Q: Who are the women prophets in the Bible?

by John DelHousaye

A: My faith in Jesus Christ was nurtured in a conservative evangelical tradition, which partly defined itself in reaction to cultural liberalism and Pentecostal enthusiasm. As a result, we did not recognize women prophets. Looking back, however, I believe they were among us. Scripture explains their enduring presence as clearly as church history explains their marginalization. Here is some of the biblical evidence.

Women Prophets in the Old Testament

The label “prophetess” or “woman prophet” (נבייה) is attributed to five women in the Old Testament: Miriam (Exod. 15:20), Deborah (Judg. 4:4), Huldah (2 Kings 22:14; 2 Chron. 34:22), Noadiah (Neh. 6:14), and “the prophetess” (Isa. 8:3).

Its significance is clear. Miriam claims the Lord “has spoken” through her (Num. 12:2). Deborah says to Barak: “Look, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded” (Judg. 4:6). Huldah similarly uses the prophetic introductory formula: “Thus says the Lord God of Israel…” (2 Kings 22:15). Scripture, then, describes a woman prophet as someone through whom God speaks to his people. In this regard, a “prophetess” is no different than her male counterpart, the “prophet” (נביא). For this reason, I prefer the translation “woman prophet.”

Women Prophets in the New Testament

Luke presents Anna as a “woman prophet” (προφήτις), which is the same Greek word the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament, uses to translate the Hebrew נבייה (Luke 2:36). Like the prophet Simeon who is paired with her (2:25–27), Anna is led by the Holy Spirit to speak about Jesus “to all who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem” (2:38). The masculine gender of the signifiers describing her intended audience suggests Anna prophesies to both men and women. Elsewhere, Luke uses the feminine signifier to define an audience of women only (15:9).


In Revelation, specifically in the letter to Thyatira (Rev. 2:18–29), Jesus criticizes a woman who calls herself a woman prophet—the same word Luke uses for Anna—for “teaching and deceiving my servants to practice sexual immorality and to eat food sacrificed to idols” (v. 20). The woman is clearly a leader in the church of Thyatira. But is she a genuine prophet? The prophet Jeremiah makes personal holiness and purity a litmus test for genuine prophecy (Jer. 23:9–40). Jesus, similarly, advises his disciples to expose false prophets by drawing attention to their behavior (Matt. 7:15–23). Unfortunately, the character and behavior of the woman from Thyatira did not meet the litmus test of a genuine prophet. Yet what is often missed is that Jesus does not attack the woman for being a leader, but for being an immoral one.

Note: Scripture references are the author’s translation throughout.

John DelHousaye is assistant professor of New Testament at Phoenix Seminary and serves as a volunteer pastor at New Day Bible Church. He is married to Tiffany, a speech therapist, and has two daughters, Livia and Joslyn. John did his doctoral work on the historical Jesus at Fuller Seminary.