

Who Was Called a Prophetess?

We hear in the Bible about lots of men who are prophets, don't we? But did any women in the Bible ever prophesy? Yes, they did, though not so many as men. Well, I thought that today we'd take a quick look at the women in the Bible who prophesied. Would you like that?

By the way, a woman who prophesies is called a prophetess. You see, sometimes when both men and women do the same type of work, the women are distinguished by adding "e-s-s". For instance, we sometimes say actor and actress or shepherd and shepherdess or waiter and waitress. This doesn't mean that one is better than the other. No. It is just a quick way to tell more about the person being talked about, whether it is a man or a woman. Just like we might say that a boy or a girl did something, rather than just saying a child did something. It just makes things more clear. But let's go on!

All right, then. There are 4 women named in the Bible who are called a prophetess. Three of them are in the Old Testament and one is in the New Testament. These women are Miriam, Deborah, Huldah, and Anna. Also, the Bible mentions in passing that the evangelist Philip had 4 unmarried daughters who were prophetesses. But their names aren't given nor what they prophesied, just that they prophesied. I wish we knew more about them, don't you?!

But let's look at the 4 prophetesses about whom we are told, all right? We'll take them in the order that they appear in the Bible. And while we do that, I'll also tell a little about what was happening at the time they lived so that you can understand better about that prophetess. So, you'll not only hear about the prophetess herself, but you'll get an extra story with each one as well! Won't that be fun?!

The first prophetess mentioned in the Bible is Miriam. We can read about Miriam in the books of Exodus and Numbers. Now, we've talked about Miriam before, haven't we? So what do you remember about Miriam? Yes, Miriam was born and raised in Egypt while the children of Israel (what we call the Jews now) were slaves there. Her parents were Amram and Jochebed, and she was the older sister of both Moses and Aaron. In fact, she was the one who watched over her baby brother Moses as his little basket was in the river, and then she talked to the daughter of Pharaoh about him.

Well, Miriam grew up and when she was about 85 years old, she was with the children of Israel as the Lord had her brother Moses lead them all out of Egypt. After the children of Israel had left Egypt, Miriam seems to have been a leader among the women. Remember when the Red Sea parted and made a dry path for the children of Israel so they could safely go across it? What happened next after they all got across? Yes, the Egyptian army that was chasing them went down onto the dry path. And then the Lord told Moses to lift his hand over the Red Sea -- and the water came crashing down on the Egyptians and drowned that whole bad army!

So what did the children of Israel do then? That's right, Moses and the children of Israel sang a song of praise to the Lord. And then the Bible says, "And Miriam the prophetess...took a timbrel in her hand: and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." And then the Bible tells how Miriam sang praises to the Lord, too. (A timbrel is something you hold in your hand; it is probably something like a tambourine. It may have little jingly things around it and it may have

something like a drum head on it. You can shake it or hit it.) Yes, Miriam was leading the women as they praised the Lord, and she is called a prophetess.

Many people think that Miriam was married to a man named Hur who was one of Moses' big helpers, but the Bible doesn't really come right out and say that, so I don't know for sure. Though it seems likely.

But then the Bible also tells about the time when Miriam and Aaron got proud and argued with Moses, thinking they should be as important as he was. They said to Moses, "Has the Lord only spoken by you, Moses? Hasn't He also spoken by us?" Oops! That wasn't a good idea to say that to Moses, was it?! No! After all, the Lord had put Moses in charge. And the Lord didn't like what they said, did He? Do you remember what happened then? Yes, the Lord scolded Miriam and Aaron, and then right away Miriam got leprosy. This made Moses and Aaron very unhappy, so Aaron begged Moses to pray to the Lord and ask Him to heal their sister Miriam. Then the Lord healed her. And from this we can learn that even prophets might do things they shouldn't; so we all need to be careful ourselves, don't we?

The only other thing we hear about Miriam in the Bible is that after many more years she died there in the wilderness, and everyone was very sad about that.

Yes, Miriam was a great woman. The fact that she was a prophetess means that the Lord spoke to her, though we aren't told what He said to her or to whom she may have told what the Lord said to her. In other words, we aren't told what she prophesied; we are just told that she was a prophetess. And that is what we know about Miriam.

Well, a while later Aaron died and then later Moses died. So who led the children of Israel then? Yes, Joshua did. And the Lord had Joshua lead them over the Jordan River and into the promised land of Canaan, and the Lord gave them this land. For a while they followed the Lord God, but after Joshua died, they started worshipping idols, didn't they? Shame on them! Why, this was very wrong and evil, and also very foolish. After all, an idol hadn't saved them from slavery in Egypt, had it? No. The Lord God had. And an idol couldn't ever help them or even hear them, could it? No. An idol was just something they themselves had made.

And when this happened, when they would leave the Lord and start worshiping idols, after a while the Lord would let one of their enemies come and conquer them and rule over them. Then later the children of Israel would be sorry and would turn back to the Lord and would cry out to Him for help. Then the Lord would send a judge to help them. This happened over and over again. This was called the time of the judges.

And this brings us to the next prophetess, the prophetess Deborah. Do you remember about Deborah? We've talked about her before, too, haven't we? We can read about Deborah in the book of Judges in the Old Testament part of the Bible. Well, Deborah was married and probably had children, as she refers to herself as "a mother in Israel". She lived under a palm tree, and the people used to come to her, since she was a judge as well as a prophetess. Deborah is the only woman judge that the Bible tells about.

Well, during Deborah's time many of the people where she lived had started worshipping idols. So the Lord had let the Canaanites come and conquer them and rule over them, and the Canaanites were mean to them. And this went on for 20 years! Then the children of Israel cried out to the Lord for help. So one day the Lord spoke to Deborah and told her to send for a man named Barak, and she was to tell Barak to take some men and go fight against the wicked general Sisera who was in charge there. So Deborah did that, and she also told Barak that the Lord would let him win against Sisera and Sisera's many chariots and big army.

Now, do you remember what Barak said then? Why, he said he'd only go and do this if Deborah would go with him! So Deborah went with Barak. And the Lord sent lots of rain that turned the roads into mud so that the Canaanites' chariots couldn't move! So the Canaanite army got down and began running away, and so did their general, Sisera. And Barak and his much smaller army chased after them and won!

Now, Deborah had told Barak that because he had said that he wouldn't go unless she went with him, that the honor of winning wouldn't go to Barak. No, it would go to a woman. Do you remember who that woman was? Yes, it was Jael, who killed General Sisera as he was sleeping in her tent after having run away!

Well, the enemy had been defeated. And then Deborah and Barak sang a song praising the Lord for this. And that is all that we know about the prophetess Deborah.

Then quite some years later the Jews began to have kings. This was called the time of the kings. Some of the kings were good and some of the kings were bad. And some of them even worshipped idols or let the people worship idols instead of the Lord! They forgot the only real God. Again, how wicked and how foolish! Well, this went on for many years. And the Lord's temple in Jerusalem wasn't being taken care of.

But then Josiah became king of Judah. He was only 8 years old when He became king! But Josiah worshipped the Lord and tried to do what would please the Lord. Then the Bible says that in the 18th year of Josiah, he decided to fix up the Lord's temple. (I don't know if that means Josiah was 18 years old or if he had been king for 18 years and was 26 years old. At any rate he was still young.) And Josiah told Hilkiyah, the high priest, to take money and fix the Lord's temple.

Well, while they were fixing it, what do you think they found? They found the scroll with the Law of Moses written on it! (A scroll is like a book, but instead of having separate pages, it is one long piece of something like paper that is rolled up.) Now, you remember, don't you, that many years before when the children of Israel had left Egypt and had gotten to Mt. Sinai, that the Lord had had Moses go up onto the mountain with Him. And the Lord had given to Moses laws and rules for the children of Israel. After all, a nation has to have rules so they know how to do things right, don't they? Well, the scroll with this Law was kept first in the Tabernacle and then later in the temple. But with so many years of forgetting the Lord God and worshipping idols, the Jews had forgotten about the Law. And now here they had found it as they were fixing the temple! How exciting!!

Well, the high priest Hilkiah gave the scroll to a scribe named Sha'phan and told him to take it to King Josiah. Shaphan went to Josiah and told him what they had found. Then Shaphan stood there and read the scroll to the king.

Well, when Josiah heard the words that the Lord had given to Moses in His law, why Josiah was very upset. He knew that they and the people who had lived before them had been disobeying the Lord very much. And Josiah tore his clothes, showing how upset and sad he was. And Josiah commanded Hilkiah, the high priest, to take Shaphan and some other important men with him and go ask the Lord what he should do.

Now, how would Hilkiah be able to talk to the Lord? After all, the Lord didn't talk to everyone, did He? No. So what was Hilkiah going to do? Why, he would need to find someone to whom the Lord Himself would talk, wouldn't he? And who would that be? Yes, that would be a prophet. So what prophet do you think they went to? Why, they didn't actually go to a prophet at all -- they went to a prophetess!! Yes, and this brings us to the third prophetess in the Bible. Her name was Huldah, and I've never talked to you about her before. In fact, she is only mentioned in these few verses in the books of II Kings and II Chronicles. But she was a true prophetess of the Lord.

Huldah lived in Jerusalem, and her husband seems to have worked in the king's palace. Many people think that Huldah's husband may have been the uncle of the great prophet Jeremiah; but I don't think that's known for sure. Anyway, Josiah's men went to Huldah and told her what had happened.

Then the prophetess Huldah said to Shaphan and the other men, "The Lord says that He will punish Judah and Jerusalem because of the great evil that the people have been doing by leaving the Lord and worshipping idols. But He also says that because the king has humbled himself when he heard the Law, that the king would live in peace." That meant that the punishment wouldn't happen while Josiah was alive.

Well, Josiah had the temple fixed up and he followed the Lord all of his life. He had the idols all taken down and burned up. (Good for Josiah!) And he had the idols' altars and things having to do with them all burned up. And he had the wicked priests for those false gods killed. Yes, Josiah cleaned everything up and had sacrifices done for the Lord God, the only real God. Josiah was a godly king, wasn't he?

And that is all that we are told about the prophetess Huldah.

Now, the prophetesses Miriam, Deborah, and Huldah were all in the Old Testament part of the Bible, weren't they? Well, the last prophetess mentioned by name in the whole Bible is in the New Testament. Her name was Anna. We hear about Anna in the book of Luke.

Anna was an old woman, and she was a widow. That means that her husband had died. Anna was a very godly woman. Some way she was able to live at the temple in Jerusalem. Of course, that wouldn't be right inside of the temple itself. But there was a big courtyard around the temple, and there was a big wall around the temple and the courtyard, and it seems that there were a lot of little rooms built into this wall. Anna probably lived in one of those rooms. Anyway, the Bible says that

Anna served God with fastings and prayers night and day.

Well, one day Anna was walking in the temple yard. And she saw an old man named Simeon there. And Simeon was holding a tiny, little baby, and he was blessing the baby's parents. Now, who do you think those parents were? Why, they were Mary and Joseph! And Who was that tiny baby? Yes, it was baby Jesus! And the Bible says that then Anna gave thanks to the Lord for Jesus and that she spoke about Jesus to everyone in Jerusalem who was looking for redemption. And those 3 verses are all that we hear about the prophetess Anna!

But what does that mean when the Bible says that Anna spoke to those who were looking for redemption? Why, it is talking about people who wanted their sins to be forgiven, isn't it? Yes. And Anna was prophesying about the Messiah, the Saviour who would come, wasn't she? But how would that tiny baby be able to have people's sins forgiven? Why, Jesus, the Son of God, had come to earth from His throne in heaven, but He wouldn't stay a little baby, would He? No. He would grow up, and He would be hung on a cross and die there. And why would Jesus do this? Yes, because God loves us very much and wants us to be able to be with Him someday. And by dying on the cross, Jesus would pay for the sins of everyone who trusted in Him. He would redeem them. And then 3 days later when Jesus was alive again, was resurrected, this proved that Jesus could do this, that He could redeem us, pay for our sins!

Now, we aren't told in the Bible the exact words that the prophetess Anna spoke. But when it says that Anna spoke of Jesus to everyone in Jerusalem that looked for redemption, in some way she was telling about Jesus making a way to have our sins forgiven, redeeming us. After all, Jesus is our Redeemer, isn't He?

And those are the Christmas and Easter stories, aren't they? When Jesus was born and then when He died for our sins but was alive again. And anyone who trusts in Jesus to have their sins forgiven will someday be able to be with God in heaven, won't they? And also someday the Lord Jesus will come back to earth again, and then He will be King of the whole world forever, won't He? And those who have trusted in Jesus to have their sins forgiven will also be there with Him forever! Isn't that a happy thing to think about?!

But back to prophetesses. I've already mentioned Philip's 4 daughters who were each a prophetess. And there may perhaps have been other women who were a prophetess during Bible times, but they aren't mentioned as such. So we really don't know if there were more.

But there are other women, godly women, talked about in the Bible, aren't there? Godly women like Sarah, Ruth, Hannah, Abigail, Mary, Elizabeth, and others. But they aren't said to have been a prophetess. Just as there are many godly men in the Bible who aren't prophets. And we should all try to be godly, shouldn't we? Yes, even little children can be godly. But what does it mean to be godly? It means to follow the Lord God and try to do what He tells us to do in the Bible. And we don't have to be a prophet or a prophetess to do that, do we?! No, we can be godly by just trusting in Jesus and following Him, doing what the Bible tells us that He wants us to do.

I hope you enjoyed hearing about the prophetess Miriam, the prophetess Deborah, the prophetess Huldah, and the prophetess Anna. Did you?