**Learn to Read the Bible** **3a – Women of the Bible 1**

*Back cover: This book tells about some of the women of the Bible.*

*Text modified from the Good News Translation (1994)*

# OLD TESTAMENT

## Eve, the first woman

Genesis 2:18–3:23

After God had created man, he said, “It is not good for the man to live alone. I will make a suitable companion to help him.” So, he took some soil from the ground and formed all the animals and all the birds. Then he brought them to the man to see what he would name them. The man named all the birds and all the animals. But not one of them was a suitable companion to help him.

Then God made the man fall into a deep sleep. While he was sleeping, he took out one of the man’s ribs. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him.

Then the man said, “At last, here is one of my own kind. ‘Woman’ is her name because she was taken out of man.” That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united with his wife, and they become one.

The man and the woman were both naked, but they were not embarrassed.

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The snake was the most cunning animal that God had made. One day it asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat fruit from any tree in the garden?”

She answered, “We may eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except from the tree in the middle of it. God told us not to eat the fruit of that tree. We should not even touch it. If we do, we will die.”

The snake replied, “That’s not true! You will not die. God said that, because he knows that when you eat it you will be like God. Then you will know what is good and what is bad.”

The woman saw how beautiful the tree was and how good its fruit would be to eat. She thought how wonderful it would be to become wise. So, she took some of the fruit and ate it. Then she gave some to her husband, and he also ate it.

As soon as they had eaten it, they were given understanding. They realized that they were naked. So, they sewed fig leaves together and covered themselves.

That evening they heard God walking in the garden. They hid from him among the trees. But God called out to the man, “Where are you?” He answered, “I heard you in the garden. I was afraid and hid from you, because I was naked.”

God asked the man, “Who told you that you were naked? Did you eat the fruit that I told you not to eat?”

The man answered, “The woman you put here with me gave me the fruit, and I ate it.”

God asked the woman, “Why did you do this?” She replied, “The snake tricked me into eating it.”

Then God said to the snake, “You will be punished for this. You alone of all the animals must bear this curse. From now on you will crawl on your belly, and you will have to eat dust as long as you live. I will make you and the woman hate each other. Her offspring and yours will always be enemies. Her offspring will crush your head, and you will bite her offspring’s heel.”

And he said to the woman, “I will increase your trouble in pregnancy and your pain in giving birth. In spite of this, you will still have desire for your husband, yet you will be subject to him.”

And he said to the man, “You listened to your wife and ate the fruit which I told you not to eat. Because of what you have done, the ground will be under a curse. You will have to work hard all your life to make it produce enough food for you. You will have to work hard and sweat to make the soil produce anything. Then you will go back to the soil from which you were formed. You were made from soil, and you will become soil again.”

The man named his wife Eve, because she was the mother of all human beings. And God made clothes out of animal skins for the man and his wife, and he clothed them.

Then God said, “Now the man has become like one of us. He has knowledge of what is good and what is bad. He must not be allowed to take fruit from the tree that gives life, eat it, and live for ever.”

So, God sent him out of the Garden of Eden. He made him cultivate the soil from which he had been formed.

## Hagar

Genesis 16:1-16; 21:9-21

Abram’s wife Sarai had not borne him any children. But she had an Egyptian slave woman named Hagar.

Sarai said to Abram, “The LORD has kept me from having children. Why don’t you sleep with my slave? Perhaps she can have a child for me.” Abram agreed with what Sarai said. So, Sarai gave Hagar to her husband to be his concubine.

Abram had intercourse with Hagar, and she became pregnant. When she found out that she was pregnant, she became proud and despised Sarai.

Then Sarai said to Abram, “It’s your fault that Hagar despises me. I gave her to you. But ever since she found out that she was pregnant, she has despised me.”

Abram answered, “Very well, she is your slave and under your control. Do whatever you want with her.” Then Sarai treated Hagar so cruelly that Hagar ran away.

The angel of the LORD met Hagar at a spring in the desert. He said, “Hagar, where have you come from and where are you going?” She answered, “I am running away from my mistress.”

He said, “Go back to her and be her slave. I will give you so many descendants that no one will be able to count them. You are going to have a son, and you will name him Ishmael. But your son will live like a wild donkey. He will be against everyone, and everyone will be against him. He will live apart from all his relatives.”

Hagar bore Abram a son, and he named him Ishmael. Abram was 86 years old at the time.

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One day Ishmael was playing with Sarah’s son Isaac. Sarah saw them and said to Abraham, “Send this slave and her son away. The son of this woman must not get any part of your wealth, which my son Isaac should inherit.”

This troubled Abraham very much because Ishmael was also his son. But God said to Abraham, “Don’t be worried about the boy and your slave Hagar. Do whatever Sarah tells you. It is through Isaac that you will have the descendants I have promised.

“I will also give many children to the son of the slave woman. His children will become a nation. He too is your son.”

Early the next morning Abraham gave Hagar some food and a leather bag full of water. He put the child on her back and sent her away.

She left and wandered about in the wilderness. When the water was all gone, she left the child under a bush and sat down about a hundred metres away. She said to herself, “I can’t bear to see my child die.”

While she was sitting there, she began to cry. God heard the boy crying. The angel of God spoke to Hagar, “What are you troubled about, Hagar? Don’t be afraid. God has heard the boy crying. Get up, go and pick him up, and comfort him. I will make a great nation out of his descendants.”

Then God opened her eyes, and she saw a well. She went and filled the leather bag with water. She gave some water to the boy.

God was with the boy as he grew up. He lived in the wilderness and became a skilful hunter. His mother found an Egyptian wife for him.

## Sarah

Genesis 17:15–18:15; 21:1-8

God said to Abraham, “I will bless your wife Sarah, and I will give you a son by her. She will become the mother of nations. There will be kings among her descendants.”

Abraham bowed down with his face touching the ground. He began to laugh when he thought, “Can a man have a child when he is a hundred years old? Can Sarah have a child at ninety?”

But God said, “Your wife Sarah will bear you a son and you will name him Isaac. I will keep my covenant with him and with his descendants for ever. It is an everlasting covenant. He will be born to Sarah about this time next year.” When God finished speaking to Abraham, he left him.

The LORD appeared to Abraham. As Abraham was sitting at the entrance of his tent during the hottest part of the day, he looked up. He saw three men standing there. As soon as he saw them, he ran out to meet them.

Bowing down, he said, “Sirs, please stop at my home. I am here to serve you. Let me bring some water for you to wash your feet. You can rest here beneath this tree. I will also bring a bit of food. It will give you strength to continue your journey. You have honoured me by coming to my home, so let me serve you.”

They replied, “Thank you; we accept.”

Abraham hurried into the tent and said to Sarah, “Quick, take a sack of your best flour, and bake some bread.” Then he ran to the herd and picked out a calf that was tender and fat. He gave it to a servant, who hurried to get it ready. He took some cream, some milk, and the meat, and set the food before the men. There under the tree he served them himself, and they ate.

They asked him, “Where is your wife Sarah?”

“She is there in the tent,” he answered.

One of them said, “Nine months from now I will come back, and your wife Sarah will have a son.”

Sarah was behind him, at the door of the tent, listening. Abraham and Sarah were very old. Sarah had stopped having her monthly periods. So, she laughed to herself and said, “Now that I am old and worn out, will I still want to sleep with my husband? And besides, he is old too.”

Then the LORD asked Abraham, “Why did Sarah laugh and say, ‘Can I really have a child when I am so old?’ Is anything too hard for the LORD? As I said, nine months from now I will return, and Sarah will have a son.”

Because Sarah was afraid, she denied it. “I didn’t laugh,” she said.

He said, “Yes, you did. You laughed.”

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The LORD blessed Sarah, as he had promised. She became pregnant and bore a son to Abraham when he was old. The boy was born at the time God had said he would be born. Abraham named him Isaac.

Sarah said, “God has brought me joy and laughter. Everyone who hears about it will laugh with me.” Then she added, “Who would have said to Abraham that Sarah would nurse children? Yet I have borne him a son in his old age.”

The child grew, and on the day that he was weaned, Abraham gave a great feast.

## Rebecca

Genesis 24:1-67

When Abraham was very old, he said to his servant, “I want you to make a vow in the name of the LORD. Vow that you will not choose a wife for my son Isaac from the people here in Canaan. You must get a wife for him from among my relatives in the country where I was born.”

The servant asked, “What if the young woman will not leave her home to come with me to this land? Shall I send your son back to the land you came from?”

Abraham answered, “Do not send my son back there! The LORD brought me here, and he promised me that he would give this land to my descendants. The LORD will send his angel before you, so that you can get a wife there for my son. If the young woman is not willing to come with you, you will be free from this promise. But you must not take my son back there.”

So, the servant vowed he would do what Abraham had asked. Then he took some of his master’s camels and went to the country where Abraham’s brother had settled.

When the servant arrived, he made the camels kneel down at the well outside the city. It was late afternoon, the time when women came out to get water.

He prayed, “LORD, give me success today. Keep your promise to Abraham, my master. Here I am at the well where the young women of the city will be coming to get water. I will say to one of them, ‘Please, let me have a drink from your jar.’ If she says, ‘Drink, and I will also bring water for your camels,’ may she be the one that you have chosen for your Abraham’s son, Isaac. If this happens, I will know that you have kept your promise to my master.”

Before he had finished praying, Rebecca arrived with a water jar on her shoulder. She was the daughter of Bethuel, the son of Abraham’s brother. She was a very beautiful young woman and still a virgin. She went down to the well, filled her jar, and came back. The servant ran to meet her and said, “Please give me a drink of water from your jar.”

She said, “Drink, sir.” She held her jar while he drank. When he had finished, she said, “I will also bring water for your camels.” As she watered all his camels, the servant watched her in silence, to see if the LORD had given him success.

When she had finished, the man gave her expensive golden jewellery. He said, “Please tell me who your father is. Is there room in his house for my men and me to spend the night?”

She answered, “My father is Bethuel. There is a place for you to stay.”

Then the servant knelt down and worshipped the LORD. He said, “Praise the LORD, who has faithfully kept his promise to my master. The LORD has led me straight to my master’s relatives.”

The young woman ran to her mother’s house and told the whole story.

Rebecca had a brother named Laban. Laban had seen the nose-ring and the bracelets on his sister’s arms. He had also heard her say what the servant had told her. He went to Abraham’s servant, who was standing by his camels at the well. He said, “Come home with me. You are a man whom the LORD has blessed. Why are you standing out here? I have a room ready for you in my house. There is also a place for your camels.”

So, the servant went into the house, and Laban unloaded the camels and gave them straw and fodder. Then he brought water for Abraham’s servant and his men to wash their feet. When food was brought, the man said, “I will not eat until I have said what I have to say.”

Laban said, “Go on and speak.”

He said, “I am the servant of Abraham. The LORD has greatly blessed my master and made him a rich man. Sarah, my master’s wife, bore him a son when she was old, and my master has given everything he owns to him.

“My master made me promise with a vow to obey his command. He said, ‘Do not choose a wife for my son from the young women in the land of Canaan. Instead, go to my father’s people, to my relatives, and choose a wife for him.’

“When I came to the well today, I prayed to the LORD. Before I had finished my silent prayer, Rebecca came with a water jar on her shoulder and went down to the well to get water.

“I said to her, ‘Please give me a drink.’ She said, ‘Drink, and I will also water your camels.’ So, I drank, and she watered the camels. I asked her, ‘Who is your father?’ And she answered, ‘My father is Bethuel.’

“Then I gave her jewellery. I praised the LORD, who had led me straight to my master’s relative, where I found his daughter for my master’s son.

“Now, please tell me if you intend to fulfil your responsibility towards Abraham, my master. If not, say so, and I will decide what to do.”

Laban and Bethuel answered, “The LORD has obviously brought you here, so there is nothing we can say. Here is Rebecca. Let her become the wife of your master’s son.”

When the servant of Abraham heard this, he worshipped the LORD. Then he gave clothing and silver and gold jewellery to Rebecca. He also gave expensive gifts to her brother and to her mother.

Rebecca’s brother and her mother called her and asked, “Do you want to go with this man?” She answered, “Yes.” So, they let Rebecca and her old family servant go with Abraham’s servant and his men.

Some time later, Isaac went out in the early evening to take a walk in the fields. Then he saw camels coming. When Rebecca saw Isaac, she got down from her camel. She asked Abraham’s servant, “Who is that man walking towards us in the field?”

“He is my master,” the servant answered. So, she took her scarf and covered her face.

The servant told Isaac everything he had done. Then Isaac brought Rebecca into the tent that his mother Sarah had lived in before she died. Rebecca became his wife. Isaac loved Rebecca, and he was comforted for the loss of his mother.

## Miriam

Exodus 1:7–2:10

The Israelites became strong and spread throughout the land of Egypt.

The king of Egypt became afraid. He said to his people, “The Israelites are becoming a threat to my nation. To control their numbers, take every new-born Hebrew boy and throw him into the river. But let all the girls live.”

During this time a man from the tribe of Levi married a woman of his own tribe. She bore him a son. When she saw what a fine baby he was, she hid him for three months.

But when she could not hide him any longer, she took a basket made of reeds. She covered the basket with tar to make it watertight. Then she put the baby in it and placed it in the tall grass at the edge of the river. The baby’s sister Miriam stood some distance away to see what would happen to him.

The king’s daughter came down to the river to bathe. Suddenly she noticed the basket in the tall grass. She sent a slave woman to get it. The princess opened it and saw a baby boy. The baby was crying, and she felt sorry for him. “This is one of the Hebrew babies,” she said.

Then the baby’s sister Miriam asked her, “Shall I go and call a Hebrew woman to act as a wet nurse?” The princess answered, “Yes.”

So, Miriam went and brought the baby’s own mother. The princess told the woman, “Take this baby and nurse him for me. I will pay you.”

So, she took the baby and nursed him. Later, when the child was old enough, she took him to the king’s daughter. She adopted him as her own son. She said to herself, “I pulled him out of the water, and so I name him Moses.”

## Rahab

Joshua 2:1-24; 6:22-25

Joshua sent two spies with orders to secretly explore the land of Canaan. When they came to the city of Jericho, they went to spend the night in the house of a prostitute. The prostitute was called Rahab.

The king of Jericho heard that some Israelites had come that night to spy out the country. He sent word to Rahab: “The men in your house have come to spy out the whole country! Bring them out!”

Rahab had hidden them on the roof. But she answered the king, “Some men did come to my house. But I don’t know where they were from. They left at sunset before the city gate was closed. I didn’t find out where they were going. If you start after them quickly, you can catch them.”

The king’s men left the city, and then the gate was shut. They went looking for the Israelite spies.

Before night, Rahab went up on the roof and said to the spies, “I know that the LORD has given you this land. Everyone in the country is terrified of you. We have all lost our courage because of you. The LORD your God is God in heaven above and here on earth. Swear by him that you will treat my family as kindly as I have treated you. Promise me that you will save my father and mother, my brothers and sisters, and all their families! Don’t let us be killed!”

The men said to her, “We will! If you do not tell anyone what we have been doing, we promise you we will treat you well when the LORD gives us this land.”

Rahab lived in a house built into the city wall, so she let the men down from the window by a rope. She said, “Go into the hill country. Hide for three days until the king’s men come back. After that you can go on your way.”

The men said to her, “We will keep the promise that you have made us give. This is what you must do. When we invade your land, tie this red cord to the window. Get your whole family together in your house. If anyone goes out of the house, his death will be his own fault. But if anyone in the house with you is harmed, then we will be responsible. However, do not tell anyone what we have been doing. Otherwise, we will not have to keep our promise which you have made us give you.”

She agreed and sent them away. When they had gone, she tied the red cord to the window.

The spies went into the hills and hid. The king’s men looked for them for three days, but they did not find them. They returned to Jericho.

Then the two spies came down from the hills and went back to Joshua. They told him everything that had happened. They said, “We are sure that the LORD has given us the whole country. All the people there are terrified of us.”

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Later, the Israelites attacked the city of Jericho. Joshua told the two men who had served as spies, “Go to the prostitute’s house and bring her and her family out, as you promised her.” So, they went and brought Rahab out, along with her family. They took them all, family and slaves, to safety near the Israelite camp.

Joshua spared the lives of the prostitute Rahab and all her relatives, because she had hidden the two spies that he had sent to Jericho.

## Hannah

1 Samuel 1:1–2:21

There was a man named Elkanah. He had two wives, Hannah and Peninnah. Peninnah had children, but Hannah had none.

Every year Elkanah went to worship and offer sacrifices to the LORD Almighty at Shiloh. Each time Elkanah offered his sacrifice, he would give one share of the meat to Peninnah and one share to each of her children. But even though he loved Hannah very much he would only give her one share, because the LORD had kept her from having children.

Peninnah would torment and humiliate Hannah, because the LORD had kept her childless. This continued year after year. Whenever they went to the house of the LORD, Peninnah would upset Hannah. Hannah would cry and refuse to eat anything.

Her husband Elkanah would ask her, “Hannah, why are you crying? Why won’t you eat? Why are you always so sad? Don’t I mean more to you than ten sons?”

One day, after they had finished their meal in the house of the LORD, Hannah got up. She was deeply distressed, and she cried bitterly as she prayed to the LORD. Meanwhile, Eli the priest was sitting in his place by the door.

Hannah made a solemn promise: “Almighty LORD, look at me, your servant! See my trouble and remember me! Don’t forget me! If you give me a son, I promise that I will dedicate him to you for his whole life.”

Hannah continued to pray to the LORD for a long time, and Eli watched her lips. She was praying silently; her lips were moving, but she made no sound. Eli thought that she was drunk. He said to her, “Stop making a drunken show of yourself! Stop your drinking and sober up!”

She answered, “No, I haven’t been drinking! I am desperate. I have been praying, pouring out my troubles to the LORD. Don’t think I am a worthless woman. I have been praying like this because I’m so miserable.”

Eli said, “Go in peace. May the God of Israel give you what you have asked him for.” Then she went away, ate some food, and was no longer sad.

The next morning Elkanah and his family went back home to Ramah. Elkanah had intercourse with his wife Hannah, and the LORD answered her prayer. And so she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. She named him Samuel.

The time came again for Elkanah and his family to go to Shiloh and offer to the LORD. But this time Hannah did not go. She told her husband, “As soon as the child is weaned, I will take him to the house of the LORD. Then he will stay there all his life.”

Elkanah answered, “All right, do whatever you think best. Stay at home until you have weaned him. And may the LORD make your promise come true.” So, Hannah stayed at home and nursed her child.

After she had weaned him, she took Samuel, young as he was, to the house of the LORD at Shiloh. Hannah and Elkanah took the child to Eli. Hannah said to him, “Excuse me, sir. Do you remember me? I am the woman you saw standing here, praying to the LORD. I asked him for this child, and he gave me what I asked for. So, I am dedicating him to the LORD. As long as he lives, he will belong to the LORD.”

Then they worshipped the LORD there.

Hannah prayed:

*“The LORD has filled my heart with joy.*

*I am happy because of what he has done!*

*I laugh at my enemies.*

*I am joyful because God has helped me!*

*No one is holy like the LORD,*

*there is none like him,*

*there is no protector like our God.”*

In the meantime, the boy Samuel continued to serve the LORD. Each year his mother would make a little robe. She would take it to him when she accompanied her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.

Then Eli would bless Elkanah and his wife, and say to Elkanah, “May the LORD give you other children by this woman. May they take the place of the one you dedicated to him.”

After that they would go back home.

The LORD did bless Hannah, and she had three more sons and two daughters. As for the boy Samuel, he grew up in the service of the LORD.

## Abigail

1 Samuel 25:1-44

David and his men were hiding from king Saul in the wilderness. In that area lived a man called Nabal. He was a very rich man. He owned many sheep and many goats. His wife was called Abigail. Abigail was a beautiful and intelligent woman, but Nabal was a mean, bad-tempered man.

David heard that Nabal was shearing his sheep. David who needed food for himself and his men, sent ten young men to give Nabal his greetings. David instructed them to say: “David sends you greetings, my friend. He sends his best wishes for you, your family, and all that is yours.

“He wants you to know that your shepherds have been with us, and that we have not harmed them. Nothing that belonged to them was stolen all this time. Just ask them, and they will tell you.

“We have come on a feast day, and David asks you to receive us kindly. Please give what you can to us your servants and to your dear friend David.”

David’s men delivered this message to Nabal. Nabal answered, “David? Who is he? I’ve never heard of him! Why should I give the food I have reserved for my workers and give it to people who I don’t know!”

David’s men went back and told him what Nabal had said. David became angry. He went to attack Nabal with about 400 of his men.

One of Nabal’s servants said to Nabal’s wife Abigail, “David sent some messengers with greetings for our master, but he insulted them. Yet they were very good to us. All the time we were with them in the fields, nothing that belonged to us was stolen. They protected us the whole time we were looking after our flocks. Please decide what to do. This could be disastrous for our master and all his family. He is so pig-headed that he won’t listen to anybody!”

Abigail quickly collected a lot of food and drink as a gift for David and his men. But she said nothing to her husband.

She was riding her donkey when suddenly she met David and his men coming towards her. David had been thinking, “Why did I protect that fellow’s property out here? Not a thing that belonged to him was stolen. This is how he pays me back for the help I gave him! I will certainly kill every one of those men before morning!”

When Abigail saw David, she quickly dismounted. She threw herself on the ground at David’s feet. She said to him, “Please, sir, listen to me! Let me take the blame. Please, don’t pay any attention to Nabal, that good-for-nothing! He is a fool! I wasn’t there when your servants arrived, sir.

“Please, sir, accept this gift I have brought you. Give it to your men. Please forgive me for any wrong I have done. When the LORD has made you king of Israel, then you will not have to feel regret for having taken your own revenge. And when the LORD has blessed you, sir, please do not forget me.”

David said to her, “Thank God for your good sense and for what you have done today in keeping me from taking my own revenge. The LORD has kept me from harming you. If you had not hurried to meet me, all of Nabal’s men would have been dead by morning!” Then David accepted what she had brought him and said to her, “Go back home and don’t worry. I will do what you want.”

Abigail went back to Nabal, who was at home having a great feast. He was drunk, so she did not tell him anything until the next morning. After he had sobered up, she told him everything. He suffered a stroke and was completely paralysed. Some ten days later the LORD struck him and he died.

When David heard that Nabal had died, he said, “Praise the LORD! He has taken revenge on Nabal for insulting me. He has kept me from doing wrong.”

Then David sent a proposal of marriage to Abigail. His servants went to her at Carmel and said to her, “David sent us to take you to him to be his wife.”

Abigail bowed down to the ground and said, “I am his servant. I am even ready to wash the feet of his servants.” She rose quickly and mounted her donkey. Accompanied by her five maids, she went with David’s servants and became his wife.

# NEW TESTAMENT

## Mary and Elizabeth

Luke 1:5-45

There was a priest named Zechariah. His wife’s name was Elizabeth. They both lived good lives in God’s sight and obeyed fully all the Lord’s laws and commands. They had no children because Elizabeth could not have any. She and Zechariah were both very old.

Some time later Elizabeth became pregnant. She did not leave the house for five months. She said, “Now at last the Lord has helped me. He has taken away my public disgrace!”

In the sixth month of Elizabeth’s pregnancy God sent the angel Gabriel to a town named Nazareth. He had a message for a young woman promised in marriage to a man named Joseph. Her name was Mary.

The angel came to her and said, “Peace be with you! The Lord is with you and has greatly blessed you!”

Mary was deeply troubled by the angel’s message. She wondered what his words meant. The angel said to her, “Don’t be afraid, Mary. God has been gracious to you. You will become pregnant and give birth to a son. You will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High God. God will make him a king, as his ancestor David was. His kingdom will never end!”

Mary said to the angel, “I am a virgin. How, then, can this be?”

The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come on you, and God’s power will rest upon you. For this reason, the holy child will be called the Son of God. Remember your relative Elizabeth. It is said that she cannot have children, but she herself is now six months pregnant, even though she is very old. There is nothing that God cannot do.”

Mary said, “I am the Lord’s servant. May it happen to me as you have said.” And the angel left her.

Soon afterwards Mary hurried off to visit her relative Elizabeth. Mary greeted her. When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby moved within her.

Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. She said in a loud voice, “You are the most blessed of all women, and blessed is the child you will bear! Why should this great thing happen to me, that my Lord’s mother comes to visit me? As soon as I heard your greeting, the baby within me jumped with gladness. How happy you are to believe that the Lord’s message to you will come true!”

## Anna

Luke 2:22-38

There was a very old prophet named Anna. She had been married for only seven years and was now a widow and 84 years old. She never left the Temple. Day and night she worshipped God, fasting and praying to him.

The very moment Mary and Joseph brought Jesus to the Temple to present him to the Lord, also Anna arrived. She gave thanks to God and spoke about the child to all who were waiting for God to set Jerusalem free.

## The Samaritan woman at the well

John 4:5-42

Jesus came to a town, which was close to Jacob’s well. Tired out by the journey, he sat down by the well. His disciples had gone into town to buy food. It was about noon.

A Samaritan woman came to draw some water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink of water.”

The woman answered, “You are a Jew, and I am a Samaritan. How can you ask me for a drink?” (Jews do not use the same cups and bowls that Samaritans use.)

Jesus answered, “If you knew what God wanted to give you, and if you knew who I am, you would have asked me for a drink. Then I would have given you life-giving water.”

The woman said, “Sir, you do not have a bucket, and the well is deep. Where would you get that life-giving water? It was our ancestor Jacob who gave us this well. Are you claiming to be greater than Jacob?”

Jesus answered, “All those who drink this water will be thirsty again. But whoever drinks the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring which will provide him with life-giving water. This water will give him eternal life.”

The woman said, “Sir, give me that water! Then I will never be thirsty again. I will not have to come here to draw water, either.”

Jesus said, “Go and call your husband and come back.”

“I don’t have a husband,” she answered.

Jesus replied, “You are right when you say you haven’t got a husband. You have been married to five men. Also, the man you live with now is not really your husband. You have told me the truth.”

The woman said, “I see you are a prophet, sir.” She continued, “I know the Messiah will come. When he comes, he will tell us everything.”

Jesus answered, “I am the Messiah.”

At that moment Jesus’ disciples returned. They were greatly surprised to find him talking with a woman. But none of them said to her, “What do you want?” or asked him, “Why are you talking with her?”

The woman went back to the town. She said to the people there, “Come and see the man who told me everything I have ever done. Could he be the Messiah?” So, they left the town and went to Jesus.

Many of the Samaritans in that town believed in Jesus because of what the woman had told them. When the Samaritans came to him, they begged him to stay with them. Jesus stayed there two days.

Many more believed because of his message. They said to the woman, “We believe now. This is not because of what you said, but because we ourselves have heard him. We know that he really is the Saviour of the world.”

## Mary Magdalene

John 20:1-18

Early on Sunday morning after the death of Jesus, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb. She saw that the stone had been taken away from the entrance. She went running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, whom Jesus loved. She told them, “They have taken the Lord from the tomb. We don’t know where they have put him!”

Then Peter and the other disciple went to the tomb. The two of them were running, but the other disciple ran faster than Peter. He reached the tomb first. He bent over and saw the linen wrappings, but he did not go in.

Behind him came Simon Peter, and he went straight into the tomb. He saw the linen wrappings lying there and the cloth which had been round Jesus’ head. Then the other disciple, who had reached the tomb first, also went in. He saw and believed. Then the disciples went back home.

Mary stood crying outside the tomb. While she was still crying, she bent over and looked in the tomb. She saw two angels there dressed in white. They were sitting where the body of Jesus had been, one at the head and the other at the feet.

“Woman, why are you crying?” they asked her.

She answered, “They have taken my Lord away. I do not know where they have put him!”

Then she turned round and saw Jesus standing there. However, she did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus asked her, “Woman, why are you crying? Who is it that you are looking for?”

Mary thought he was the gardener. She said to him, “Sir, if you took him away, tell me where you have put him. I will get him and bury him.”

Jesus said to her, “Mary!” She turned towards him and said, “Teacher!”

Jesus told her, “Do not hold on to me, because I have not yet gone back up to the Father. Go to my brothers and tell them that I am returning to God the Father.”

So, Mary Magdalene went and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord. She told them what he had told her.

## Sapphira

Acts 5:1-11

There was a man named Ananias. He had a wife called Sapphira. He sold some property that belonged to them. With his wife’s agreement he kept part of the money for himself. Then he handed the rest over to the apostles.

Peter said to him, “Ananias, why did you let Satan make you lie to the Holy Spirit? Why did you secretly keep part of the money you received for the property? Before you sold the property, it belonged to you. And after you sold it, the money was yours. Why, then, did you decide to do such a thing? You have not lied to human beings. You have lied to God!”

As soon as Ananias heard this, he fell down dead. All who heard about it were terrified. The young men carried him out and buried him.

Later his wife came. She did not know what had happened to her husband. Peter asked her, “Tell me, is this the full amount you and your husband received for your property?” She answered, “Yes, this is the full amount.”

Peter said to her, “Why did you and your husband decide to put the Lord’s Spirit to the test? The men who buried your husband are now at the door. They will carry you out too!”

At once she fell down and died. The young men came in and saw that she was dead. They carried her out and buried her beside her husband. The whole church and all the others who heard of this were terrified.

## Tabitha

Acts 9:36-42

In a town called Joppa there was a woman named Tabitha. She was a believer. She did a lot of good, and she helped the poor.

One day she became ill and died. Her body was washed and laid in a room upstairs.

The believers heard that Peter was in a town close by. They sent two men to him with the message, “Please hurry and come to us.” So, Peter went with them. When he arrived, he was taken to the room upstairs. All the widows crowded round him. The women were crying. They showed him the shirts and coats that Tabitha had made while she was alive.

Peter put them all out of the room. He knelt down and prayed. Then he turned to the body and said, “Tabitha, get up!” She opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter, she sat up. Peter reached over and helped her get up.

Then he called all the believers, including the widows, and presented her alive to them. The news about this spread all over the town, and many people believed in the Lord.

## Lydia

Acts 16:14-15

A woman called Lydia heard Paul speaking. She was a dealer in purple cloth. She was a woman who worshipped God.

God opened Lydia’s mind to pay attention to what Paul was saying. She and the people of her house were baptized. She said to Paul and his companions, “Come and stay in my house if you have decided that I am a true believer in the Lord.” And she persuaded them to stay with her.