

⁵ *The First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Tyndale 1958), page 153.

⁶ *The Pastoral Epistles* (Tyndale, 1957), page 76.

⁷ *An Exposition of the Old and New Testaments*, Vol. 1 (James Nisbet, 1706), Comments on Genesis 2:21-22.

⁸ "On the Apparel of Women," *The Ante-Nicene Fathers*, Vol. IV, (Eerdmans, 1956), page 14.

⁹ "The New Bedford Gang Rape: Who Were the Men?", *Ms.*, (July 1983), page 51.

¹⁰ *Women Be Free!* (Zondervan, 1977), page 111.

HEROINES OF THE FAITH: A NARRATIVE ESSAY

By Mary LaGrand Bouma

It was a desperate ploy. If it failed she would be, at best, a social pariah; at worst, burned alive. Probably few of us, either women or men, would be able to summon up the kind of courage Tamar showed when, realizing that the system was failing to give her justice, she decided to do something about it. She used womanly wiles, but not in ways we usually associate with the term.

We read her remarkable story in Genesis 38. She was married to the patriarch Judah's son Er. This unfortunate young man was "wicked in the sight of the Lord: and the Lord slew him." At this point Judah did the proper, the just thing according to Hebraic law: He gave her his second son, Onan, for a husband. This fellow, of legendary wickedness, was a scofflaw. Well, not exactly. He pretended to honor the law, but when he "went in to his brother's wife, he spilled the semen on the ground." He did not mind having sex with Tamar, but he did not want to impregnate her because the child would be counted as his dead brother's. God did not approve of this any more than God approved of Er, so Onan died also.

Now Judah had one son left, but Judah was understandably nervous about letting Shelah marry Tamar. It did appear that Judah would be tempting fate by giving her his last remaining son — his last hope for carrying on his name. After all, he knew many men who had outlived a couple of wives, but not vice versa. Was Tamar putting arsenic in his sons' food? Was she hexing them? Judah's friends probably counseled him to cut his losses: "Law or no law, man, that woman is bad news. Give her a wide berth."

Women had virtually no legal power in Israel, particularly widows. They were the truly disenfranchised. All Tamar had was her womanliness. But she didn't go to Judah and plead, weep, or bat her eyelashes. She didn't grovel. Instead, she decided to be an actress — to play a role. She, Tamar, Judah's daughter-in-law, retained her self-respect; her actress persona played the whore.

The narrative continues in a vein which many well-meaning Christians would not allow their children to read if it were not in the Bible. Judah had put Tamar off, after Onan died, by telling her to go back to her father's house until Shelah grew up. "Don't call me — I'll call you." But when Shelah was grown and she had not heard a word from Judah, she realized what was going on.

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ANNOUNCING A WEEK-END SEMINAR ON CAPE COD JULY 22-24, 1994

Center for Urban Ministry Course: Great Black and/or Africans of the Bible and Early Church

Instructors:

Allen Callahan — assistant professor of New Testament, Harvard Divinity School

Catherine Clark Kroeger — adjunct associate professor, Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary

This week-end seminar will survey the extraordinary ministry and outreach of those persons identified in the Bible or early Christian sources as being of black or African in ancestry. The continuing heritage will be expressed in a Sunday morning service of worship at a local church. The Objectives of the seminar are:

1. To demonstrate and document the remarkable roles of leadership and ministry assumed by blacks and/or Africans in the Bible and in the early Church.
2. To challenge students to emulate the courage, conviction, and passion of these great persons of faith.
3. To provide convincing evidence that during the second, third, and fourth centuries, the African Church provided the paramount voice of orthodox faith to other segments of Christendom.
4. To encourage Christians of African descent to lay hold of the wonderful heritage that is theirs and to proclaim Christ as their own.

Those desiring credit for this course should contact Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary's Center for Urban Ministerial Education at 363 South Huntington Ave., Boston, MA 02130 or telephone 617-983-9393. FAX 617-983-0190.

The seminar will begin at 2:00 p.m. on Friday, July 22 and terminate at 4:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 24. It will be conducted at the Cape Cod Institute of Bible and Christian Studies, 1073 Stony Brook Road, Brewster, MA, 02631. (telephone 508-896-3443 or 508-896-3518) Very simple accommodations may be secured at the Institute; and lists of camp sites, hotels, and bed and breakfasts can be supplied. Parents are welcome to bring their children. Baby-sitting may be arranged with advance notice. Simple meals will be served at the Center each morning and evening.

Tamar was determined to live by the Hebraic law of remarriage as she had been taught it. She had not married anyone else, and she had been taken advantage of. So when she found that Judah, now a widower, would be going out of town to shear his sheep, she covered her face with a veil and sat by the road. Judah could hardly claim entrapment: She simply sat there while he took the initiative. In fact, she was not wearing anything "sexy", as it appears she was completely covered. Judah mistook her for a businesswoman of the shady sort and proceeded to do business with her. And now she was an astute businesswoman: She demanded a pledge. She made a thorough job of it, too, requiring his signet, his cord, and his staff — the equivalent to his drivers license and social security card. She made sure she would have enough evidence of Judah's action.

Then, as Providence would have it, she became pregnant. (Perhaps this is what she had hoped for — that now Judah would marry her.) But almost as soon as she discovered her pregnancy, the word was out. Judah was told that not only had she "played the harlot,...she (was) with child by harlotry."

Oh my! Judah was being disgraced by this daughter-in-law of his. Hadn't he always known she was up to no good? He had certainly done the right thing by refusing to let her become an active member of his family again. He had not been able to catch her red-handed in the Er and Onan business, but *this* case was clear enough. He did not have to waste any time thinking about what to do: Judah knew a sinner when he saw one. He gave the command: "Bring her out, and let her be burned." Actually he probably had to stretch the letter of the law a little — it was the daughter of a *priest*, according to the law later written in Leviticus 21:9, who should be burned for playing harlot. But that was only a minor detail. Surely the spirit of the law condemned harlots. Now she would be off his conscience. He would not have to deal with that nagging guilt he felt every time he happened to think about her. God was taking care of things nicely.

To Judah's everlasting credit, when Tamar confronted him with the identifying evidence, he did acknowledge that the child was his. In fact, he admitted, "She is more righteous than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah."

While Tamar pretended to be a prostitute; Rehab was the real thing. Her story is told in Joshua 2 and 6. She too, showed outstanding courage along with a faith in Yahweh that was remarkable for one who not only was not an Israelite but who was, in fact, a citizen of one of the countries suffering most-hated-nation status. She was risking death by defying her government to hide the two Israelites who were sent to spy out Jericho. The king knew the men had come to her house. If the king's deputies had chosen to do a systematic search, they almost certainly

would have found the men she had hidden on her roof among the stalks of flax, and then she would have been done for.

Rahab had no assurance that the Israelite spies wouldn't betray her, either: "All's fair in love and war" is a time-honored sentiment. She did not even have a promise from the spies before she hid them. She just operated on faith — taking a tremendous chance. Also, because she seemed to know about the God of Israel, she may have known something of Yahweh's requirements for moral obedience. What made her think that either this God, or more to the point, God's people, would ever accept a prostitute even if they did spare her life? After all, she was not a woman who had temporarily fallen: She was a professional fallen woman. It is hard enough for an outsider with an impeccable reputation to get accepted into a tightly-knit ethnic community. What group wants a woman who might seduce their men and subvert their young people? She was taking a chance, all right. But Rahab, with her dramatic scarlet cord in the window, became one of the few biblical women whose stories are known to Sunday School goers everywhere, and she is the only woman mentioned by name in the classic "heroes of faith" chapter in Hebrews.

Ruth was yet another "outsider" who showed tremendous faith in the God of Israel — the God of her dead husband and of her mother-in-law. Although she seems to have been a virtuous woman, the people of Israel would have had no way of knowing that for themselves. They would have to trust the word of Naomi, her mother-in-law, who herself had been living away from Israel for many years. Who knows what these two women might have been up to in that wicked land where they had been living? Who in Bethlehem was going to take care of two widows — one who came back only because her husband was dead, and the other who was not an Israelite at all? Didn't they have enough widows of their own to take care of? If Ruth stayed in Moab, her parents would take care of her. It was the only sensible thing to do, as her sister-in-law Orpah realized.

But Ruth had courage and faith in Yahweh and Yahweh's people. Her story has a nice fairy-tale ring which the Book of Ruth details for us. She was poor but honest, hard-working and virtuous, and soon she made a brilliant marriage: Her husband, Boaz, was both rich and good.

However, Ruth put her reputation and her person at risk by her action of going to lie at Boaz's feet at the threshing floor. The third chapter of the book of Ruth tells us he was "startled" to find her there: It certainly would not seem to be stretching a point to say that an attractive young woman who gets all prettied up to hide herself where a man will wake up and find her sharing his blankets is putting herself at sexual risk. Wasn't she "asking for it"? But she was following Naomi's directive: She

trusted Naomi and most of all Naomi's God to take care of her. She had made her decision to trust Yahweh, and she never looked back.

Bathsheba, however, was definitely involved in an illicit sexual relationship (2 Sam 11, 12). David, being king, had the royal prerogative and simply ordered her to come to him. To refuse meant her possible death. God held David responsible for the sin: The prophet Nathan was sent to rebuke him. However, there is no indication that Bathsheba was held responsible. Presumably she could, like Joseph (Gen 39), have simply refused to sin, but David could have forced her anyway. Perhaps that is what happened. We aren't given all the tawdry details.

Bathsheba had a far from easy life. Her beloved husband, Uriah, was murdered so that she could serve the king's lust, and then the baby who was the product of that lust died. Her grief and loss were terrible. She knew that what David had done was wrong, yet she had to suffer from the punishment as well as he. The biblical narrative focuses on David's mourning for his son, but surely the mother's sorrow for her child was every bit as intense. All the long nine months she was carrying Solomon she must have been haunted by questions of whether this child would die, too. Her faith in Yahweh was almost certainly what carried her through.

For two reasons I think it is fair to the biblical account to suppose that Bathsheba was a godly woman. First, her husband, Uriah, was an extraordinarily righteous man. David was not able to corrupt him, although David tried desperately. Uriah's integrity would not make Bathsheba godly by association, but on the whole husbands and wives share a similar level of godliness or ungodliness. Notable exceptions such as Abigail and Nabal notwithstanding (1 Sam 25), from Adam and Eve through Elkana and Hannah, Ahab and Jezebel, Ananias and Sapphira, and Priscilla and Aquila, biblical couples tend to be righteous or wicked together.

The second reason for believing that Bathsheba was a godly woman is that her son, Solomon, was an exemplary young man whose main desire was to serve God. It is true that in his later years his many wives turned his heart away, but it is obvious that he received good spiritual nurture in his early years.

Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, Bathsheba — four women who have in common illicit sexual relationships and/or native citizenship in a pagan foreign country, yet who all became godly Israelites against great odds. More remarkably, all four are direct foremothers of Christ. They are the only women except Mary who are mentioned in Matthew's genealogy of Jesus. None of the conventional Jewish mothers is named. God passed over Judah's son Shelah for Perez, Judah's illegitimate son by Tamar. God chose Boaz, Rahab's offspring, and Obed, Ruth's son. And God certainly had plenty of other sons of David to choose

besides the one by Bathsheba. Of course God's choices show God's amazing grace, that God uses notorious sinners and those born outside the covenant to work out his plan.

These women also prefigure the New Testament gospel to the Gentiles. Ruth and Rahab were natives of pagan countries — perhaps all four women were. Matthew might have deliberately chosen to show the Jews that, even in the Old Testament, Gentiles were being included, becoming part of the chosen people. The Holy Spirit through Matthew was preparing the Jews for what would be coming.

But it seems a bit simplistic to say that these women are mentioned only for their negative qualities — for their pagan background or their "gross" sin, as one commentator writes. I do not believe that Matthew named them only for their shady past. Their virtues are much more to the point.

Faith is a risky business: It is the evidence of things not seen, the courage to face possible failure. Most believers do not sin spectacularly, but they do not step out for God in spectacular ways, either. While sitting in a chair there's almost no chance of falling; start walking and you may stumble; run fast and you may come crashing down. The heroes of faith mentioned in Hebrews all took great risks — ran for God — and many of them crashed. Abraham and Isaac both lied, passing their wives off as their sisters to save their skins; Abraham did it twice. Moses murdered. Samson sabotaged his fabulous God-given powers. David committed adultery and murder. By human standards these crimes are more heinous, more gross, than those of any of these four women. This does not teach us that either men or women should sin so that grace may more abound, but I believe that God's choice of these four, and Matthew's listing of them, is significant.

At least two lessons emerge. The first is that the line of David was not ethnically pure (as indeed the Israelites themselves were not). All along the way non-Jews who trusted Yahweh became Israelites and were incorporated into the community of believers. That the physical environment of the Messiah's birth was far from antiseptic we know, but we must also remember that these foremothers listed in the Messiah's genealogy would have been disqualified if later standards of racial integrity had been the criterion for acceptance. The people of God have always been a diverse group, their only unifying characteristic being changed hearts and forgiven sins.

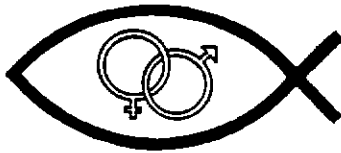
Second, this quartet of remarkable women showed the same quality of courage and faith as heroic biblical men. Rahab coolly confronted the king of Jericho's messengers at the **ultimate personal risk**. The king's messengers knew that the spies were, or at least had been, in her house. There is no question that if they were discovered she

would have died, and she knew it. She had the courage to believe that Israel's God would save her.

Tamar also risked death, and Ruth faced being ostracized or deported.

Bathsheba showed tremendous faith by continuing to trust God while having to live with and submit to the person who had killed her husband and been responsible for the death of her child. Uriah was an exceptionally good, God-fearing man, and she must have felt a terrible resentment against King David, who was anything but godly at the time. We are not told how she dealt with her rage and grief, yet she was able to keep faith with Yahweh and raise Solomon to be a godly young man.

All four of these women set a standard of faith for us to try to meet. While facing the possibility of great loss, they all had the courage to believe the evidence of things not seen.



FROM MY POINT OF VIEW: SUSPICIOUS IDENTITY

Laura L. Lupton

As a woman preparing to seek ordination to the pastoral office in the Presbyterian Church (USA) I find myself encountering skepticism — a skepticism about my real identity. In light of my gender and career objective, some people immediately assume that I am a radical feminist. Others are not sure, so they conduct a stakeout, patiently waiting to see what I'll say or do. It seems as if people are listening to every nuance of what I say, trying to uncover a feminist agenda. I feel scrutinized.

My gender raises questions about my theology, associates me with a cause, and raises questions about my integrity. And all of this happens before I say a word.

"Well," I think to myself, "Am I a feminist? Who do I say that I am?" The answer is not simple nor is it easily articulated.

I am not seeking to become a pastor because I think I have a right to do so, but because I believe I am called by God. Having received this call, I have had to wrestle with Scripture, knowing that a call contrary to Scripture is not

from God. Through study I have become convinced that for a woman to teach and have authority over men is in accord with Scripture. Does this make me a feminist or a careful exegete?

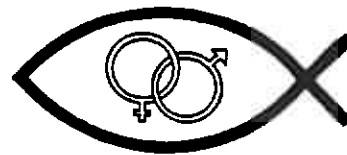
Does it make me a feminist that I am a woman seeking to enter the ordained ministry, traditionally a male occupation? In some ways, yes. Clearly I as a woman believe I am called and capable of carrying out the tasks involved, and I am willing to do the required preparation and jump the inevitable hurdles to get there. So in that sense I am a feminist, willing to face challenges caused by my gender. But I stop short of responding to these hurdles in ways that put my gender before the gospel.

As a minister my priority will be to proclaim the good news of life in Christ. The first thing I desire to present is Christ and him crucified, not my gender (or any other issue for that matter—although Gospel does speak to issues and inform our responses to issues).

God does not conform to human images of God. God is not ignorant, weak, maneuverable, passive, or gender limited. We are in God's image; God is not in ours. When we teach the full counsel of Scripture, we understand that God is above our petty disagreements over gender, and is more concerned about his relationship with us than our religious vocabulary. Therefore I am not going to present God as limited by our human descriptions, but as all powerful, all knowing, holy, righteous, and just.

If I sought to become a minister of gender issues or of some goddess, I would seek those titles in a social work office or in another religion. But I am seeking to become a minister of Jesus Christ because that title reflects accurately my call and my beliefs.

So while my gender raises questions for some people, my gender is neither my priority nor my soap box. As I prepare to be a minister of the Gospel, it saddens me when the question is whether or not I am a feminist, rather than whether or not I know Christ and him crucified, risen, and coming again. But that is what I do know, and that is what I seek to proclaim.



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