

WOMEN IN GOD'S HALL OF FAME

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And next unto him repaired Shallum the son of Halohesh, the ruler of the half part of Jerusalem, he and his daughters (Neh. 3:12).

The text is unusual and thought-provoking. It appeared that Nehemiah's Hall of Fame was reserved exclusively for males. but suddenly among many builders, the daughters of a ruler were seen working side by side with men. The total number of workmen is unknown. For example. it is written "the men of Jericho" repaired one section of the wall, and Nehemiah did not specify how many of those citizens participated. Evidently there were hundreds and possibly thousands of workmen, for the area covered was immense. The entire wall was being repaired at the same time. When news circulated through the country that Nehemiah had arrived from Babylon with authority to help the Jews. volunteers came from all parts of the land and there were many laborers.

The history recorded in the book of Nehemiah is one of the most exciting accounts in the Scriptures. His secret examination of the ruins of the city and the subsequent meeting with the elders reveal the secrecy with which the initial preparation was made. When builders and the materials were available, Nehemiah and his counselors assigned workers to their various places. and suddenly around the wall intense activity began. Rubbish was removed, foundations were laid or repaired, and the sounds of hammers and chisels falling upon stone could be heard everywhere. When determined men rolled up their sleeves and commenced their colossal task, it was surprising, to say the least, when one of the two rulers of the city brought his work-party of daughters. They were the only females accepted by Nehemiah, and although for reasons unknown their names were not included in the city's hall of fame, they worked unceasingly with the men and earned for themselves an abiding place in the affections of all who love Jerusalem.

The twentieth century has many halls of fame. Athletes from every sport are chosen to receive awards of merit, but ladies are never welcomed in places reserved for men. During ancient history this fact was even more pronounced, for women were

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considered to be inferior citizens. They worked in the fields. prepared meals, and produced children. To discover them working side by side with men was unprecedented.

The Daughters Who Worked

It is difficult to decide the type of task they performed. Every visitor to Jerusalem knows the immense size of the stone blocks used in ancient constructions. It is still uncertain how the pyramids in Egypt were erected. Some scholars believe the huge stones were rolled on timber upon banks of earth to positions far above the ground. Others believe these monuments were only made possible by techniques brought from distant planets. It is quite evident that women could not handle such huge blocks of masonry. Maybe they supervised the making of mortar or slime. or perhaps served as messengers for Nehemiah as he communicated with foremen around the walls. Their presence revealed a determination to do everything possible in restoring the city of

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God. While time continues, these women of a bygone era will be remembered with gratitude. for they "being dead, yet speak" (see Heb. 11:4).

It is possible that in one way or another many women helped in the reconstruction of the walls of Jerusalem. There was always the possibility of enemy attacks, and it was necessary for builders to defend their work.

They which builded on the wall, and they that bare burdens, with those that laded, every one with one of his hands wrought in the work, and with the other hand held a weapon. For the builders, every one had his sword girded by his side, and so builded. And he that sounded the trumpet was by me (Neh. 4:17-18).

The men on the walls had to be fed, and there remains the possibility that a great company of women prepared meals for their husbands and sons and made sure the workmen would never be hungry. Without such assistance the walls would not have been completed. Nevertheless, the question remains. who were the daughters of Shallum mentioned by Nehemiah when other women were ignored? There had to be some outstanding service rendered by these ladies. That civic official could have found less arduous tasks for his girls, such as working in administrative offices where there was no danger. Those brave women resemble others of our modern world who are not content to sit in an office when they can be with men in the trenches!

The Daughters Who Witnessed

And we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist. Which was one of the seven, and abode with him. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophesy (Acts 21:8-9).

Philip the evangelist was one of the best known men in the early church. At a time of crisis he was appointed by the apostles to help in overseeing the needs of impoverished people (see Acts 6:5). Later, he conducted a successful evangelistic crusade in Samaria (see Acts 8:5) and was sent to the desert to intercept an Ethiopian dignitary returning to his country after attending a feast in Jerusalem (see Acts 8:26-40).

It would seem that like Shallum who helped to rebuild the walls of Jerusalem, Philip had no sons. but he was the father of four daughters who were the joy of his life. Women worked within the church, but they were not encouraged to become public speakers. It was thought advisable that they remain silent in the assemblies (see I Cor. 14:34). It was therefore significant when the daughters of Philip were anointed by the Holy Spirit to become prophetesses—tellers forth—of the good news of the Gospel. There is no evidence that they preached or prophesied in the services, but, on the other hand, there is nothing to prove they did not. God's servants ministered when they were "moved by the Holy Spirit." and not when they decided to make a speech! These women could not have been old, for the fact their father was appointed to be an administrator suggests he was a man about forty or fifty years of age. His girls. therefore, would have been in their late twenties. They had never been married, and as far as is known, had no desire to be: they belonged to Christ. Whether or not they helped their father in his crusades is not known. If they did, Philip was a very fortunate man. His success as an administrator and preacher was probably due, in part, to inspiration received from his daughters.

Philip must have owned a large house in Caesarea. for when Paul and his companions arrived in the city. they "entered into

the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven, and abode with him." The daughters were delighted to entertain such a distinguished guest, and having male company in the house was a delightful change. Their concern deepened when they became aware of Paul's intention to attend the forthcoming festival in Jerusalem, and their fears increased when a prophet named Agabus arrived to warn him of impending disaster. Luke, describing what followed, said: "And when we heard these things, both we and they of that place besought him [Paul] not to go up to Jerusalem" (Acts 21:12). They were in the home of Philip, so the statement "they of that place" could only mean Philip and his daughters. The advice given was rejected, for the apostle was determined to please himself. Unfortunately, his decision resulted in two years imprisonment, when he might have been leading souls to Christ.

It has been said that behind every successful man stands a woman. Philip was very fortunate, for he had the continuing support of four delightful daughters who earned an abiding place in God's Hall of Fame. It would be nice if we knew their names, but perhaps getting to know them will be one of the joys to be experienced in eternity.

The Daughters Who Worshiped

Then Jesus six days before the passover came to Bethany, where Lazarus was which had been dead, whom he raised from the dead. There they made him a supper; and Martha served: but Lazarus was one of them that sat at the table with him. Then took Mary a pound of ointment of spikenard, very costly, and anointed the feet of Jesus, and wiped his feet with her hair: and the house was filled with the odour of the ointment (John 12:1-3).

Mary and Martha of Bethany were sisters, but who was their father? Tradition says they were the daughters of Simon the leper. Whether or not this report is accurate is open to conjecture. It has been affirmed that Simon had been a leper cleansed by Jesus. To distinguish him from other Simons, he retained his old name which reminded him of the debt owed to his benefactor. His desire to entertain the Lord was an outpouring of love and gratitude. His separate house may have preserved his independence. All this is conjecture, but Martha, Mary, and Lazarus were close friends of Simon. Whoever the father might have been, he had every reason to be proud of his daughters who became two of the best loved Bible characters.

Martha was industrious, but Mary was contemplative—a dreamer—easily lost in her thoughts. Lazarus was probably a mixture of both. There is no record of anything he said. Martha was easily annoyed: Mary could be provocative. It would be easy to criticize all three of them, but it was significant that after one gentle rebuke given by Jesus, everything changed. Ultimately, the women understood that Jesus was the Son of God and in every way possible worshiped Him. There was never need to rebuke Martha the second time, for during the supper given by Simon she served without complaint (John 12:2). Mary once again was missing when work needed to be done, but when she sacrificed her treasure by pouring the precious ointment on the Lord, Martha probably understood and smiled. Blessed are they who learn important lessons quickly.

As we review these characters from the Bible, we are reminded of three steps to immortality. The daughters of Shallum worked; the daughters of Philip witnessed; the daughters of some unknown father worshiped and became so famous the world

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now appreciates their adoration of the Son of God. Some people are so busy building walls, they have no time to sit at the feet of the Savior! Others are so anxious to be seen and heard, they are unwilling to become servants in obscure places. Many people would prefer to be chief in a small village, than to be second in an empire. Blessed is the soul who graduates from God's school with honors in work, witnessing, and worship. These are the folk who become successful in time and rewarded in eternity.

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