



Tertius . . .

Someone ought to count the women of the Bible. More to the point, someone ought to count them accurately. I mention this because a quick Internet search reveals significant disparity in the various numbers people give for the women in the Bible. I should not criticize, however, for several difficulties make such counting an impossible task. We do not know, for example, whether a few Bible characters are men or women (e.g., Dibilaim the parent of Gomer in Hosea 1:3, and Ezra who is mentioned in a genealogy in 1 Chron 4:17). A much more difficult challenge is counting groups of women, such as the water-drawers who helped Saul find Samuel in 1 Sam 9 or the daughters of King Zedekiah mentioned in Jer 41. Another question is whether to count women who are characters in proverbs or parables. And what about women who may or may not be the same person, such as “the other Mary” (Matt 27:61, 28:1), who is probably the same as “Mary the mother of James” (Mark 16:1; Luke 24:10), who is probably the same as “Mary the mother of James and Joseph” (Matt 27:56; Mark 15:40).

The following pages feature some women of the OT. Since this is not the first time *Priscilla Papers* has devoted an issue to OT women (see, for example, vol. 23, no. 2; vol. 25, no. 1; and vol. 28, no. 4), one might jump to the conclusion

that we are at risk of running out of women to write about. But that conclusion would be far from accurate. Though a precise number is elusive, the fact remains that a large number of women occupy the pages of the Bible—more than most people would assume.

Let me introduce you to one of these numerous women. The cover photo and opening article of this issue of *Priscilla Papers* portray Deborah—the famous Deborah who rescued Israel and judged its people under a palm tree near Bethel. But there is another Deborah—the not-so-famous Deborah who served Rebekah and was buried under an oak tree near Bethel. She is introduced in Gen 24:59, and Gen 35:8 records her death: “Rebekah’s nurse Deborah died and was buried at Bethel under the oak, and Jacob named it Allon-bacuth” (CEB). The name “Allon-bacuth” means “oak of weeping” and suggests that the death of this life-long servant was sincerely mourned by many. The presence of a second Deborah in the OT, a woman of whom most Christians have never heard, is a reminder that many such women inhabit the pages of Scripture.

In addition to reading about the famous Deborah, in this issue you will also encounter numerous female prophets, Woman Wisdom and the other women of Proverbs, and one of the Bible’s most honored women—Ruth.

May the women in these articles and the hundreds of other biblical women be an encouragement to you.

. . . greet you in the Lord.

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