

Prologue

When I undertook the task of researching and writing on the subject of biblical womanhood, I planned to write a single book, entitled *Feminine and Free: God's Design for Women*, in which I would return to the beginnings of human existence, the Genesis narratives, to establish the biblical foundations of family and community, particularly as they relate to God's plan for women. I have long been acutely and painfully aware that women *per se* have been the most abused people group in human history in continuing and unrelenting maltreatment that has transcended all nationalities, ethnicities, and virtually all religions. I am convinced that it is vitally important to the well-being of family, society, and religious communities that an accurate understanding of the foundations of biblical anthropology, especially as it relates to women, be recovered and restored.

As I delved deeper into Scripture and the massive literature that discusses the lot of women from time immemorial to the present and as I analyzed the dizzying array of concepts, philosophies, and options for the roles of women, I soon realized that I could not possibly address this important subject fairly or adequately in one book. As the research and writing has continued, the *Feminine and Free* project has expanded into five volumes, with a sixth book to serve as a *Readers' Digest* condensed version of the series for those who do not have the time or inclination to study the subject in such great detail.

My basic premise has been that it is impossible to develop a sound anthropology without first establishing right and proper theology. Inevitably, one's understanding of humanity is profoundly influenced by one's thinking about God. My writing on the subject of theology became so extensive that I was forced to remove the vast majority of the material from the *Feminine and Free* series and to publish it in another book, *Rediscovering the God of Scripture*. Likewise, my comprehensive analysis of the image and likeness of God and its reflection in humanity, male and female, was so extensive that I have had to condense this material drastically for *God and Women*. I plan to publish the complete discussion in yet another book, *Imaging the Divine: Mirroring God's Likeness in the Earth*.

God and Women: Woman in God's Image and Likeness is the first of the five volumes of this *Feminine and Free* series. In this book, I undertake to establish a foundation for considering the wide-ranging options that God has provided for women to fulfill the divine call that he has placed upon their lives. That foundation, of necessity, returns to the beginning, to the creation of humanity according to divine design. Following the hermeneutical law of first mention, I maintain that the

best place to begin is “in the beginning,” or at Genesis 1:1. Then, I have exercised great care to bypass the Hellenization and Latinization of Christian and Jewish thought by seeking to recover the Hebraic truths that God himself established in Scripture as foundations for successful living in the context of family, society, and community.

A VOICE OF EXPERIENCE

As a young teenager, I was first exposed to what at that time was a radical concept, the idea that Christianity has always been fundamentally a Jewish religion. The Christian faith was founded on belief in the God of the Jews. It was developed on the revelation of God’s self-disclosure recorded in the Hebrew Scriptures, the Bible of the Jews. It was completed and made perfect through the life, death, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus, the Jewish Messiah. And it was extended by him to all human beings in the form of salvation by grace through faith, a salvation that, by Jesus’ own confession, is also from the Jews!

As I have diligently searched the Scriptures, history, and extracanonical Jewish and Christian literature, I have become more and more convinced that it is essential to the health of the Christian community around the world to recover the most ancient foundations of the faith of Jesus and the apostles. I have been convinced that the late Edward Flannery was perfectly correct when he said that “an over-Hellenized, over-Latinized Christianity needs a re-Judaization process to restore it to its founding Jewish roots and renew it more in keeping with its own inherent ideals.”¹ Incredibly, an international, transdenominational, multiethnic movement of restoration and renewal has emerged in a work that has no single identifiable earthly source but clearly has one heavenly source. In rapidly increasing numbers, people everywhere are catching the spirit of renewal and restoration and are laboring to recover the Jewish roots of their Christian faith.

Many in this movement have been motivated by the opportunity to hear or tell something new while others have been swept up in sentimentality and the existential moment, relishing the novelties and symbols of restoration. Still, a solid core of this renewal movement has come to understand that the richest legacy that Jews and Judaism have given to Christians is the profound and enduring emphasis on family and community as the locus for social, intellectual, and spiritual development. The very core of the faith of Jesus was the living community of disciples who walked with God in a committed relationship of covenant living that connected them vertically with the God of the universe and laterally with other people of faith. The church of Jesus Christ was and

¹ Edward Flannery, quoted in *Restore!* 1:2.

should ever remain a Hebraic community in continuity with the patriarchs, prophets, sages, and apostles of biblical faith.

Impelled by this foundational understanding of God’s plan for his people, I have devoted more than forty years in ministry and academia, researching, writing, teaching, and preaching about the Hebraic foundations of the Christian faith. I have been and remain an unabashed Biblicist in that I have total confidence in the divine inspiration and complete trustworthiness of the Hebrew Scriptures, the *Tanakh* (commonly called the “Old Testament”) and the Apostolic Scriptures (commonly called the “New Testament”), both of which were written by Hebrew peoples to inculcate the Hebraic worldview and the core values of faith in the one God of Scripture. Like the Christian Hebraists of the sixteenth century, who were the progenitors of the Protestant Reformation, I have come to appreciate the mottos *sola scriptura* and *sola fide*. I have come to understand that the most trustworthy path to establishing the truth that is foundational to faith is the Holy Scriptures that were inspired of God and conceived, thought, and written in the Hebrew language.

VOLUME 1

In this book, I first offer a general introduction to the overall subject of “God and Women,” which I call, “Who is Woman?” So many have written and spoken about “a woman’s place,” largely in a pejorative manner that implies that women need to be kept in their “place.” This subject has been widely and hotly debated for centuries, even millennia, with profoundly divergent viewpoints.

Second, I offer a discussion on the importance of going back so we can go forward—in this case, going back to the very beginnings of human existence, to the Garden of Eden and the creation, formation, and fashioning of the first human couple.

Third, I discuss the importance of not merely reacting to perceived evils, an action that often produces an even greater evil, and I suggest that it is vital that we be proactive by going beyond mere perception and insisting on apperception, a return to original models as a basis for judging current perception.

Fourth, I advance the idea that all good anthropology, including studies of women, has its foundation in good theology; therefore, I discuss a few concepts about the God of Scripture that have been overlooked because of the profound influence of Greek philosophy on historical church theology.

Fifth, I delve into Scripture to establish the fact that neither God nor the biblical authors were hesitant to describe God and his actions in feminine metaphor.

Sixth, I analyze what it actually means to say that God “created humanity, male and female, in his own image and likeness.”

Seventh, I discuss the concept of the image of God as it related to the creation of humanity wherein human beings, male and female, were designed by God to be theomorphic—actually revealing the very image and likeness of God.

Finally, I develop the theme that the fullness of God’s image is in the pure relationality of divine being; this relationality was the purpose for the creation of humanity in the beginning and is the fullest manifestation of God’s image in humanity.

VOLUME 2

In the second volume in the *Feminine and Free* series, entitled *Feminine by Design: God’s Plan for Women*, I analyze the process of humanity’s creation. Amazing detail is found in the Hebrew text of the Genesis narratives, including the manner in which God created humanity by forming a body from the dust of the earth, employing the skills of a potter to mold humanity from the humus.

In an act that only God could have performed, he created a living being “out of nothing” by breathing his own divine breath into the earthen body that he had formed. God went on to create gender-specific beings by fashioning a woman from the side of the already-formed human entity, “building up” the crowning element of his creation. I develop the biblical ideas that male and female are delicately counterbalanced by divine design so that both are equally essential to the well-being of humanity.

Then I discuss the fact that femininity is indispensable for humanity by analyzing the contributions and roles that are unique to the female half of humanity and then encouraging women to feel free to be fully feminine. I analyze the various aspects of femininity that were created by divine design and are essential to women in God’s image. Finally, I describe the ideal human experience as God designed it in the beginning: “Heaven on Earth” as it were, God’s will accomplished on earth precisely as it is in heaven.

VOLUME 3

The third book in the *Feminine and Free* series is entitled *Free and Equal: The Biblically Hebraic Woman*. In this volume, I chronicle the lives of the many women who are mentioned in the Hebrew

Scriptures and demonstrate how they serve as paradigms for the modern woman who is committed to imaging God in the earth by fulfilling his calling and purposes for her life. I compare what the Scriptures say regarding Eve with the erroneous positions that both Jewish and Christian scholars have developed under the influence of Greek and other Gentile worldviews. Next, I proceed to a discussion of the roles that women chose to fulfill in the Hebraic culture of antiquity within the context of the nomadic and agrarian societies in which they lived. I analyze the lives of women of godly character and divine calling such as Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, Miriam, Deborah, Ruth, Hulda, Esther, and others, pointing out the high level of spiritual leadership that they demonstrated in their families, society, and religion.

Next, I discuss the changes in Jewish perspectives on women that emerged in late post-exilic times when some of the sages of second-temple Judaism began to be influenced by Hellenism and its dim view of womanhood and departed from biblically Hebraic views of women and the roles available to them.

Then, I analyze the impact of Jesus upon second-temple Judaism, the reformation of restoration in which he often insisted that his Jewish compatriots abandon Greek-influenced traditions and return to the heart of the Torah on which the faith of God had been established. This includes the markedly different attitude and perspective that Jesus demonstrated regarding women.

Finally, I discuss the revolutionary positions on women's rights that Paul, the Jewish rabbi and Christian Apostle, espoused in a gynophobic and misogynistic world. By returning the teachings of this much-misunderstood apostle to their Hebraic matrix, I provide a hermeneutically sound context that aids in a radically different, yet contextually accurate exegesis and exposition of Pauline thought.

VOLUME 4

The fourth book in the *Feminine and Free* series is *Bound and Gagged: Secular and Ecclesiastical Misogyny and Its Impact on Women*. In this volume, I discuss the implications of God's statement to Eve following humanity's fall into sin: "Your turning will be to your husband, and he will rule over you." This is one prediction that has been fulfilled across the eons of time and in virtually every human society.

I analyze the impact of sin upon humanity and the malevolent dominance/submission codependency in which sin has universally entrapped both men and women. I detail various worldviews and the cultural implications of those perspectives on women. I focus on the mindset of

the Greek world and the perspectives on women that it produced, detailing the impact of this perverse viewpoint on all of the West and much of the rest of the world as well.

I also evaluate the impact of Hellenism on Judaism and Christianity, detailing the Hellenization (and Latinization) of original Hebraic Christian views on the nature and roles of women. This toxic influence transformed Christian women from highly active leaders and teachers in a domestic-based, congregational faith into the bound-and-gagged victims of male bureaucracies, a condition that began in ante-Nicene times and persists even to the present day.

VOLUME 5

The fifth volume in the *Feminine and Free* series is entitled *Free Indeed: Releasing Women for Divine Destiny*. In this book, I first chronicle the lives and works of the many women in the nearly two millennia since the time of Jesus and the apostles who refused to be silenced by the androcentric bureaucracies that demanded that all women be bound and gagged, at least figuratively.

I also discuss the way in which church leaders used Hellenic and Latin philosophies and sociological perspectives to enforce their general gynophobia and frequent misogyny. I demonstrate how, from the time of the first Greek influence in the church near the end of the first century until the present day, women have either been silenced and cloistered or openly abused, tortured, and even murdered simply because they had a call of God on their lives to proclaim God's Word.

Next, I discuss the intention of Jesus and the apostles to restore womanhood to its high status of freedom and equality with men so that the prophecy of Joel could be fulfilled: "Your daughters will prophesy." Then, I analyze what it means to be feminine and free. Finally, I challenge women of God to discern by the Holy Spirit the calling that God has placed on their lives and to free themselves from the shackles of the secular and ecclesiastical past to enter into the fulfillment of their own divine destinies, whatever they may be.

CLIFFSNOTES

All of the extensive material in these five volumes is then condensed into a *Readers' Digest* version in *Feminine and Free: God's Design for Women* with references to detailed analysis of each point in the other volumes of the *Feminine and Free* series. This book is greatly simplified but still contains basic ideas from the research and argumentation that I have advanced in this entire series.

WOMEN AND ACADEMIC STUDIES

Some of my colleagues and advisers have encouraged me to take a less academic approach to this subject, adopting what I suppose is the much-celebrated KISS methodology: “Keep It Simple, Stupid!” I realize, and I agree with them, that people in today’s world, both men and women live at such a frenetic pace that they often have neither the interest nor the time for details. Because of the pressures of life, so many people do not have time for in-depth analysis.

On the other hand, I simply refuse to believe the pernicious viewpoint that has been maintained for centuries by philosophers, poets, playwrights, politicians, and preachers that women are not as intelligent as men and that they do not have the capacity for logical thought. I don’t believe that women are the emotionally consumed, irrational creatures that men have portrayed them to be (and in some cases that they have even come to think themselves to be!). I do not share the idea that women who are academically inclined are deficient in their womanhood, as some scholars in history have boldly proclaimed. Women are as capable of critical thought and exhaustive study as men and may even have a greater capacity than men for intuitive thought.

I think that it is about time for women to have access to biblical and historical facts about women and to critical analysis directed toward establishing a biblical anthropology that is solidly grounded on scriptural theology. Too much is at stake to resort to platitudes and emotional fluff. It is time to return to that most Hebraic of concepts, the challenge to think. Thinking may be the most painful process known to humanity, but it is essential in today’s ignorant and apathetic world where too often the answer to most important questions is, “I don’t know, and I don’t care.” It is time to do more than a casual, cursory review of surface thought in history, Scripture, theology, and anthropology. It is time for women and men to make in-depth, critical analysis of every aspect of human relations—particularly those of female-male interrelationships and male and female roles and responsibilities—and to find foundations on which clearly biblical and godly perspectives can be lived out in the context of families, communities, and congregations throughout the world.

“Life is for learning, and learning is for life” is a wonderful Hebraic maxim. Regardless as to how much erudition we may have or how great we may become as teachers, we are still only learners. Indeed, submission to the discipline of learning is the essence of biblical discipleship. As Jesus said, “Take my yoke upon you and *learn* of me.”² The easy yoke of discipleship is learning, submitting oneself to the rigors of “searching the Scriptures” and acquiring the information on which accurate understanding can be established.

² Matthew 11:29.

The preeminence of learning in the biblically Hebraic world was underscored by the fact that the Hebrew word for learning (*lamad*) is also one of the letters of the Hebrew *aleph-bet*, the letter ● (*lamed*), which is positioned at its middle and is its tallest and largest letter. Before *lamed* was a letter, it was a pictograph representing an ox goad. This confirms that teaching and learning are the means of discipline by which God goads human beings toward achieving success in life as well as right relationship with their creator.

The sages of Israel also found great importance in the fact that the two words at the center of the Torah text are *derosh derash* (“search diligently”), from which they concluded that the purpose of life was to devote oneself to a careful analysis of God’s Word. Indeed, the righteous person, who is like a tree planted by rivers of water and whose life flourishes, is one who “meditates” on God’s Word “day and night.”³ When we seek God, we have his promise that we will find.⁴ When we ask, we will receive. If we need wisdom, we need only ask God, and he will give it.⁵ When we knock, the door of understanding will be opened to us.⁶ Never underestimate your capacity for knowing God in the intimacy of true relationship as you delight yourself in his Word.⁷

If, as you read this volume or the others in the *Feminine and Free* series, you find language and concepts challenging, I have offered a Glossary at the end of this volume. I encourage you to take the time to educate yourself by mastering the vocabulary and evaluating the thought for yourself. Another quick and simple tool is www.Dictionary.com, the use of which will rapidly and easily expand your vocabulary and your knowledge base. Another valuable tool can be acquired by using BibleWorks (www.BibleWorks.com) or another of the many Bible programs for your computer. For an online library, I also recommend www.Question.com.

FOLLOW THE WORD AND SPIRIT

Please do not accept anything that I have written without evaluating it for yourself. You have the liberty—and the responsibility—in Christ to “be fully persuaded in your own mind,” which is the conclusion of Paul’s wonderful argument for pluriformity.⁸ Rely, therefore, on the Holy Spirit to

³ Psalm 1:3.

⁴ Matthew 7:8.

⁵ James 1:5.

⁶ Luke 11:10.

⁷ Psalm 37:4; Psalm 1:2.

⁸ Romans 14:5.

“guide you into all truth.”⁹ I have attempted to fulfill my responsibility by sharing the insights and inspirations on these subjects as I believe I have received them from God. I do not claim to have the imperial word of the Lord. In the spirit of 1 Corinthians 14:29, I gladly submit myself to the discernment of the greater community of faith, for I believe and practice the idea that peer review is a significant part of the Hebraic mindset exemplified in Scripture. It is the responsibility of all believers to discern or judge for themselves whether what anyone says is the truth.¹⁰ We are encouraged in Scripture to walk “circumspectly” in wisdom.¹¹ We do so by being “diligent to present ourselves approved unto God” by accurately explaining the word of truth.¹²

APPRECIATION

I would like to express my thanks to a number of my personal friends and colleagues who have contributed their insight and gifts to the creation of this series. Dr. Marvin Wilson and Dr. Robert Bleakney have made copious notes, corrections, and recommendations in careful critiques of the manuscripts. Dr. Jennifer Scrivner has also studied the manuscript and has made excellent suggestions. Judy Grehan has contributed her usual expertise in copy editing my works. Elizabeth Nason has added her genius to this project by patiently creating the graphic design, the covers, and the layout for these books.

CHALLENGE AND BLESSING

As you read this and the other volumes in this series, I pray that you will be enlightened and inspired with an even greater passion for biblically Hebraic truth. May you use the golden key of Hebraic insight to unlock for yourself the treasures of Holy Scripture that will enrich your life. May you recover the Hebraic foundations of your Christian faith that will illuminate your understanding and invigorate your walk with God in Spirit and in truth. May you be blessed with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in the Messiah.

Shalom & Blessings!

John D. Garr, Ph.D.

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⁹ John 16:13.

¹⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:29.

¹¹ Ephesians 5:14.

¹² 2 Timothy 2:15.

