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Bauckham, Richard

Gospel Women: Studies of the Named Women in the Gospels

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Richard Bauckham, Professor of New Testament Studies and Bishop Wardlaw Professor at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, has written a major work on some of the named women of the New Testament. In doing so, he looks keenly at stories, facts, and hints in the biblical text and in stories in extrabiblical literature about these women.

His subjects include women in the genealogy of Jesus in Matt 1; Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1; Anna of the tribe of Asher in Luke 2; the two Salomes, one, a sister of Jesus, and the second, her namesake and not named in the biblical text, a disciple of Jesus (226); Johanna (Luke 8:3; 24:10), who, he argues, is an apostle; Mary of Clopas (John 19:25); and the women in the resurrection stories.

He begins by looking at the book of Ruth, positing that it offers a key to a gynocentric reading of scripture (1–16). At first glance this seems unusual, yet it lays the foundation for his argument that portions of scripture present women's voices. He points out that while we cannot know the authorship of Ruth, "the voice with which the text speaks to its readers is female" (3, emphasis original); this female voice dominates until the last verses, when the male voice in the form

of the genealogy of David returns to the text (4). Citing the work of Carol Meyers, Bauckham notes that one glimpses in certain texts such as Ruth, Song of Songs, and perhaps Esther an internal world of women, a place in society where their voices are heard and appreciated (9). He argues that the gynocentric texts have the role not of relativizing the androcentric texts, the predominant texts in both Testaments, but of counterbalancing or correcting precisely this: their androcentrism (15–16). Consequently, listening for and hearing women’s voices and perspectives in the New Testament runs as a theme throughout Bauckham’s *Gospel Women*.

Bauckham continues his Old Testament emphasis by looking at the four women named in the genealogy of Jesus in Matthew: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and the wife of Uriah the Hittite. “In a patrilineal genealogy of this kind, women have no necessary place,” he begins, and then asks why they are there. Taking his readers step by step, he argues that Matthew’s genealogy expresses the universal direction of God’s purposes, namely, that Jesus is the Jewish Messiah for the Gentiles (21). That the four women have some sort of connection by birth or marriage outside of Israel “accords well with the overall messianic purpose of the genealogy” (27).

He asserts that Tamar “was at least no more a Gentile than Sarah, Rebekah, Leah, and Rachel were” (31). Furthermore, the fact that Jesus had Gentile foremothers shows the openness of God’s people to the inclusion of believing Gentiles, an openness the Messiah confirms and expands (42).

The interaction of Elizabeth and Mary in Luke 1 presents one textual vignette offering a glimpse into the world of women. Lacking in his chapter on these two women, however, is an in-depth look at Elizabeth; Bauckham concentrates on Mary instead. He cites the prevalence of the mother-child theme in many of the preceding Old Testament stories about women. The Elizabeth-Mary section carries on the salvific model of women as deliverers of God’s people. Earlier women deliverers he cites are Shiphrah and Puah, the midwives in Exod 1; Deborah the judge and Jael who killed Sisera (Judg 4-5); Hannah (1 Sam 1–2); and Esther. Along with men, women act as human agents of God’s deliverance for his people from their enemies (57). Mary and Elizabeth continue this pattern.

Bauckham notes that commentators usually say the songs of Mary and Hannah celebrate God’s salvation of Israel and remain separated from the women singers themselves. He thinks these commentators have missed the point. Instead, he argues that the songs of these joyful women “celebrate God’s gracious action for

the singer herself *in its significance for all* who are also in humiliating circumstances of various kinds and so for God's faithful people in general" (6, emphasis original).

Bauckham notes that Anna of the tribe of Asher is the only Jewish character in the New Testament not belonging to the tribe of Levi, Judah, or Benjamin (77). He convincingly argues that mention of Anna and the tribe of Asher ensures that the community represented in the Lukan narrative represents Israel as a whole, northern tribes as well as southern, exiles as well as inhabitants of the land (98). The message of salvation in the person of Jesus came to all Israel.

In his longest and most interesting chapter (109–202), Bauckham argues that Johanna and her husband Chuza, Herod's steward, are the Andronicus and Junia mentioned so fondly by Paul as his relatives and fellow prisoners in Rom 16:7. He notes that the reference to Johanna's husband is exceptional among all the Gospels' references to women disciples of Jesus (119).

Bauckham notes that Johanna and Chuza, as members of the Herodian aristocracy of Tiberias, moved freely in the Roman world (161). Johanna already, as a member of the aristocracy, had chosen to be a follower of Jesus and therefore had made an incredible social crossing to become a follower of Jesus (145). She further crossed, according to Bauckham's arguments, more social gulfs when she became, with her husband Andronicus/Chuza, an itinerant missionary. He argues that the name Junia is a Greek version of Johanna, one likely taken up by a Palestinian Jew who became a Christian missionary to the Greek world (169).

In an imaginative account that must have been fun to write, Bauckham, drawing from his research, inclinations, and hunches, paints a historical sketch of this intriguing woman and her husband (194–98). Paul commends them as "outstanding among the apostles" and believers in Christ before he became a believer (Rom 16:7).

Another missionary couple quite likely was Mary of Clopas and her husband Clopas (198). In his next chapter, Bauckham argues that the phrase "Mary of Clopas" (John 19:25) can mean either that Mary is the unmarried daughter of Clopas or the wife of Clopas; he opts for the latter (207–9). Tracing both the union and line of Mary and Clopas prove fascinating, for this study reveals the importance of the roles that relatives of Jesus played in the early church (203). Clopas was the brother of Jesus' putative father, Joseph, Bauckham says (208). Mary and Clopas had a very famous son, a man called Simon or Symeon, the

most important Christian leader in Palestine for a half a century (209). Evidently according to extrabiblical texts, he was martyred at age 120, an age that places him in the same category of importance as Moses (209). Because Simon/Symeon was so well known by reputation throughout the churches, the first readers of the Fourth Gospel, John, would have had no difficulty in identifying Mary of Clopas as his mother (209).

Bauckham, continuing his exploration of extrabiblical texts and the light they shed on people surrounding Jesus, cites a postcanonical Christian tradition naming Mary and Salome as the two sisters of Jesus (p. 226). The Coptic History of Joseph mentions that Salome followed Mary, Joseph, and Jesus on the flight into Egypt (231).

In his concluding chapter Bauckham tackles each Gospel resurrection story separately and looks at its women characters. Regarding Matthew, he says that the command to the women “go and tell” (Matt 28:10) kept applying during their lifetimes. Because it is inconceivable that the women would have stopped telling all who were subsequently willing to hear, their witness is not replaced by that of the eleven, as has been argued, but contains its own continuing validity (279).

Luke’s resurrection narrative refers to the disciples in such a way as to make clear that not only the eleven but also a larger group are in mind; the women belong to this larger group, Bauckham says (82). In John, Mary Magdalene’s statement “I have seen the Lord” (John 20:18) goes on testifying to the reality of the risen Lord and is just as compelling a witness as that of the other disciples and Thomas (285).

Bauckham handles well the difficult problem of the way Mark’s Gospel ends. He argues that the silence of the women tells readers that, although the women pass on the news of Jesus’ resurrection to the male disciples, the proclamation of the gospel to the world does not start at this point. Indeed it cannot start here, not because the women are women, but because proclamation must begin from a resurrection appearance in which Jesus commissions his witnesses (294).

Bauckham, clearly a fine, methodical teacher, writes as an academic to academics. His study *Gospel Women* includes interesting sidelights of his research, such as a fine section called “Jewish Women As Owners of Property” (121–35) and notes on the northern tribes in exile in *4 Ezra* 13 and on the book of Tobit (101–7).

His book would have been better named *Gospel Women: Studies of (Some of) the Named Women of the Gospels*. One hopes he'll apply his expertise to a sequel, something like *Gospel Women: Studies of (More of) the Named Women in the New Testament*.