

**McCabe United Methodist Church**  
**Behind the Veil: Women of the Bible**  
**Rise Up, O Women of God! (Part 1)**  
**II Chronicles 34:14-17**  
**Pastor Ray**  
**7-29-2012**

Today Pastor Rick and I are starting a new sermon series called: Behind the Veil: Women of the Bible. We will spend the next few weeks talking about women of the Bible that made a tremendous difference in the life of the Israelite Nation and the early Christian Church. You will know the names of some of these women, but there will also be women you have probably never heard. Some of them were prominent and others were not.

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Have you ever noticed the majority of Bible stories are about men? Women aren't mentioned very often. When the Bible does mention women it is not uncommon for the women to be unnamed. For example, we can consider the story of Noah and the Ark. When God called upon Noah to build the Ark he never mentioned Noah's wife by name. On the day God directed Noah to enter the Ark with his family we hear God tell Noah and his three sons Shem, Ham, Japheth, and "their wives" are to enter the Ark.

The Bible was written by men and for men. Of course, the women were allowed to overhear the biblical story; but the target audience was men. This is illustrated in the passage attributed to the Apostle Paul in I Timothy 2:11-12:

“A woman should learn in submission. I do not permit a woman to teach or assume authority over a man; she must be quite.”

He made similar comments in I Corinthians 14:34-26.

This passage doesn't go over very well at my house or with a number of my friends. It's obvious to us that Paul wasn't writing in modern times. This statement may also indicate why he was a lifelong bachelor.

In the Greco Roman world there was a very well defined social structure the first group were free citizens who were wealthy, moderately wealthy, or poor. Second, were citizens who were freed (had been slaves at one time) and were now wealthy, moderately wealthy, or poor. The third group was people who were slaves: household slaves by choice, people working off a

debt, or people who were captured in a time of war. At the very bottom of the ladder were the average women. They were of the least concern to that particular social structure.

But even in the time of the Old Testament there were women who found a way to be recognized as great leaders within the synagogue. The Hebrew Bible reports there were four women exulted as Prophets. This office placed them in a position of authority over men. The women were:

- Miriam – Moses sister
- Isaiah's wife (a prophet without a name)
- Deborah – one of the Judges
- Huldah – who is mentioned in today's passage

The role of women in the church and in society has improved a great deal. But the way women are viewed is still an issue in some Church circles.

For example, there was a conservative pastor who made a joke about women. The joke is in very poor taste, so I trust that you won't laugh when I tell it to you. The conservative pastor was asked about his understanding of the role of women in the life of the church. When he was specifically asked how he felt about women behind the pulpit he said:

“I think it's great. After all, how else will the chancel get vacuumed?”

When I was a student at Saint Paul School of Theology one of my classmates told us about her experiences growing up in a conservative church. One of the stories she told us still sticks with me. I don't think I will ever forget it.

She volunteered as a member of the alter guild. The members were all women. Two of their responsibilities included dry cleaning the altar cloths once a year and buying flowers for the chancel area. But when it came time to place them in the chancel they had to stop at the communion rail and give them to a man to place on the altar, because “Women” were not allowed inside the chancel.

It took the Christian Church a long time to get this one right, and some branches of our faith are still getting it wrong. The United Methodist Church got it right in 1956 when we started ordaining women. The second woman ordained in our church was Pastor Grace Huck from South Dakota. She was and is a respected pastor and leader within our Church. She now lives in Spearfish, SD.

But even today there are times when women are treated differently in our church. That's what today's skit was all about. There are times when the chairperson of a committee asks for someone to be the secretary for the meeting and one of the men asks a woman if she will do the honors. At the very least the men turn away and try not to make eye contact, so they won't be selected, while waiting for a woman to "volunteer."

Today's scripture was written during the time when the Israelite nation was divided. In its history the nation was ruled by the Great King David and by Wise King Solomon. The time between their reigns marked the high point of their national history. Following Solomon there was a bloodless civil war, because the people couldn't agree on a new king. The north became known as Israel and the south as Judah. After some time, Israel was defeated and taken over by Assyria.

Following Solomon the kings of Judah turned away from the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and started worshiping the pagan gods. During that time a king even offered his children as a sacrifice to the pagan god Molech in the valley of Gehenna, which is translated as "Hell." It was known as a valley of death...a valley of burning fire.

Then along came the child King Josiah. He was named the King of Judah at age eight (8). When he was sixteen (16) he set about the task of renovating the temple...cleaning the corners... an all around spring cleaning and remodeling. It was during this project that the workers found a lost book of "the Law." Today we call this scroll the book of Deuteronomy.

The Priest presented this book to King Josiah who read it...and then tore his clothing and repented because he knew the Kingdom and the people had turned away from the one true God, worshiping false gods, for at least the last fifty-five (55) years. Then he called upon the Priest to find someone who could help them interpret the book and help them understand how to help the nation regain its faith in the one true God.

The Priest did something surprising. They took the book to a woman...the Prophetess Huldah. The amazing thing is they could have taken it to the great Prophet Jeremiah...but instead they took it to Huldah. Over the centuries Rabbis have tried to make sense of this decision and they have surmised the Priest may have taken it to Huldah hoping she would be more compassionate in her judgment of the nation. But we will never know the actual answer.

As a Prophetess, Huldah was in a position of authority over the Priest and in this instance, over the King. Did you notice...she referred to the King as: "...the man who sent you..." rather than by his name or his title.

Huldah showed compassion on King Josiah, because of his acts of repentance and because he sought to rebuild the Kingdom's relationship with God. Through her wise counsel Huldah is responsible for helping the nation of Judah return to a faithful relationship with God. She helped the nation regain its faith and its prominence as a great nation.

Huldah was a faithful leader. Huldah was an authority figure. Huldah was a Prophetess in a world ruled by men.