? Weren't the disciples hiding behind locked doors? Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea weren't afraid to come forward! Why?
7. After the resurrection, why do you think Jesus chose to reveal Himself to several women before

He appeared to any man? Who was the first person to be given the news of the resurrection of Jesus? (John 20:1-18; Luke 24:1-12) Would you have chosen a former prostitute to be the first person to bear the message of the resurrection to the first “general conference committee”? Was she “chosen” to be the first to hear the good news because she was there and because she was ready to be told that glorious news? A number of modern movies have tried to suggest that there was a special, maybe even immoral, relationship between Jesus and Mary Magdalene. Do you think there is any basis for that in Scripture? Jesus has presented Himself as an “ordinary” human. The devil is doing everything he can to make Jesus look like just any other human male—sinful!

8. The lesson notes that women were restricted from the innermost portions of the temple in Jerusalem. There was a special court for women between the Court of the Gentiles and the court for ordinary Israelite men. One of the main features of the court of women was all the offering receptacles!

There was the *Bruised or Bleeding Pharisee*. The Talmud speaks of the plague of *self-afflicting Pharisees*. These Pharisees received their name for this reason. Women had a very low status in Palestine. No really strict orthodox teacher would be seen talking to a woman in public, even if that woman was his own wife or sister. These Pharisees went even further; they would not even allow themselves to look at a woman on the street. In order to avoid doing so they would shut their eyes, and so bump into walls and buildings and obstructions. They thus bruised and wounded themselves, and their wounds and bruises gained them a special reputation for exceeding piety. *Daily Study Bible on Matthew 23:1*.

9. As a general rule, women were not allowed to study the Torah or the Old Testament. In fact, they were not even allowed to touch the Scriptures lest they contaminate Them. But there were certain ways to get around almost every restriction:

The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother's knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.— *Desire of Ages 70* (1898)

How did Mary get her education? Why was she picked to be the mother of Jesus? She was Godly, intelligent, literate, and apparently had access to Scripture. Joseph had at least six children already, and Mary was probably only a teenager when he married her. (Matthew 13:55,56) Why have men dominated women for so much of human history? Is it because they could and because they were—and are—sinful and selfish! Men still dominate their wives in most of the world. If women are inferior to men because the first woman was taken out of man, what about every male child from that day to this who has been taken out of a woman?

10. It was against the law for a rabbi to include women in his group of students. But Jesus ignored all those taboos. Many women followed Him; most notably, Mary Magdalene.
11. As an example of how patriarchal or male-dominated the society of that day was, men were allowed to divorce their wives for even the simplest provocation, but wives were not allowed

to divorce their husbands at all! Jesus had some very significant words to say about that. (Matthew 5:31,32; 19:3-10; Mark 10:2-12; Luke 16:18)

12. It is interesting to note that almost all the references to women in the New Testament gospels are in the Gospel of Luke. Why do you think this is? Could it be that the Greek audience of Luke—the non-Jewish writer of Scripture—was less prejudiced against women than the Jews were? Were even the disciples Matthew, Peter (whose Gospel Mark wrote out), and John still “bound” by their prejudices? Look at Luke 7&8. Jesus repeatedly did things with women that were strictly forbidden. He even touched a dead girl and brought her back to life! (Mark 5:35-42; Luke 8:49-56) The books of Luke and Acts were not accepted by the eastern portions of the Christian church for hundreds of years because they were regarded as too favorable to women and marriage.
13. A famous Jewish male prayer goes something like this: I thank you Lord that I was not born a Gentile, a slave, or a woman. In light of such a prayer, it is very significant to read Galatians 3:28, *GNB*: “So there is no difference between Jews and Gentiles, between slaves and free people, between men and women; you are all one in union with Christ Jesus.” Was that a statement of fact, or was it wishful thinking on the part of Paul?
14. Think of all the ways you can think of that Jesus broke the cultural norms and rules of His day in relating to women and to Gentiles.
15. What is the significance of the fact that Philip, the deacon, had four daughters who prophesied? (Acts 9:21)
16. Are there cultural and religious barriers today that keep us from spreading the gospel? Can you name some? How can we clearly distinguish between what are just customs and what are clearly principles? How can we know for sure what is a cultural norm versus a biblical standard?
17. Another group of people who was despised by Jewish males was the Samaritans. Very early in His ministry, Jesus broke all the rules by taking His disciples through Samaria and talking with the Samaritan woman. But as we know, that led to the conversion of an entire village. (John 4)
18. Notice that except for this passage in John 4, Samaritans also are mentioned almost exclusively by Luke and not by the other writers of the Gospels.
19. Do you think those differences explain the fact—as noted above—that the books of Luke and Acts were not accepted by certain Christian groups for hundreds of years?
20. If you were asked to make a list of the 10 or 20 greatest women in the Bible, who would you include?
21. Do you have a rational explanation for the fact that Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar that He was “the Messiah” (John 4:26) while to His Jewish followers, He apparently did not use that terminology? Would the Jewish followers have misunderstood and thought Jesus was setting up an earthly kingdom as they had hoped?
22. Do you think Jesus intentionally broke every taboo that He possibly could? Or was it by accident? Was He intentionally trying to break down cultural, ethnic, and gender barriers? Do you think you would have chosen the Samaritan woman at the well to be one of your earliest missionaries? She convinced many from that town to go with her to listen to Jesus and “many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus.” (John 4:39, *GNB*) She was a missionary.

23. The apostle Paul found a home with Aquila and Priscilla in Corinth. (Acts 18:1-3) We are told that they felt a kinship because they were all tentmakers. Then, Aquila and Priscilla went with Paul from Corinth to Ephesus and the two of them stayed in Ephesus when Paul had to travel on to Jerusalem after his brief initial visit in Ephesus. (Acts 18:18-21) They ministered in Ephesus and shared the gospel message with Apollos. (Acts 18:24-26) When Paul came back to Ephesus, (Acts 19) he probably stayed with Aquila and Priscilla. Who do you think did the cooking and cleaning to accommodate Paul and perhaps several of his friends? Two of Paul's most successful campaigns and missions were to the church at Corinth and the church at Ephesus. It is quite possible that he lived with Aquila and Priscilla both of those times! How much do we owe to Priscilla for the ministry of Paul at that stage in his life?
24. The first person to be converted by Paul in Europe was a woman, Lydia. (Acts 16) We are told that she was from Thyatira. If that was her original home, then she was Asian as opposed to European. But once again, Lydia, who was probably married, felt comfortable inviting the whole group of men to her home to stay for a period of time. Would Paul have been able to carry on his business of evangelizing Philippi and later other cities without the very generous hospitality of some of the women? There are a number of other women mentioned by Paul in his greetings at the end of different books. (Romans 16:7,12; Philippians 4:2,3; Philemon 2)
25. Do you think there were certain things that those women could do for Paul and for "the gospel" that men could not do? If so, what? What are some things that men could do that women could not do?
26. What things can women do today that man are not as good at doing? Is God calling women today to exercise their talents in supporting the church in various ways? What special work for women do you see that will be necessary in the final end of this earth's history?
27. We know that God apparently approached two men before He approached Ellen White to be His end-time messenger. Didn't God know that the two men would turn Him down? Why did He choose a somewhat-disabled, feeble young woman to carry the most important message to the world in these final days?
28. How do you see the role of Ellen White changing in our church today? Are her writings valued as they should be? Does her gender have anything to do with that changing role?
29. Should there be more women in "high" positions in our church?
30. Are you particularly thankful for the work of women throughout Scripture and especially for the work of Ellen White in our day? If so, why?

© 2008 Kenneth Hart, MD. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.*** [Info@theox.org](mailto:Info@theox.org)

Last modified: August 25, 2008

C:\My Documents\WPISSTG-Hart\AgentsOfHope\GPR of KH near-Final Added SS-10-Agents of Hope-2008\_09\_06-Fin.wpd