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Judge Deborah and Pastor/Teacher Priscilla: Templates for Contemporary Biblical Women's Leadership

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Abstract: Based on the examples of Judge Deborah from the Old Testament and Pastor/Teacher Priscilla from the New Testament, this paper contends that women have a biblical responsibility to lead in any vocation for which God has called and anointed them, and the Christian church has a biblical responsibility to accept and encourage them. Women leaders offer valuable leadership qualities, as illustrated by Deborah, the prophetic judicial/governmental/military leader of a nation, and Priscilla, the theologian, educator, missionary, and pastor in the nascent church. This paper further argues that leadership structures are not complete or fully effective without feminine inclusion and participation. The church and the world have historically deprived themselves of rich resources by curtailing women's leadership roles. The need for rediscovering and recovering women's leadership gifts and styles has never been more urgent or appropriate in the current cultural atmosphere requiring an emphasis on collaboration and cooperation (relationality), emotional intelligence that seeks transformation rather than transaction, and servant leadership, as manifested in Deborah and Priscilla as leaders. The church would be wise to embrace the Deborahs and Priscillas, as well as other types of women leaders whom God has placed in her midst, thus creating strong, responsive, and nurturing communities that reflect Jesus to the world.

Keywords: biblical women's leadership; women's leadership style; Judge Deborah; Pastor/Teacher Priscilla; confidence; balance; healthy leadership



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1. Introduction

Scripture depicts women as God-anointed leaders of His chosen people, Israel, and of His church. Women leaders offer valuable leadership qualities, which the church (and the world) have mistakenly subjugated or ignored to its detriment. As Esther Wachs Book notes, "Men and women often bring different approaches to looking at problems, opportunities, and decisions. The more approaches available, the better the outcome" (Wachs Book 2009, p. 9). This paper examines the lives of two women leaders—Deborah from the Hebrew Bible and Priscilla from the New Testament. The two case studies are representative but not exhaustive of the styles of capable leadership offered by women. The study unpacks Deborah's and Priscilla's strong and effective contributions to leadership, highlighting their emphases on collaboration and cooperation, transformation rather than transaction, and circular/web (servant) rather than hierarchical/tower (master) leadership styles. These Bible women's timeless examples offer guidance and inspiration to contemporary women leaders to remain true to their womanly natures, to lead with confidence in their God-given gifts and callings, and to aspire and innovate in every area of Spirit-guided and empowered human development in service to God's kingdom.

This paper does not seek to debate *whether* women should lead but builds on the premise that women's leadership is biblical and examines what women offer that renders feminine leadership healthy and necessary to the body of Christ and society at large. The study begins by examining the lives and leadership of Deborah and Priscilla and then compares them with each other in personality, situation, and leadership style. Finally, these findings are applied to women in leadership today.

The next section focuses on Judge Deborah of the Hebrew Bible, whose life and contribution to God's kingdom are found in Judges 4–5.

2. Judge Deborah

In the Book of Judges, Israel's leadership and frequently needed deliverance from oppressors came through individuals raised up and anointed by God and given the designation of judges as their title of authority. J. G. Brown claims that, despite the chaos of the era, Israel under the judges came closer to a genuine theocracy than at any time in its history (Brown 2004). Wilda Gafney concurs that, at this time without a king, human leadership came and went. The only constant leader was YHWH, the true head of state for fledgling Israel (Gafney 2008, p. 91). People were to respect the judge, regardless of gender or antecedents, as His direct representative. Brown notes that "the office of judge carried with it both civil and spiritual authority. The Book of Judges makes it very clear that Deborah was appointed to leadership by God" (Brown 2004). Thus, at her debut, the situation in Israel is typical: the previous judge, Ehud, had died decades prior, the people had lapsed into apostasy, and as a result, God had "sold them into the hands" (Judges 4:2, NIV) of an oppressor. Then, and only then, did the Israelites cry out to God for deliverance, and God tapped Deborah to guide the nation to liberation.

Scripture does not describe how Deborah arose as a judge but immediately situates her holding court under a tree "between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim, and the Israelites went up to her to have their disputes decided" (Judges 4:5, NIV). In other words, she rendered judgments. The term "judgment" (לִפְתוּחַ) in 4:5 is *lam-miš-pāt* in Hebrew and is found a total of 15 times in the Hebrew Bible. The overwhelming majority of instances are translated simply as judgment—a legal decision delivered by a recognized authority figure or body (e.g., Joshua 20:6, 2 Samuel 15:2). However, the concept of what is just or proper is introduced in some instances (e.g., Jeremiah 30:11; 46:28). Deborah's firm planting beneath a tree named after her, while citizens came to her for לִפְתוּחַ, lends weight to her recognized authority (Serman 2011, p. 20). In addition, Deborah's open accessibility to the people for whom God had made her responsible illustrates a distinct emphasis on relationality in leadership as identified by Werhane, Posig et al. in their study of successful women leaders in the workplace (Werhane et al. 2007, p. 178). This deliberate accessibility characteristic is found in none of the male judges in the Book of Judges.

Further information about Deborah's background remains scarce, except for a puzzling notation. Lynn Japinga explains that "the NRSV also describes her as the 'wife of Lappidoth' (4:4), but the word lappidoth can mean torches or fire, so some scholars translate the phrase as a fiery or spirited woman" (Japinga 2017, p. 59). Due to differing possibilities of translation, scholars debate whether Deborah was married to a man named Lappidoth, if this was the name of the community where she lived, or if the designation was primarily a description of her personality (Frymer-Kensky 2006, p. 46).

What does become clear in the biblical depiction of Deborah is her confident, God-honoring leadership and the respect and trust the people awarded her (Japinga 2017, p. 60). Daniel and Cathy Skidmore-Hess point out that Deborah's "appearance in the Hebrew Bible is limited to two chapters in the Book of Judges, yet the roles and identities attributed to her in the Biblical text are remarkable: judge, military strategist, poetess, and prophetess (*naviah*)" (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 1). Further, they compare her to David, the much later king at the apex of Israel's existence, yet David, for all his glory and competence, was never designated a prophet (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 2). In this aspect of authority, Deborah eclipses David. Deborah's judgments were trusted by the people, the military obeyed her voice, and what she declared in obedience to God's revelation came true, as will be examined in more detail in the following sections.

2.1. A Necessity, Not an Aberration

Over the centuries, some Christian and rabbinic scholars have attempted to portray Deborah as an aberration in leadership purely because of her gender (Herzberg 2013, p. 15;

Belleville 2021, p. 113). However, if this case were viable, scholars would also then be obliged to denigrate the contributions of the many women leaders throughout biblical history, such as Miriam and Huldah (women prophets from the Old Testament) as well as Phoebe (a church deacon) and Priscilla (a pastor-teacher who will be discussed in future sections) from the New Testament. Such a gender-suspicious approach skirts dangerously close to criticizing God's choice of these women as leaders. Linda Belleville contends that Israel's history is speckled with prominent and capable women leaders selected and empowered by YHWH (Belleville 2021, p. 71). Two such are mentioned above. Thus, it is not without precedent that Deborah appears as "a woman leader who is respected and valued for her wisdom and intelligence" (Japinga 2017, p. 59). She led Israel boldly and with confidence in her God.

At this time in Israel's history, when the nation needed a strong leader, Deborah filled the role with admirable panache. She had a powerful personality that commanded respect and inspired obedience (Stökl 2015, p. 328). Even the general of Israel's army understood her necessity and relied upon her leadership. Bruce Herzberg makes the case that Barak's reluctance to go into battle without her was not a sexist "unwillingness to take orders from a woman," but that Deborah's presence was needed "to inspire the troops" (Herzberg 2013, p. 20). Susan Niditch states that Barak "is wise to know that victory comes with the presence of God's favorite" (Niditch 2008, p. 65). Not only does Deborah have the authority to judge cases for the Israelite people, but she commands a general to gather the troops and ultimately gives the order to join battle (Herzberg 2013, p. 22).

If this evidence was not sufficient to underscore her necessity as a leader, judge, and prophet, the victory song in chapter five of Judges lends insight into her effect on the practical and economic life of Israel. Belleville states, "As a judge, she made a profound difference. Before her tenure 'the roads were abandoned; travelers took to winding paths. Village life in Israel ceased' (Judges 5:7)" (Belleville 2021, p. 73). With Deborah's advent to judge their cases and lead them to overthrow their oppressors, everyday life was transformed for the better. Everyone from least to greatest was blessed under her leadership, which enjoyed unique features that are discussed next.

2.2. Trusted Authority

From her first introduction at the beginning of Judges 4, Deborah is portrayed as possessing the trust of the people to judge their cases, to give orders, and to prophesy. The Skidmore-Hesses state, "Deborah was a judge, the descriptive term used is *mishpat* (Judges 4:5), which denotes both explicitly and distinctly her judicial status" (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 2). Belleville underscores her command capabilities by pointing out Barak's prompt obedience to her summons in Judges 4:6 (Belleville 2021, p. 71). Finally, as a prophet, she was the trusted mouthpiece of God (Japinga 2017, p. 29). She is perceived as one who was capable of mediating between God and humans and settling disputes between people.

This latter role of settling human disputes in a judicial setting and role renders Deborah unique among the judges in the Book of Judges. As Herzberg states, "Deborah appears to be the only actual judge in the book of Judges" (Herzberg 2013, p. 18). No other judge in that book of Scripture is portrayed as rendering judicial decisions. In fact, some of the judges, such as Samson, were clearly unsuited for settling legal matters (Herzberg 2013, p. 18) and served only as military leaders or, as in Samson's case, a solitary deliverer of vigilante justice. Only Deborah was trusted to hear cases and render judgments. Belleville states, "Deborah's stature as a judge is confirmed by the types of cases she handled. Intertribal disputes too difficult for the local judges fell to her (Deut. 17:8) ... men and women alike came to her to have their disputes settled (Judges 4:4–5)" (Belleville 2021, p. 72). The people approached her outdoor courtroom that was open to all, submitted to her judgments, and listened to her discourse with respect and obedient appreciation. It is little wonder she was regarded as "a mother in Israel" (Judges 5:7), as will be discussed next.

2.3. A Mother in Israel

Scripture does not mention whether Deborah had biological children of her own, nor is it clear whether she was married, an issue previously discussed. One set of scholars observes that since Deborah's children are not mentioned in Scripture (if she had any), the title "mother in Israel" should be taken as an honorific in the same way Elisha uses it when he watches Elijah being taken into heaven in 2 Kings 2:12 (NIV): "My father! My father! The chariots and horsemen of Israel!" (Garcia-Bachmann et al. 2018, p. 68). Susan Ackerman also considers the phrase "mother in Israel" to be a marker of Deborah's prophetic role, much like male prophets were called fathers (Ackerman 2002, p. 62). Belleville takes the designation a step further, stressing that "the phrase ... 'Mother in Israel' is comparable today to an honorary doctorate bestowed in recognition of national leadership contributions" (Belleville 2021, p. 73). The Bible's portrayal presents Deborah with the requisite brilliance, wisdom, and insight to correlate to a high scholarly degree in an honorary sense leading to a penultimate governmental role, with the ultimate role belonging to God.

Further, Deborah behaved maternally toward the people of her nation—God's people, whom she served with faithful devotion toward YHWH and His call upon her life. Japinga points out that her nurturing quality, evidenced by her empathy toward her people's pain, as well as her piety toward God, qualified her as an effective national leader, leading from women's strengths (Japinga 2017, p. 60). Deborah nurtured her people with fair judgments available to all in her open-air courtroom, and she nourished them with true words from YHWH. Gafney touts Deborah as "exceptional in her character, indicated by her portrayal in the test ... each judge who succeeded her represented a decline in quality and character" (Gafney 2008, p. 1). In the Book of Judges, Deborah is the only judge who is continually portrayed positively and the only judge to already be in active ministry before military service is required.

Further, Deborah behaved as a mother concerned for the best good of her people by infusing them with the will and courage to be free from oppression and then facilitating their means to do so, even hazarding herself on the battlefield—not as a combatant, but as an icon of inspiration. "Deborah is a mother who sends her children to fight because all their lives depend on their success" (Garcia-Bachmann et al. 2018, p. 80). The designation "mother in Israel" is rare in Scripture, with only two occurrences in the Hebrew Bible (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 5). The phrase is used once to describe a prominent city in Israel (2 Samuel 20:19), considered a mother city because many villages depended upon it. However, the first usage is applied to Deborah, and it is the only usage referring to a human person upon whom many people and villages depended for survival.

Scholarly works have been written comparing Deborah with Miriam, Moses' sister, based on the premise that a woman can only be appropriately compared to another woman (Herzberg 2013, p. 17). The false limitations of such an unnecessary presupposition exclude an even more compelling comparison between Deborah and Moses himself, as explained in the next section.

2.4. Likened to Moses

As mentioned previously, Deborah was unique among the judges in the Book of Judges in that she was the only one recorded as actually hearing cases and rendering legal verdicts. As Garcia-Bachman et al. state, "Deborah is invested with the authority of speaking YHWH's name and with the same authority of Moses in judiciary matters. This is an impressive task" (Garcia-Bachmann et al. 2018, p. 44). Also, Deborah, "like Moses in his tent," set up her courtroom in a designated place (Herzberg 2013, p. 16). She remained stationary and available, and the people came to her, different from a traveling prophet/adjudicator like Samuel (Millgram 2018, p. 101).

Further, Deborah was a prophetic military leader like Moses. She took part, like Moses, in military action but continued in her parallel role to his by behaving like him, delivering orders as the mouthpiece of God but taking a position atop a hill as the highly visible reminder of God's support (Herzberg 2013, p. 16). Then, following the battle, the com-

parison continues to ring true when both Moses and Deborah led the people in a victory song. These two instances of pairing a lyrical poem with a prose narrative of events occur only these two times in Scripture. (Herzberg 2013, p. 16). Herzberg maintains that “a full examination of the parallels [between Deborah and Moses] ... yields a reading that significantly raises the status of Deborah and sees her as an avatar of Moses himself” (Herzberg 2013, p. 15). Simply put, he makes a strong case that “Deborah was ... the Moses of her time” (Herzberg 2013, p. 33). Uniquely, both Moses’ victory song and Deborah’s victory song are believed to be older than the prose account they accompany, a matter that will be further explored in the next section.

2.5. Author

The Song of Deborah may be one of the oldest works in Scripture (Herzberg 2013, p. 27). Niditch touts it as “a beautiful and moving example of the traditional type of the woman’s victory song”, with its Hebraic parallel structures, formulaic language, and “frequent chant-like refrains” (Niditch 2008, p. 76). Garcia-Bachman et al. dub the song “a masterpiece” (p. 64) with “an ideologically well-accomplished message” (p. 64). One of the few leadership roles available in Israel that Deborah did not embody was that of priestess, but here she did occupy the role of public worship leader (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 3), thus rounding out her myriad accomplishments in the judicial, governmental, military, and prophetic arenas with a manifestation in the worship arena. The song is a formidable literary accomplishment that honors God as the true deliverer of Israel (Stökl 2015, p. 11).

However, Deborah is far from the only woman in Scripture who mastered multiple ministry leadership roles. As Belleville states, “Just as Miriam and Deborah were multi-gifted Israelite women, so there were multi-gifted Christian women who served the early church in a variety of ways” (Belleville 2000, p. 67). Pastor/Teacher Priscilla is among those multi-gifted, New Testament women and will be examined next.

3. Pastor/Teacher Priscilla

What can biblically be known of Priscilla’s New Testament ministry in the Christian paradigm is found in scattered but significant references in the Book of Acts and in Paul’s epistles. From these piecemeal references, Priscilla is revealed as a missionary, a church planter, a pastor/teacher, and a workplace evangelist. She is also a wife, being famously paired with her husband Aquila as “an apostolic couple” (Ramelli 2021, p. 32). Mary Getty-Sullivan states, “Prisca [Priscilla] and Aquila represent a Christian couple modeling equality and partnership in marriage, business, education, and the Church” (Getty-Sullivan 2001, p. 161). This notable pair provides an outstanding example of couples ministry, arguably the best-known and most effective in all of Scripture.

3.1. Dominant Leadership Role

Though Priscilla and Aquila lived together in domestic life, worked together in the marketplace as tentmakers, and ministered the gospel together wherever they went, indications exist that Priscilla was the more spiritually gifted leader of the couple. Her name is listed first whenever their mention connects to ministry activities. Wayne Meeks and James Dunn represent a school of thought that ascribes Priscilla’s name placement before her husband’s to a matter of higher social status or personal wealth (Meeks 1983, p. 59; Dunn 1988, p. 892). However, Jerome Murphy O’Connor, among many others, objects that a high society or wealthy background does not square with Priscilla’s biblically stated labor as a tentmaker (Murphy-O’Connor 1992, online). An independently wealthy woman would not have needed to work, and if she was of noble birth, she would be physically ill-adapted to manual labor (Murphy-O’Connor 1992, online), nor would she have married a tradesman. Therefore, scholars such as Murphy-O’Connor and Marie Keller represent a preponderance of opinion that this order of mention in the biblical text most likely represents Priscilla’s greater prominence in the nascent Church (Murphy-O’Connor 1992, online;

Keller 2010, p. xiii). Văn Thanh Nguyễn and Belleville concur that Priscilla took the lead in ministry (Nguyễn 2013, p. 200; Belleville 2021, p. 82).

The example of Priscilla and Aquila illustrates the wisdom of the first-century church in deploying leaders based on spiritual giftings rather than gender and the wisdom and humility of her husband Aquila in deferring to his wife's gifts and callings. As Murphy-O'Connor states, "The public acknowledgment of Prisca's prominent role in the Church, implicit in the reversal of the secular form of naming the husband before his wife, underlines how radically egalitarian the Pauline communities were" (Murphy-O'Connor 1992, online). The church and the world were greatly blessed and benefitted by this common-sense approach to ministry leadership.

3.2. Multiple Leadership Roles

The term missionary accurately represents Priscilla and Aquila's ministry at a basic level. Nguyễn notes that the couple "relocated both their home and their trade at least three times in three different locations" (Nguyễn 2013, p. 195), making them missionaries in three major Roman metropolises: Corinth, Ephesus, and Rome. Further, Priscilla and Aquila pioneered the churches in Corinth and Ephesus along with Paul. Nguyễn points out that since Scripture records Priscilla and Aquila arrived before Paul in Corinth, they likely had started establishing a church there by the time Paul arrived (Nguyễn 2013, p. 202). Further, when Paul desired to move to another area to spread the gospel, the couple did not hesitate. "Priscilla and Aquila sacrificed everything they had built up in Corinth to accompany Paul on a 250-mile (400-kilometer) journey across the Aegean Sea to Ephesus" (Nguyễn 2013, p. 202). Since, as Luke indicates (Acts 18: 19-21, Paul left the city soon after he arrived there, the inference remains that the migrant couple were instrumental in founding the Ephesian church (Maloney 2003, p. 8). Such conclusions make Priscilla a church planter, among the most foundational and difficult ministry activities in any era, but particularly challenging in the hostile Roman culture when the nascent church offered only a tenuous support system.

Priscilla and Aquila's courage in presenting the gospel remains consistent throughout the recorded references to them. Paul, who lived with the couple for long stretches of time, states in Romans 16:3-4 that the couple risked their lives for him, and "not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them" (v. 4, NIV). Thus, courage and faithfulness to friends in the Lord and the gospel of Jesus Christ are hallmarks of Priscilla's ministry that encompassed multiple localities and a variety of church plants. As Christoph Stenschke states, "Prisca [Priscilla] was an active and influential member of at least three early Christian churches" (Stenschke 2020, p. 27), listed above. Wherever she traveled, along with her husband, Priscilla labored courageously and selflessly with all her might and exercised her leadership gifts to provide an enduring legacy of the gospel for future generations.

If missionary and church planter, which necessarily involves the activities of an evangelist, were not sufficient ministry roles, Priscilla was also a skilled and able teacher. Terran Williams states, "Priscilla may be the best biblical example of the principle of 2 Timothy 2:2. Paul, who has taught Timothy, tells him now to teach other people, who will in turn teach other people" (Williams 2022). As a case in point, Priscilla offered her teaching skills without apology or compromise to a prominent man who might have been considered more educated or eloquent than she. The incident occurred in Acts 18:24-26.

Meanwhile, a Jew named Apollos, a native of Alexandria, came to Ephesus. He was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately. (NIV)

Based on material explained in a previous section, many scholars believe Priscilla took the lead in instructing Apollos more accurately and thoroughly in the gospel, and "without

hesitation, Apollos accepts her instruction" (Haddad 2021b). Larry Phillips concurs that Priscilla's listing as first (Acts 18:26) of the pair to instruct Apollos accords her precedence as the lead teacher (Phillips 2022, p. 80). There is no hint in Scripture that this theologically gifted woman ought not to teach this educated and enthusiastic man. Certainly, Paul is not recorded as issuing a rebuke or correction to her, even though certain Bible passages attributed to him would seem to proscribe her activities. On the contrary, Paul's references to Priscilla were overwhelmingly positive. Thus, it would be difficult to infer anything else but that the apostle approved Priscilla teaching Apollos, and the results were eternally spectacular. Apollos went on to become a leading evangelist and pillar of the church.

Finally, Priscilla and Aquila made their home, wherever they went, into a hospitality center, hosting a local church where believers could gather to worship, share giftings, receive teaching, pray, and provide fellowship and support to one another. Also, as part of their pastoral responsibilities as house church leaders, "they would have been responsible to 'build up the body' by maintaining order" (Keller 2010, p. 49). Such a function required the couple to be respected as the proper authorities. There is no effective leadership without acknowledged authority, and the Scriptural text leaves no doubt that Priscilla (the lead pastor/teacher) and Aquila received such respect.

Paul's actions demonstrate his absolute trust in them as leaders and ministers to God's people. Upon his leaving an area, "Priscilla and Aquila were left to nurture the community, teach about Jesus the Christ (as they did for Apollos and presumably many others), and continue to provide fellowship in their home" (Nguyễn 2013, p. 203). It is presumed that Priscilla, the more apt to teach, provided a great deal of the instruction that molded disciples who went on to change the world. Williams affirms there is no reason to doubt Priscilla's status as "a full-blown pastor, teacher, and elder" (Williams 2022). In sum, Priscilla and Aquila number among the most effective pastoral teams of all time.

Dubbing Priscilla a pastor/teacher seems only logical and appropriate. Ben Witherington claims that "all of early Christianity owes her a great debt" (Witherington 2019, p. 53). However, this skilled and gifted woman also filled the role of marketplace minister, an activity that has garnered significant attention in the contemporary church but was a pioneer activity in the first century, as was so much of what Priscilla undertook.

3.3. Marketplace Minister

Priscilla and Aquila incorporated Paul in their ministry strategy of supporting themselves in life and ministry through their own business labors. Their frequent moves meant they needed to establish their business anew in each location. Harry Maier calls Priscilla "an entrepreneurial woman" (Maier 2021, p. 67). The couple were tentmakers, an occupation that Paul shared and participated in from time to time when he was with them. Phillips states, "From Luke's Acts, it is inferred the pair lived a missionary life in the faith of Jesus Christ, not only in developing trade skills as tent makers, affording their simplified nomadic lifestyle ... Priscilla and Aquila demonstrated a faith that pre-dates Paul" (Phillips 2022, p. 78) in marketplace ministry. Thus, Priscilla and Aquila could, like Paul, offer the gospel free of charge. Beyond doubt, they also took every opportunity during their workday encounters to share the good news of Jesus Christ. In this way of financial independence and workplace evangelistic encounters, Priscilla's ministry also excelled and offers a pristine example of a woman on the front lines of pioneering church leadership.

Priscilla also presents as an early church example of a female theologian, as will be examined next.

3.4. Theologian

When Priscilla and her husband brought the learned Apollos into their home to instruct him more thoroughly in the gospel, since his knowledge of Jesus extended only as far as the baptism of John, the wording implies this theological instruction was at least on par with Apollos's level of scholarship. The phrase in Acts 18:26 translated "and explained to him the way of God more adequately" (NIV) is *καὶ ἀκριβέστερον αὐτῷ ἐξέθεντο τὴν*

ὁδὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ. The accusative singular comparative adjective ἀκριβέστερον parallels the adverb ἀκριβῶς in the previous verse, Acts 18:25, that describes Apollos's teaching as accurate in its theology. The use of ἀκριβέστερον in v. 26 with the connotation of *more* indicates that the teaching Apollos received, primarily from Priscilla as the first mentioned (Schnabel 2012, p. 1382), was superior in its exactness and thorough knowledge of the Scriptures regarding Jesus Christ. Ellicott's commentary states, "The prominence given to Priscilla in this instruction implies that she was a woman of more than ordinary culture, a student of the older Scriptures, able, with a prophetic insight, to help even the disciple of Philo to understand them better than he had done before" (Ellicott 2019, p. 12603). This instruction was not an elementary Sunday school lesson but a thorough exposition of the Scriptures with the skill level of the Apostle Paul when he expounded Jesus and the kingdom of God to the learned Jews of Rome in Acts 28:16–31.

Clearly, Priscilla was intellectually gifted, and she focused that gift on understanding the Scriptures and everything to do with the kingdom of God announced and inaugurated through Jesus Christ. Her grasp of theology was no doubt aided and informed by many hours spent in the apostle's company when he lived in her and Aquila's home and labored alongside them in business and ministry for months at a time. The theologically thorough instruction imparted to Apollos may have been very similar to Paul's compelling theology in its brilliant intricacies. The efficacy of Priscilla's teaching to Apollos is demonstrated when he left Ephesus and moved on to Achaia in Acts 18:27–28, where "he vigorously refuted his Jewish opponents in public debate, proving from the Scriptures that Jesus was the Messiah" (NIV). One wonders how much of Apollos's esteemed and effective preaching came straight from Priscilla's mouth. Thus, her theological leadership extended far beyond her own locale.

This paper next compares and contrasts the leadership styles of Deborah and Priscilla.

4. Comparison of Leadership Styles, Personalities, and Situations

Deborah and Priscilla exemplify excellence in women's leadership. They share significant leadership similarities beyond the basic fact of their gender, including what Esther Wachs Book considers "traditional feminine qualities" like nurturing, empathy, and relational collaboration (Wachs Book 2009, Introduction). Yet, they also present dramatic differences in background, circumstances, and leadership approaches, which will be examined next.

4.1. Similarities

Both women adapted readily to multiple leadership roles and functions, though these roles and functions differed, as will be explored in the next section. The similarity lies in their capacity for multi-tasking. Modern science remains ambiguous about this trait regarding gender aptitude, but tradition attributes the characteristic most naturally to women. Whether or not skill in multi-tasking is a boon or a bane to leadership does not lie within the scope of this study. However, in every one of these ministry roles, Scripture testifies that these women were respected, followed, and obeyed by the diverse populations they led.

Both women proved to be capable and courageous leaders in wildly different circumstances of life. The survival of each was at risk in their endeavors—Deborah militarily through her hazardous defense of her people against oppressors and Priscilla due to persecution for her faith and in her defense of the Apostle Paul (Romans 16:4). Though men and women leaders alike possess capability and courage, Deborah and Priscilla manifested these qualities through their collaborative humility in style and their emotional intelligence. These hallmark characteristics of collaboration, relationality, and servant leadership will be more closely examined in a future section.

4.2. Differences

Personality differences between Deborah and Priscilla are immediately apparent. Scripture depicts Deborah as a fiery preacher and prophet, while the Bible portrays Priscilla with bold, steady, quiet confidence as a teacher and pastor. Deborah might be described as a meteor contrasted with Priscilla as a deep, flowing river. Both women profoundly influenced their times with effects into eternity. Deborah proclaimed from divine revelation; Priscilla taught from the same source—different styles, identical inspiration.

Deborah ministered alone, not in concert with a spouse, and manifested no discomfort in her independence. She may have been a married woman, but if so, no ministry activity is attributed to her husband, tentatively identified as Lappidoth, a name with no roots in Hebrew tradition or ancestry. However, the application of Lappidoth as the name of a person, much less Deborah's husband, is in dispute and may reveal Deborah's personality rather than the presence of a spouse. Skidmore-Hess states, "Taken quite literally, it [lappidoth] also means 'woman of torches' and so the phrase is perhaps an introduction to a fiery woman whose appellation indicates the potency of her spiritual force" (Skidmore-Hess and Skidmore-Hess 2012, p. 3). However, despite Deborah's solitary leadership standing, she possessed a highly effective gift for delegation—a natural outgrowth of her style of collaboration.

Priscilla's leadership revolved around teamwork. She and her husband formed a ministry couple renowned even in their own day and time. Her leadership was intensely relational in nurturing close bonds with other church leaders, such as Paul and Timothy, and intensely pastoral in her care for the believers, who met regularly in the homes she and Aquila established in each location of their ministry.

Deborah's and Priscilla's situations in life also differed greatly. Deborah ministered from a fixed, rural location. The people came to her to hear the word of the Lord and to receive the resolution of their disputes. It is from this outdoor location, anchored by a specific tree named after her, that she summoned the military general Barak to receive her instructions, and the general dutifully arrived, received prophetic directives, and balked only in his insistence that Deborah be present at the battle. Then, and only then, did Deborah leave her seat of governance to take up a mountain-top position of oversight and inspiration. At no time is a city entered or even mentioned. This deep-seated agrarian background suggests Deborah's Spirit-infused leadership was rooted in common folk wisdom rather than formal education.

In contrast, Priscilla spent her life in cosmopolitan surroundings, and she and her husband moved at least three times to different cities and established businesses and churches in each location. Priscilla's Spirit-infused leadership grew out of urban sophistication and a likelihood of formal education. As Hoppin states, "If Apollos was 'mighty in the scriptures' (Acts 18:24), so was Priscilla, his teacher" (Hoppin 2000, p. 81). Scriptural evidence previously discussed characterizes Priscilla as a capable Bible theologian and expositor who must have enjoyed many intense theological discussions with the Apostle Paul. Indeed, she followed in his footsteps—at times quite literally—in imparting the gospel to eager hearts. Thus, Deborah is likened to Moses and Priscilla to Paul, their gender forming no inherent limitation on their gifts, intelligence, roles, or leadership capabilities.

4.3. Comparison Summary

This study of Deborah from the Old Testament and Priscilla from the New Testament amply illustrates that God picks leaders as He wills, regardless of gender, to fulfill His purposes specific to time and place. Also, women may lead in a variety of contexts, as illustrated by Deborah, the prophetic judicial/governmental/military leader of a nation, and Priscilla, the theologian, educator, missionary, and pastor in the nascent church. Female leaders, as much as males, may be empowered and used by God to guide, instruct, and command His people. While Deborah and Priscilla are the focal case studies of this research, they do not offer the *only* biblical models for women's leadership.

Further, women's leadership may vitally serve God and people and provide valuable leadership elements that have been lacking over the centuries in male-dominated milieus. This paper would argue that leadership structures in any context are not complete or fully effective without feminine inclusion and participation. The church and the world have historically deprived themselves of rich resources by curtailing women's leadership.

The New Testament frequently cites characters from the Hebrew Scriptures as examples of life and conduct applicable to the time of the nascent church (e.g., Hebrews 3:5; Romans 4:3,13; Hebrews 11:11). In parallel practice, so also might worthy examples of life and conduct from the Bible validly apply to contemporary contexts with appropriate cultural adjustments. Contemporary women's unique gifts and cultural locations will help them evolve into the leaders God intends for them to be. This paper next looks at the leadership models Deborah and Priscilla have bequeathed women leaders today.

5. Deborah's and Priscilla's Examples for Female Leadership Today

Deborah and Priscilla provide exceptional models of women's leadership today, though these women are far from the only positive exemplars the Bible and history provide. As Belleville states, "There are current socio-historical studies that show that there were more women leaders in antiquity, particularly in formerly male-dominated arenas than has commonly been acknowledged" (Belleville 2021, p. 70). The manifestation of women in leadership is biblical. The creation account from the Hebrew Bible unequivocally describes the male and the female as designed in the image of God, and both genders are instructed to "take dominion over" (i.e., bear responsibility for) God's creation. In other words, men and women "share responsibility" (Haddad 2021a, p. 542) for looking after each other, their fellow human beings, and the environment in which they have been placed.

In the New Testament, the Apostle Paul plainly presents many women as esteemed colleagues in ministry alongside him. In various places, he calls them co-workers, even naming one, Junia (an indisputably female Roman name), as "outstanding among the apostles" (Romans 16:7). He urges the churches to hold these women in respect and to esteem them as those "who work hard in the Lord" (Romans 16:12). Such laudation of women in church leadership from the Apostle Paul renders it difficult to continue interpreting certain biblical texts (i.e., 1 Corinthians 14:34–35 and 1 Timothy 2:11–15) in the gender-restrictive manner they have traditionally been presented. This topic, however, is beyond the scope of this paper, which starts from the premise that women are appropriate leaders. In sum, "God gives gifts as God chooses, and all believers are to use their gifts for the good of the body, his church" (Haddad 2021a, p. 542). The statement also holds true for women in vocational callings outside the church.

This paper next looks at the different women's leadership styles exhibited by Deborah and Priscilla, which may be emulated to good effect by today's women leaders or blended into unique styles as God bestows and develops leadership gifts as He wills.

5.1. Deborah Leaders

Deborah leaders have fire in their bones for justice, for what is right and good and true, as well as a passion for liberty that is expressed in ways honoring their femininity. They are not afraid to speak out, especially when they have received a message from the Spirit of God for the people, even to the extent of urging them into battle in literal or figurative ways. However, they are not impetuous but in sync with God's timing. Deborah's story in the Bible makes clear the order of events. She was established as a sought-after judge in Israel and could have continued in that role indefinitely. Deborah did not call the people to war until she heard the voice of YHWH. Then she acted in submission to Him, the true leader of Israel.

In perceiving the authority of her Lord, she did not concern herself with garnering acclaim. Whether from nature or nurture, women seem more adept at subjugating ego (exercising servant leadership) in pursuing team accomplishments, demonstrating a ten-

dency toward collaboration in aid of their leadership skills (Wachs Book 2009, Introduction, Kindle Edition). Deborah freely delegated vital tasks, not caring who received the glory, whether man or woman. This willingness to delegate leadership is found in no other judge in the Book of Judges—all men took the tasks upon themselves and also expected and welcomed the glory. As Garcia-Bachman et al. state, “We learn from Moses’ father-in-law that good leadership involves delegation (Exodus 18:13–27)” (Garcia-Bachmann et al. 2018, p. 42). Thus, again, in wisely assigning the generalship in battle to another (a man) and prophetically assigning the doom of the enemy general Sisera to another (a woman), we see Deborah walking in Moses’ footsteps by exercising the art of delegation, sharing the responsibility but uncaring of who gains the accolades.

The Deborah leader is a coach and a mentor to leaders under her guidance, illustrating a leadership emphasis on transformation over transaction. Japinga vividly describes the interaction between her and the military general she personally summoned and appointed.

Deborah serves as a coach or encourager for Barak. The text is not clear whether he was fearful or lacked self-confidence or failed to see the opportunity to engage Sisera in battle. Perhaps he wasn’t sure he could trust God, or Deborah. She was not resentful or angry about his hesitation. Instead, this fiery woman “lit a fire” under Barak. She encouraged him to take action and she provided motivation and strategy and insight. She knew the right time to act. He, in turn, did not appear to resent her leadership or direction. He saw her as the embodiment of God’s presence. (Japinga 2017, p. 61)

Through Deborah’s life and ministry, we see a model for men and women to work together with the female at the helm and, as Japinga points out above, no one questioning or resenting her leadership. Carrying out the will of God becomes the focus, not the gender of the person in charge.

Further, Deborah leaders manifest mothering characteristics in their leadership style. These characteristics tie in with mentoring and coaching abilities and enhance them to include the sort of nurturing that followers thrive under, just as children thrive and mature under the guidance of a loving mother. Japinga states, “Deborah may not have had children, but she functioned in ways that mothers do: leading, encouraging, nurturing, teaching, and more” (Japinga 2017, p. 62). Deborah leaders place the well-being of those under their care ahead of their own wants and needs. They are true servant leaders.

However, they understand discipline is a loving and essential part of nurturing. The discipline begins with themselves and only then extends to those they lead. Beyond doubt, Deborah’s demanding role as judge of Israel required a great deal of self-discipline. Though Deborah leaders recognize and utilize the skills of others that they do not possess (which is a component of this self-discipline), they also do not expect others to do what they will not do themselves. Deborah did not hesitate to accompany Barak into battle. Though she recognized that she did not possess the training to participate in combat, she provided essential direction and inspiration, disregarding any danger to herself from proximity to the conflict.

Many Deborah leaders remain unutilized or sidetracked in churches today. In fact, given their fiery temperament, they are often actively squelched, which tends to turn their positive leadership skills into negative traits and unhealthy manifestations that can do damage where they were meant to serve for the upbuilding of the body of Christ. Part of the responsibility for that consequence must be shouldered by the woman herself. Women called to lead should seek the Lord to guide them into that location in Christ’s body where they will be useful and free to express the leadership skills God put in them for the health and expansion of God’s kingdom.

Pastor/Teacher Priscilla went wherever the effects of persecution or the positive urging of a fellow leader (Paul) took her. Wherever she found herself, she blessed and built up the body of Christ with her God-given gifts of leadership. Her leadership style will be examined next.

5.2. Priscilla Leaders

Priscilla leaders share the Deborah leaders' passion for the Lord and servant leaders' maternal willingness to sacrifice for the good of others. As Keller states, Priscilla "burned with the love of God ... unafraid to preach ... willing to risk everything" (Keller 2010, p. 65). Priscilla leaders take full advantage of every gift God gives them for the building up of Christ's kingdom. They are ever on the hunt for new ways to present the gospel and bring God glory. Scripture teaches that women, as well as men, received the in-filling of the Holy Spirit, and were empowered by the Spirit to lead by making disciples. As Belleville states, "Women leaders came to the fore with the advent of the apostolic period ... The outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost was an equal opportunity event" (Belleville 2021, p. 76). There is no thought in the Priscilla leader that she ought not to lead because the Spirit compels her to step out and guide others with a true shepherd's hand in a humble spirit of collaboration and cooperation.

The Priscilla leader possesses a high degree of diplomacy and what contemporary society has come to term emotional intelligence that serves her well in discerning and responding to the needs of others in ways that exemplify Christ's love and respect for all human beings. Priscilla demonstrated these characteristics in her approach to correcting Apollos's doctrinal shortcomings when he preached at the synagogue in Ephesus, as recorded in Acts 18. As Keller explains, "Priscilla and Aquila ... show their diplomatic and pastoral sense in that, instead of challenging him publicly, they took him aside privately, perhaps to their home. Obviously, their teaching was effective" (Keller 2010, p. 25). Priscilla, as has been previously established, was most likely the lead teacher of Apollos, but she astutely delayed the goal of correction until an appropriate time and place that guarded Apollos's dignity. Such delicacy illustrates a leadership focus on transforming those they lead rather than simply requiring performance (Alloway 2021, p. 152).

Priscilla leaders are intellectually gifted and theologically astute. They know their Scriptures, what they mean, and how to apply them in everyday life. Hoppin states of Priscilla, "Her fame ... was not derivative [from Paul or Apollos] and grew as the early church wonderingly watched her in action—teaching and preaching; risking her life to rescue Paul; matching wits with Apollos, a leading theologian of her time, and bringing him into the Christian fold" (Hoppin 2000, p. 104). A divine compulsion grips the Priscilla leader to share her wisdom and understanding with every open heart in a spirit of respect and kindness that exercises the maternal, nurturing instincts of a woman servant leader.

The Priscilla leader is intensely relational, a hallmark characteristic of women's leadership, in all she undertakes. Werhane, Posig, et al. dub this relational style—key in the women leaders they study—as "interactive and participatory," concerned more with transformation than transaction (Werhane et al. 2007, p. xviii). Hierarchy does not concern her when interactive participation and collegial coaching produce better results. She builds circles of influence, creating atmospheres of collaboration and mutual submission. A manifestation of her relational nature and intellectual qualities, combined with her desire to influence others for the gospel, prompts her to communicate by every available means with clarity and holy boldness tempered with grace. In this area, the Priscilla of the Bible provides a clear leadership template.

Priscilla leaders are most egregiously denied their place in leadership by being barred from the pulpits of many churches and denominations, including ordination into the pastorate. Women manifest profoundly pastoral qualities that deserve expression in answering God's call to serve as pastors of congregations. Churches and denominations that prohibit women pastors are not looking at giftings and callings bestowed by God's sovereign choice, as demonstrated throughout Scripture in the lives of women like Deborah and Priscilla. These denominations honor the letter of certain verses through a sincere desire to obey God but ignore the broader testimony of biblical examples explored in this study.

Often, women called into pastoral functions find their only outlet to be the mission field, where most of their denominations ironically permit them to find notable successes denied to them at home. As Haddad points out, "In mission fields around the world,

women have preached, married, buried, and baptized thousands; begun and administered hospitals, orphanages and schools, and planted hundreds of churches" (Haddad 2021a, pp. 544–45). There, far from their birthplaces, women find themselves walking in the footsteps of the biblical Priscilla, an outstanding missionary leader, pastor, and teacher.

The church needs to rediscover the advantages of appreciating and implementing the unique contributions and perspectives women's leadership offers for the proclamation of the gospel and the health of Christ's body. Haddad asserts that men and women "see and experience life" differently (Haddad 2021a, p. 547). These differences exist to bless the church and the world and should be invited to flourish. Nora Hamzeh adds, "Women leaders offer insight and a specific skill set in leadership positions" (Hamzeh 2023, p. 16). Women's leadership distinctives, in light of Deborah's and Priscilla's examples, will be examined next.

6. The Women's Leadership Mystique: A Fresh Perspective and Style

The first-century church evidenced a refreshing egalitarianism that created the best opportunity for the greatest number of Christian workers, regardless of gender, to reach their world with the gospel and to provide care and guidance to the forming fellowships of Christ-followers. Women received "a prominence in Christ's life and ministry that was a radical break with acceptable conduct in Jesus' time" (Alexander and Gause 2006, p. 66) and "this pattern is the paradigm for the early church" (Alexander and Gause 2006, pp. 67–68). This equal-opportunity structure was common sense for the forming church and contributed greatly to its dynamic growth.

The abandonment of this paradigm has hindered the church through the centuries. As Haddad states, "Most churches are looking for more gifted leaders to take charge of their programs. Churches that open leadership doors to women double their potential supply" (Haddad 2021a, p. 544). Conversely, "churches that deny opportunity to women leaders are working with one hand tied behind their backs" (Haddad 2021a, p. 544). The need for rediscovering and recovering women's leadership gifts and styles has never been more urgent or appropriate in the current cultural atmosphere requiring emotional intelligence, collaborative style, and relationality as manifested in Deborah and Priscilla as leaders.

Priscilla plainly demonstrated women's tendency to lead relationally, rather than through a top-down command structure. Today, this has been called "the influence model of leadership" (Gergen 2005, p. xix) or "distributed leadership practice" (Hamzeh 2023, p. 15), which is becoming more and more common in the workplace because of the advantages the model offers for communication flow, worker happiness, and productivity by fostering a deep sense of community. As Hamzeh states, "Research findings point to a new phase in leadership practice that highlights women's participation as contributing to trusting and safe environments that nurture collaboration" (Hamzeh 2023, p. 25). This deep sense of community is often missing in churches today, sometimes because the top-down structure fosters compartmentalization and distance between leaders and followers and between the leaders themselves. The inclusion of women's leadership perspectives and styles offers balance (Helgeson 1995, p. xx). Priscilla's life exemplifies this leadership style.

According to Gergen, women's instinctive leadership formulation appears as concentric circles linked by lines of communication (Gergen 2005, p. xx), which render the structure more like a web than a tower. Women leaders perceive that communication flow becomes constricted within the inverted funnel of a hierarchical structure, whereas the web is designed for ready communication dissemination and possesses an innate sensitivity to change and new information that is quickly and relationally spread throughout. This quality is especially advantageous because of the relationship web's innate rapid responsiveness in the current cultural paradigm of instant information and quick change. The hierarchical structure that has dominated in male-led culture—and came to pervade the church within a few short centuries of its beginning—lends itself to the development of silos that the feminine tendency toward web structure circumvents. As Susan Smith states, "Hierarchical structures were not the defining characteristic of the earliest Christian com-

munities” (Smith 2007, p. 22). Priscilla’s collegial collaboration with Paul, her husband Aquila, and other church leaders in planting and nurturing churches exemplifies the possibilities of the web-like leadership structure.

On the other hand, Deborah’s more prophetic leadership style reflects the paradigm of the Hebrew Bible but remains applicable to women’s leadership today. Her recognition of strengths in others and delegation of tasks without concern for personal glory is a hallmark of confident, effective leadership. Deborah was quick to “see what was no longer working and to identify new solutions” (Helgeson 1995, p. xiv). With the good of her whole community in mind, she utilized unusual personnel in creative ways. This community-based, big-picture style of leadership is a manifestation of the tendency toward serving those she leads in a creative, nurturing, and liberating manner, finding value in empowering others (Wachs Book 2009, p. 244).

Further, Deborah was not risk averse, as has been the societal stereotype of female timidity. As is necessary for women’s leadership today, she had a “fierce belief” (Helgeson 1995, p. xxiv) in her God-given vision and was not afraid to step out into it, leading her people to victory and freedom. Part of her process was doing what good leaders do—making her people feel “valued, trusted, and respected” (Helgeson 1995, p. xxxv) and providing them with whatever support they required, even at risk to herself.

Women leaders, like Deborah and Priscilla, see “themselves as being in the center of things rather than at the top; it’s more natural to reach out than to reach down” (Helgeson 1995, p. xxxv). People respond well to this approach that women bring to leadership. The church would be wise to encourage and embrace the Deborahs, Priscillas, and other types of women leaders God has placed in *her* midst; thus, creating strong, responsive, and nurturing communities that reflect Jesus to the world.

7. Conclusions

The Bible depicts women leaders operating competently and admirably in every sphere of influence, both in the Hebrew Bible and the New Testament. Prophet Deborah in the Hebrew Bible and Pastor/Teacher Priscilla in the New Testament offer inspiration and prime examples for women in leadership today. “Deborah ... was a judge (at that time the top leadership position in Israel), the commander in chief of the army, and a poet, singer, and prophet” (Haddad 2021a, p. 545). Priscilla gave her all as a pastor/teacher, missionary, evangelist, and workplace minister. The Bible and church history is replete with both men and women God has called to serve Him and lead His people, as Deborah and Priscilla illustrate (Haddad 2021a, p. 547). Therefore, women have a biblical responsibility to step into leadership in any vocation—ministerial or secular—for which God has called and anointed them.

Women offer advantageous leadership qualities that the church has eschewed for too long to its detriment. Williams calls the church “to release suitably called and gifted women into the highest levels of contribution in the local church today” (Williams 2022). The church has deprived *herself* for millennia of invaluable gifts, skills, and talents by proscribing women’s functions in ministry and society. The tragedy must not be perpetuated in this generation. For the sake of the church’s health and the spread of the Good News of Jesus Christ, modern-day Deborahs and Priscillas must manifest in the leadership positions for which they have been created.

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