



Lesser Known Women of the Bible

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When most of us think of the women of the Bible, a few names come to mind. Mary, the mother of Jesus, of course. Mary Magdalene. Perhaps Esther and Ruth, since they have books named after them.

I asked women around me who they think of first when I say “women of the Bible.” Their responses were as different and diverse as they are. That created the foundation of today’s study.

Even with our many personalities and character traits, over 2000 years later, we can find a woman in the Bible that represents us pretty well. As we consider the experiences of our lives, or the many facets to our personality, we can actually find comfort in several of these biblical women. Let’s look today at some of the lesser known women and see what we can learn from them.

Athaliah and Jehosheba

You can’t really tell the story of one without the other. They are polar opposites and likely would not want to be associated with each other. Did I mention they are mother and daughter? Their family tree is complicated and beautiful, a story of humanness and a story of redemption. In the end, it’s a story of the epic struggle between putting ourselves first or putting God first. Who among us can’t relate to that?

Their story takes place during the years of division in the nation of Israel: the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. We might be familiar with some of the players that precede these two women; Ahab and Jezebel who reign over Israel, and Jehoshaphat who reigns over Judah. Ahab and Jezebel were a mess. They were not faithful to God and in fact openly rebellious and disrespectful of Him.

1 Kings 16:30-33 (ESV):

³⁰ And Ahab the son of Omri did evil in the sight of the LORD, more than all who were before him. ³¹ And as if it had been a light thing for him to walk in the sins of Jeroboam the son of Nebat, he took for his wife Jezebel the daughter of Ethbaal king of the Sidonians, and went and served Baal and worshiped him. ³² He erected an altar for Baal in the house of Baal, which he built in Samaria. ³³ And Ahab made an Asherah.

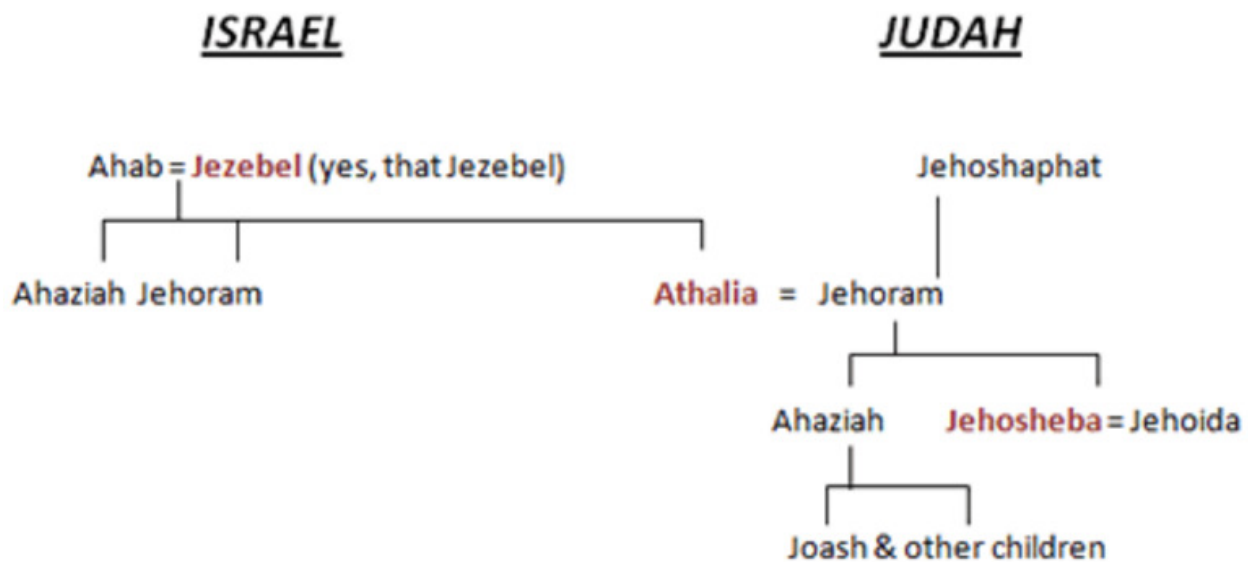
Ahab did more to provoke the LORD, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel who were before him.

In contrast, Jehoshaphat was mostly good, as we learn in 2 Chronicles.

2 Chronicles 17:3-6 (ESV):

³The LORD was with Jehoshaphat, because he walked in the earlier ways of his father David. He did not seek the Baals,⁴but sought the God of his father and walked in his commandments, and not according to the practices of Israel. ⁵Therefore the LORD established the kingdom in his hand. And all Judah brought tribute to Jehoshaphat, and he had great riches and honor. ⁶His heart was courageous in the ways of the LORD. And furthermore, he took the high places and the Asherim out of Judah.

Really, Jehoshaphat's only big errors were in his alliances with Ahab. One product of this ill advised alliance was a marriage: Athalia, the daughter of Ahab and Jezebel, to the son of Jehoshaphat, Jehoram. Here's a family tree to help:



Athaliah is clearly a woman who knows how to wield influence. She, daughter of Jezebel, made very intentional decisions about how she would counsel the men in her life.

Her husband, Jehoram, 2 Chronicles 21: 4-6 (ESV):

⁴When Jehoram had ascended the throne of his father and was established, he killed all his brothers with the sword, and also some of the princes of Israel.⁵Jehoram was thirty-two years old when he became king, and he reigned eight years in Jerusalem. ⁶And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, as the house of Ahab had

done, for the daughter of Ahab was his wife. And he did what was evil in the sight of the LORD.

Her son, Ahaziah, 2 Chronicles 22:2-4 (ESV):

² Ahaziah was twenty-two years old when he began to reign, and he reigned one year in Jerusalem. His mother's name was Athaliah, the granddaughter of Omri. ³ He also walked in the ways of the house of Ahab, for his mother was his counselor in doing wickedly. ⁴ He did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, as the house of Ahab had done. For after the death of his father they were his counselors, to his undoing.

Later when her son, king Ahaziah died, Athaliah killed all of Jehoram's other heirs to make herself the sovereign. Little did she know that her daughter, Jehosheba had hidden Joash (Athaliah's grandson, Jehosheba's nephew) to protect him. Later, Jehoida and Jehosheba unveil the boy and he takes his seat as king.

2 Chronicles 22:11-12 & 2 Chronicles 23:1-4, 11 (ESV):

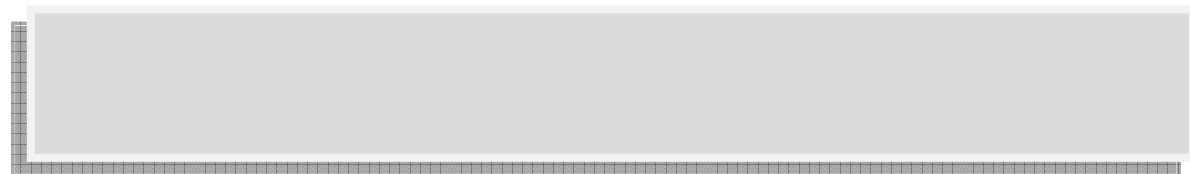
¹¹ But Jehoshabeath, the daughter of the king, took Joash the son of Ahaziah and stole him away from among the king's sons who were about to be put to death, and she put him and his nurse in a bedroom. Thus Jehoshabeath, the daughter of King Jehoram and wife of Jehoiada the priest, because she was a sister of Ahaziah, hid him from Athaliah, so that she did not put him to death. ¹² And he remained with them six years, hidden in the house of God, while Athaliah reigned over the land.

But in the seventh year Jehoiada took courage and entered into a covenant with the commanders of hundreds, Azariah the son of Jeroham, Ishmael the son of Jehohanan, Azariah the son of Obed, Maaseiah the son of Adaiah, and Elishaphat the son of Zichri. ² And they went about through Judah and gathered the Levites from all the cities of Judah, and the heads of fathers' houses of Israel, and they came to Jerusalem. ³ And all the assembly made a covenant with the king in the house of God. And Jehoiada said to them, "Behold, the king's son! Let him reign, as the LORD spoke concerning the sons of David.

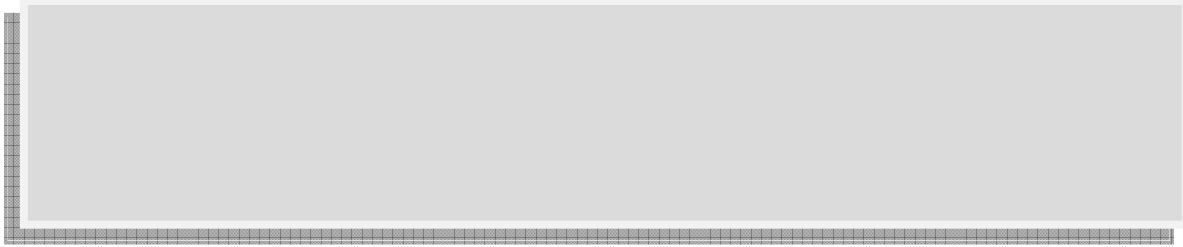
¹¹ Then they brought out the king's son and put the crown on him and gave him the testimony. And they proclaimed him king, and Jehoiada and his sons anointed him, and they said, "Long live the king."

It did not end well for Athaliah. She was put to death moments after her grandson ascended the throne. But we can learn a lot from her and her daughter.

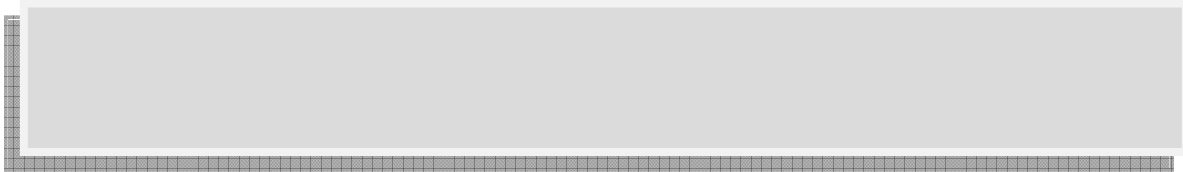
Describe Athaliah



What/Who do you think were the primary influences in her life, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:



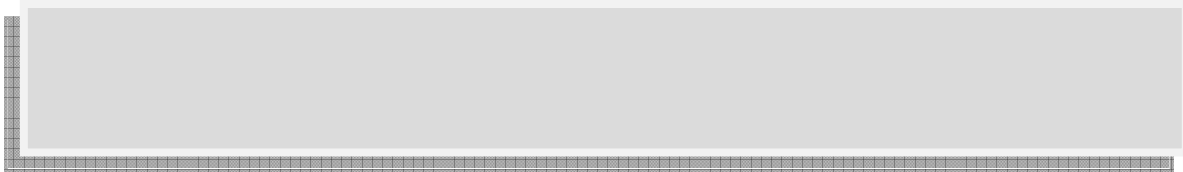
Describe Jehosheba in your own words:



Who was Jehosheba's husband, and what was his profession (hint, 2 Ch 23:8)?



Make a guess about what Jehosheba's life may have looked like in the six years between the murders and the ascension of Joash to the throne:



What/Who do you think were the primary influences in her life, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:



The Wife of Job

Christian author Daniel Darling does a much better job than I could do on this one. The following excerpt, in fact, the entirety of this commentary on the wife of Job, is from his article in *Today's Christian Woman*¹. Because this article also heavily influenced the writing of this study, I choose to pay homage with a complete reference. I think Darling is incredibly insightful in his observations:

I wonder if there isn't a gap in our understanding of the Job story. Although clearly Job is the main character, he is not the only one. She may not have been the primary subject of the cosmic argument between God and Satan (Job 1:6-11; 2:1-4), but she was still caught in the crossfire. You might argue that every hardship endured by Job was similarly felt by his wife:

Job 1:13-19 (ESV)

¹³ Now there was a day when his sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁴ and there came a messenger to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys feeding beside them, ¹⁵ and the Sabeans fell upon them and took them and struck down the servants^[c] with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁶ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The fire of God fell from heaven and burned up the sheep and the servants and consumed them, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁷ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "The Chaldeans formed three groups and made a raid on the camels and took them and struck down the servants with the edge of the sword, and I alone have escaped to tell you." ¹⁸ While he was yet speaking, there came another and said, "Your sons and daughters were eating and drinking wine in their oldest brother's house, ¹⁹ and behold, a great wind came across the wilderness and struck the four corners of the house, and it fell upon the young people, and they are dead, and I alone have escaped to tell you."

She watched her children die.

Ten times God had blessed her womb. Ten times she endured the joy and pain of childbirth. Ten lives nurtured to love, honor, and respect Jehovah. From the account in the first chapter of Job, this appears to be a fun-loving, God-fearing, tight-knit family. Who was the heartbeat of this home? Likely Job's wife played a part in that. It's unlikely he could be such an esteemed man in society (Job 1:1) if his wife was not an integral and influential leader in her own right.

Imagine the grief that overwhelmed her soul as she looked down in disbelief at ten freshly dug graves.

She experienced dramatic financial loss.

¹ *Today's Christian Woman*, "The Most Misunderstood Woman in the Bible: Why Job's wife may have gotten a bad rap," May 2011

The Bible describes Job as a wealthy man, perhaps the richest in the world (Job 1:3). Undoubtedly his wife was accustomed to a lifestyle of luxury and comfort. I imagine her home was adorned with the finest furnishings, her clothes spun from the most expensive threads. Her children likely had everything they needed.

In one really bad day, she lost it all; all their wealth, property, and way of life. She was not only bankrupt, but homeless, forced to beg outside the city dump.

She became a caretaker for her disease-ravaged husband.

Although Old Testament scholars don't agree on the nature of Job's illness, clearly his pain was so excruciating, he asked God to take his life (Job 3). It distorted Job's appearance so dramatically that his closest friends could barely recognize him and when they approached, fell to the ground in pity (Job 2:12). This last temptation brought by Satan was so severe, it nearly broke Job's soul. Every day Job spent at the ragged edge of death, only experiencing momentary relief brought by the heat of the burn piles and the scrape of pottery shards.

While we weep with Job, we miss the faithful, steady presence of his wife. She put aside her own grief to stay care for her husband. Imagine the exhausting drain, caring for a suffering soul like Job. Imagine the loud howls of agony, hour after hour, day after day. Imagine the one you love walking the thin line of sanity, suffering excruciating, debilitating pain.

Job's wife continued this mission of mercy without the resources of a helpful support network, without any financial resources, without relief. Their children were gone, their friends and family scattered, her God seemingly absent.

Words of Despair

And we come back to those seemingly bitter words of resignation, the only recorded words of Job's wife in the entire story. Words shared at the lowest point of her life.

"Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die" (Job 2:9, ESV).

These are tough words that appear to reflect a heart bitter and angry toward God. This is where most commentators pounce, accusing Job's wife of collusion with the Devil to force her husband to do exactly what the Devil predicted Job would do: give up on God. Many question her faith, wondering if perhaps her faith in Jehovah wasn't real. I find both scenarios difficult to believe. Every human has moments, words, thoughts we'd love to have back, shared in the crucible of a crushing trial. Imagine if those words were recorded in history for everyone to dissect and analyze.

Clearly God chose to record her thoughts in Scripture, yet sometimes I wonder how fair it is to define an entire life based on one conversation. Nowhere before or after this incident are we given any indication that Job's wife was a perpetually bitter, unhappy wife.

And perhaps her advice to Job wasn't born out of her own misery, but out of compassion. Day after day, she witnessed her husband live out his days in utter agony, no relief in sight. Maybe she was seeking the most compassionate way out for Job. Curse God, pull the plug, and get it over with. Perhaps she longed to see an end to Job's suffering, a painless journey to the sweet relief of heaven. This is certainly something Job himself desired of the Lord.

It's not uncommon to find raw, honest, expressions of grief spilled on the pages of the Bible. Yet we celebrate David, Moses, Jeremiah, and even Job as being authentic and honest, but heap judgment on Job's wife for similar expressions.

A Husband's Response

Job's response is fascinating. He carefully listens and watches his beloved wife shrink under the weight of their shared hardships.

I imagine Job lifts his blistered hand and strokes her hair. At first, his words read like a harsh rebuke: "You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?" (Job 2:10, ESV).

Yet, if you listen to Job, you almost hear admiration. "You speak as one of the foolish women." He didn't say his wife was foolish. He didn't even say her words were foolish. He said, "She sounds *like* one of the foolish women." In other words, "You don't sound like yourself."

You might read these words like this: *Sweetheart, that's not you talking. This doesn't sound like the woman of God I know and married. That is not you talking, my wife. Let's remember God's promises. Let's remember his goodness.*

Such a far cry from the ringing condemnation she's received in the centuries since. Job knew his wife's suffering was just as acute as his. In fact, seeing the pain in her eyes may have added to Job's great suffering.

It's likely she was in a state of shock. Sudden loss has a way of clouding our judgment, distorting our view of reality and of God. Often those living in the thick of tragedy make contradictory statements about faith and life. Today we might even conclude Job's wife suffered from post-traumatic stress disorder.

Apparently Job's words were the balm his wife needed to soothe her soul, because she isn't heard from again in the remaining chapters of the story.

What Does God Think?

Curiously, while authors, commentators, and pastors all rush to judge her, God is silent. The Scriptures don't record specific words of blessing for Job's wife like they do for Job (Job 1:8).

Yet we don't find divine rebuke either. Surely, if God was displeased with her, he would have expressed it. He didn't hesitate to rebuke Job's friends (Job 42:7-9).

All we know of God's treatment of Job's wife is how he blessed her after the trial was over. She shared in the doubling of their wealth (Job 42:10). She had the privilege of giving birth to ten more children, whom the Scriptures declared the most beautiful in all of the land (Job 42:12-15). And it's likely she shared in the many more fruitful years of her husband's life. The Scriptures say that Job lived long enough to see four generations of his offspring (Job 42:16).

A Model of Endurance

So what can we learn from Job's wife today? Perhaps her greatest testimony is her simple presence during her husband's lowest moments. At the end of Job, we read that his siblings and friends returned and "consoled and comforted him because of all the trials the LORD had brought against him" (Job 42:11). It's easy and safe to show compassion *after* the fact, but during Job's lowest moments, they were nowhere to be found.

Yet every single day, there was his wife, caring, loving, and enduring the trials Satan inflicted.

The trials that would split many marriages didn't split Job and his wife. They stuck it out together. And at the end of this story, we read of them conceiving and raising another ten children.

Was her attitude perfect throughout the storm that engulfed her family? No. Did she say things she would later regret? Absolutely.

But through it all, she endured, her faith in God remained intact, and maybe, just maybe, her service to her husband should be held up as a model of biblical character.

Describe the wife of Job in your own words:

What/Who do you think were the primary influences in her life, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:

Lois and Eunice

The word "grandmother" appears in the Bible just once: Lois, the grandmother of Timothy. In 2 Timothy 1:2, Paul addressed this same Timothy as "my dearly beloved son." The one verse in the Bible that mentions Lois and her daughter Eunice, Timothy's mother, shows not only the faith of Timothy but also paints a picture of family faith for three generations.

2 Timothy 1:5 (ESV)

⁵I am reminded of your sincere faith, a faith that dwelt first in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice and now, I am sure, dwells in you as well.

Every woman who raises children is also nurturing a legacy. We choose the things we prioritize in our teaching and in our role modeling. These women chose faith.

Paul gives more evidence of the teachings of Timothy's youth when he says to him,

"¹⁴But as for you, continue in what you have learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learned it ¹⁵and how from childhood you have been acquainted with the sacred writings, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus." -2 Timothy 3:15 (ESV).

Paul began training Timothy at a young age, maybe as young as 15. Paul loved him as his own son and spoke of him always with great pride. Paul planted gospel seeds in fertile ground that had been prepared by two loving women.

Describe Lois and Eunice in your own words:

What/Who do you think were the primary influences in their lives, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:

Priscilla

About the same time Paul began his missionary labors, Claudius, emperor of Rome, issued an edict expelling all Jews and their converts from that city. Among the refugees were Aquila and his wife Priscilla, who fled to Corinth where they earned their living as tentmakers.

Because Paul was also a tentmaker he came to live and work with Aquila and Priscilla when he first came to Corinth. While Paul worked his tentmaking trade during the week the scriptures tell us what he did on the weekends: "he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks." (Acts 18:4)

It's not difficult to picture that "reasoning and persuading" extended into his weekday activities with others, including Priscilla and Aquila. In fact, the situation indicates they were good students of Paul's teachings, because when he left Corinth for Syria, they were with him. They stopped first at Ephesus, where Paul left the two of them to preach and teach as he traveled on toward Jerusalem.

Ephesus at this time was home to the great temple of Diana (Artemis), so large it was one of the seven wonders of the world. Measuring at least 150 feet by 300 feet, it would have cast quite a shadow, literally and figuratively. This must have been a difficult place to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. But that's exactly the task Priscilla and Aquila undertook. When Paul returned more than a year later he found a well-organized church. One small glimpse of their activity is recorded:

Acts 18:24-26 (ESV):

²⁴ Now a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was an eloquent man, competent in the Scriptures. ²⁵ He had been instructed in the way of the Lord. And being fervent in spirit, he spoke and taught accurately the things concerning Jesus, though he knew only the baptism of John. ²⁶ He began to speak boldly in the synagogue, but when Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they took him aside and explained to him the way of God more accurately.

They had success coaching this young man, and he would become a great missionary:

Acts 18:27-28 (ESV):

²⁷ And when he wished to cross to Achaia, the brothers encouraged him and wrote to the disciples to welcome him. When he arrived, he greatly helped those who through grace had believed, ²⁸ for he powerfully refuted the Jews in public, showing by the Scriptures that the Christ was Jesus.

Priscilla was a diligent student of the gospel of Jesus Christ, able to refine rough learning to accuracy. She was a fearless teacher, willing to confront even the eloquent Apollos to share with him the truths that she had learned. She strengthened the church in Ephesus and she strengthened at least one future missionary. Those of us who live in a

secular world know the costs and courage of such faith. Examining Priscilla we discover an early role model for us as women and carriers of the gospel message to a fallen world.

Describe Priscilla in your own words:

What/Who do you think were the primary influences in her life, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:

Dorcas

In Acts 9 we read of Saul's astounding vision on the road to Damascus and his miraculous conversion. Chapter 10 recounts Peter's dream-vision directing him to preach the gospel to the gentiles. Tucked between these two important moments is the story of a gentle woman named Dorcas. Seven verses outline her story; one of these describes her as a woman "full of good works and acts of charity." In the same verse she is called a "disciple." This is the only New Testament occurrence of that word with a feminine ending, and scholars suggest this may identify her as an original follower of Christ.

Acts 9:36-42 (ESV):

³⁶ Now there was in Joppa a disciple named Tabitha, which, translated, means Dorcas. She was full of good works and acts of charity. ³⁷ In those days she became ill and died, and when they had washed her, they laid her in an upper room. ³⁸ Since Lydda was near Joppa, the disciples, hearing that Peter was there, sent two men to him, urging him, "Please come to us without delay." ³⁹ So Peter rose and went with them. And when he arrived, they took him to the upper room. All the widows stood beside him weeping and showing tunics and other garments that Dorcas made while she was with them. ⁴⁰ But Peter put them all outside, and knelt down and prayed; and turning to the body he said, "Tabitha, arise." And she opened her eyes, and when she saw Peter she sat up. ⁴¹ And he gave her his hand and raised her up. Then, calling the saints and widows, he presented her alive. ⁴² And it became known throughout all Joppa, and many believed in the Lord.

We are not told whether Dorcas was rich or poor, but the text makes it clear that she used her means and her time most generously for the relief of the needy around her. Since the scripture calls her "full of good works" we may conclude that she was not just an occasional giver, but one whose whole life-style reflected her conversion to Christ's teachings.

At Lydda, about ten miles southeast of Joppa, Peter was engaged in his missionary labors when word came to him that Dorcas "was sick, and died." The mourners, probably many to whom Dorcas had ministered in life, sent word, asking Peter to come without delay. In Lydda he had healed Aeneas, paralyzed and bedridden for eight years (see Acts 9:32-34) and word of that miracle may have prompted the people's summons.

When Peter arrived he was taken to the upper chamber. He sent the people from the room and knelt alone in prayer. Using the Aramaic form of her name, said to her, "Tabitha, arise." The woman who had extended her hands to the needy now had the hand of healing extended to her, recalling her from death itself. She had sought in life to bring souls to Christ and through the miracle of being raised from the dead brought still more to ponder and believe.

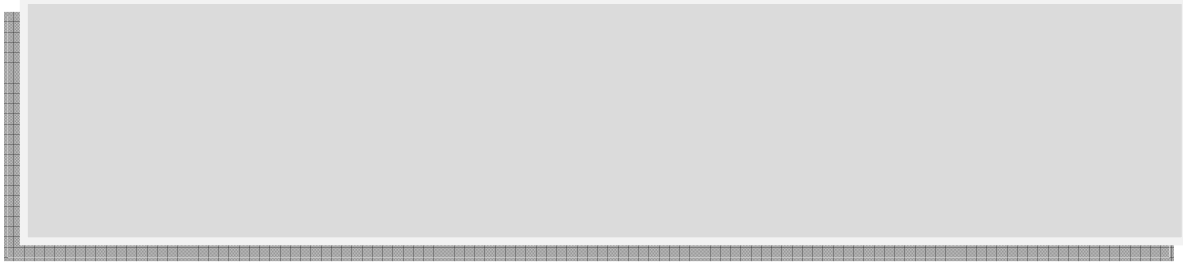
Describe Dorcas (Tabitha) in your own words:

What/Who do you think were the primary influences in her life, and what were the major life choices you would like to copy or avoid:

Summary

We can't do an exhaustive account of all the women in the Bible, but in these lesser known women we see so many facets of ourselves. Next to each summary, make some notes on how/if you can relate to them, or perhaps how you would like to emulate these women:

A self involved woman, likely to run her own life and the lives of those around her into the ground (Athaliah).



A protective and brave woman, breaking the chain of family dysfunction (Jehosheba).



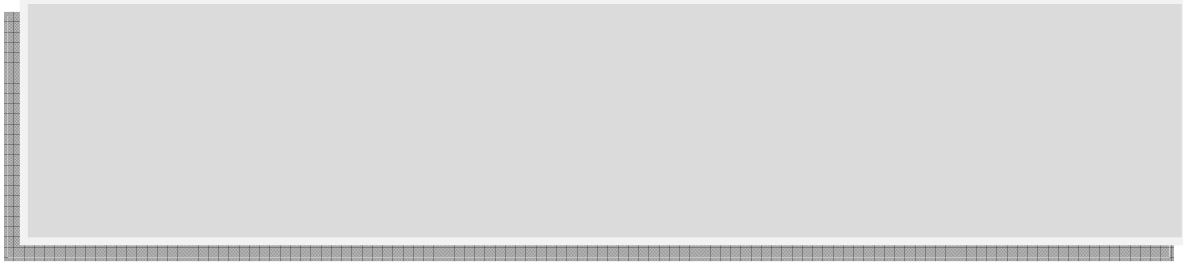
A weary, mourning, exhausted caretaker in an impossible situation (the wife of Job).



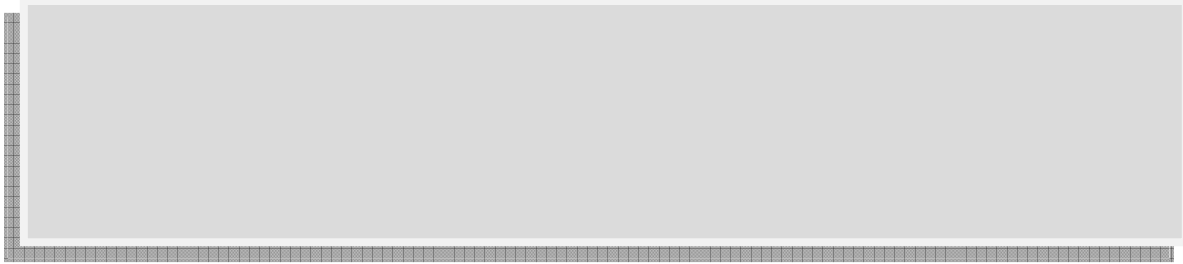
A Mother and daughter, raising a child in the faith and hoping to see him become fully committed to Jesus (Lois and Eunice).



A well educated woman, still working in the marketplace and bringing the gospel with her (Priscilla).



A steadfast but quiet giver, connected to her community by her faith and her selfless service to others (Dorcas).



The God who loves you so personally, through every season and every facet of your life, gives you these women and so many more in His Word. He wants to call them all daughters, wayward or steadfast. He loves them, and He loves you.