



Weekly Bible Study Resources

## Bible Characters Notes

for Your Weekly Bible Study

*Notes on the Bible characters mentioned in the weekly Bible Lesson  
with correlative references from the Christian Science periodicals.*

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### SUBJECT: THANKSGIVING 2014

**Cast of characters are listed in the order of appearance in this week's Lesson**

For biblical commentary on the Bible verses in this week's Lesson,  
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#### **Naomi**

[Nā ō'mē] ("pleasant, my joy")

Naomi was the wife of Elimelech and mother-in-law of Ruth, probably in the time of Gideon. Naomi left Judea [**central Israel/West Bank**] with her husband and two sons, in a time of famine, and went to the land of Moab [**Jordan**]. Here her husband and sons died. She later returned to Bethlehem with Ruth.

"Naomi's prominence continues [in chapter 2]. Her name is the first word. It links her to a wealthy kinsman named Boaz." (*Women in Scripture*) Naomi advised Ruth to work for him and to seek his favor. When Boaz and Ruth eventually married, they had a son, whom they named Obed.

"The story of the bond between Naomi and Ruth has become a paradigm of filial love." (*All the People in the Bible*)

#### **Elimelech**

[Ē lim'uh leck] ("my God is king")

"Elimelech was an Ephrathite clan member who emigrated to Moab [**modern Jordan**] when a great famine broke out in Bethlehem of Judah during the period of the judges." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) "That Elimelech would go to Moab demonstrates the severity of the famine and his own desperation." (*All the People of the Bible*)

"After his death, his two sons married local women. The ensuing story is narrated in the book named after Ruth, one of Elimelech's daughters-in-law." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) The story tells how, despite the death of all male members of his family, Elimelech's estate in Bethlehem remained in the family's hands through Ruth's marrying Boaz with the permission of Elimelech's widow, Naomi. Naomi's kinsman Boaz replaces her husband Elimelech's closest "redeemer" relative, who might otherwise obtain the land belonging to Naomi and claim it for himself.

## Boaz

[Bō'az] (Heb. "strength")

Boaz was a kinsman of Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, from the tribe of Judah, and the husband of Ruth, Naomi's widowed daughter-in-law. "He was a wealthy and honorable landowner in the town of Bethlehem." (*Who Was Who in the Bible*) "He was a faithful Jew, and as such would have been careful to obey the laws governing the harvest." (*All the People of the Bible*) One spring day he went to his barley field, where his servants were reaping the harvest. He noticed that behind them a comely young woman was gleaning the scattered ears left behind by the reapers. He learned on inquiry that was Ruth, the widow of his relative Mahlon, son of Elimelech, and that she had just arrived in Bethlehem from her native land of Moab [*Jordan*] with her widowed mother-in-law Naomi. Boaz spoke kindly to Ruth and praised her for her devotion to Naomi. He told her to go on gleaning his fields with his servants, where she would not be molested, and invited her to share their food and water.

At the end of the harvest Boaz spent the night on the winnowing floor after the usual feasting. Under Naomi's guidance, Ruth dressed herself in her best clothes and went to lie at the feet of the sleeping Boaz.

Later, Boaz married Ruth. "A son was born to them whom they called Obed. In due course Obed's son, Jesse, became the father of King David, who was therefore the great-grandson of Boaz and Ruth (Book of Ruth; I Chr 2:11,12)." (*Who's Who in the Old Testament*)

## Ruth

[Rooth] ("friendship")

"Ruth is the heroine of the book of Ruth. The book is a gripping short story, incorporating folkloric features that make for ease of appreciation as common human experience, as well as distinctive cultural features commending Israel's theology and ethics." (*Oxford Guide to People & Places*)

The story of Ruth is one of constancy and loving cooperation. She was a woman of Moab [*Jordan*] who married Mahlon, one of the two sons of Elimelech and Naomi. It was the custom during those times that a widow would return to her own family after her husband's death. When Elimelech and Mahlon died, she chose instead to go with Naomi, her mother-in-law, to the land of the Israelites. Her words of devotion to her mother-in-law are often quoted, "*And Ruth said, Entreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God:*" (Ruth 1: 16)

After making their way home to Bethlehem, Ruth humbled herself by gleaning in the fields of a wealthy farmer by the name of Boaz. Boaz was attracted to Ruth and married her. In due course, Ruth gave birth to a son, named Obed, and through him Boaz and Ruth became the great-grandparents of King David.

"Her story ends, however, not with the male elders but with the women of Bethlehem (see 1:19). In transferring Ruth's child to Naomi, they remind her that '*your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him*' (4:14-15)." (*All the People of the Bible*)

## Abigail (widow of Nabal the Carmelite)

[Ab'i'h gale] ("father [i.e.'leader'] of the dance, or 'of joy'"')

Abigail is the wife of the churlish Nabal, who dwelt in the district of Carmel (I Sam 25:3). "She was as beautiful, charming, and intelligent as her husband Nabal was churlish, selfish, and rude." (*All the People of the Bible*) She showed great prudence and delicate management at a critical period of her husband's life. She was "a woman

of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." After Nabal's death she became the wife of David (25:14-42), and was his companion in all his future fortunes (27:3; 30:5; II Sam 2:2). By her David had a son called Chileab (II Sam 3:3), elsewhere called Daniel (I Chron 3:1).

"Abigail's acknowledgment of the religious legitimation of David as military leader, and her acceptance of his demand for material support, are expressed in the elaborate address she delivers when she goes to meet him." (*Great Couples of the Bible*)

## **David**

[Dā'vid] ("beloved")

Jesse

(seven brothers)	=	Michal (Saul's 2 <sup>nd</sup> daughter)
(two sisters)	=	Ahinoam (the Jezreelite)
<b>David</b> (youngest of brothers)	=	Amnon (eldest son)
	=	Abigail (widow of Nabal)
		Chileab
	=	Maachah (daughter of King of Geshur)
		Absalom (killed Amnon)
		Tamar
		Tamar (violated by Amnon)
	=	Haggith
		Adonijah (4 <sup>th</sup> son/eldest at end of David's reign)
	=	Eglah
	=	Bathsheba (Uriah's wife)
		(infant boy died)
		Shimea/Shammua
		Shobab
		Nathan
		Solomon (youngest son)
	=	Other wives and concubines

"David is one of the most enigmatic characters in the Bible. He is honored as...the root from whom the Messiah would come, and the key to Jesus' ancestry." (*All the People in the Bible*) David exhibited many roles during his lifetime: warrior, fugitive hero, King of Judah, King of Israel, musician, and ancestor of Jesus. He was the second king of Israel, who enlarged the kingdom, moved the capital to Jerusalem, and strengthened the armed forces. In later times, David was looked on as the ideal ruler who would return, or it was believed that a descendant of his would arise, to restore the kingdom of Israel. His life may be divided into three portions:

His youth before his introduction to the court of Saul; his relations with Saul; his reign.

"David's story emerges primarily in the books of Samuel, concluding in I Kings chapters 1 and 2." (*Oxford Guide to People & Places*) "1 and 2 Chronicles offer quite a different version of David's life. This work is later than Samuel-Kings, composed perhaps in the fifth century [BC], and draws upon a version of those books which it revises and supplements." (*Ibid*)

### **As a Youth**

“David grew up as the youngest of the seven sons and two daughters of Jesse, a simple but prosperous shepherd of the tribe of Judah.” (*All the People of the Bible*) His youth was spent in Bethlehem and he was the keeper of his father’s sheep. He played the harp, and music figured prominently in his life. Many of the psalms in the book of Psalms are attributed to him. “When Saul failed to meet God’s standards for kingship (I Sam 15:23,35; 16:11), God sent Samuel to anoint a replacement from among the sons of Jesse, who lived in Bethlehem (I Sam 16:1).” (*Holman Dictionary*) Subsequently, he was anointed as a future king of Israel by the prophet Samuel.

### **Relations with Saul**

“There are two stories as to how Saul met David. In the first story (I Sam. 16:14), Saul went into a deep depression after he realized that God had forsaken him.” (*All the People of the Bible*) Saul’s servants had heard of David, and brought the young David to play his harp and to sing songs before Saul. “Saul was charmed by David’s good looks and intelligence, and appointed him his armour-bearer.” (*Who’s Who in the OT*) It was during this period with Saul that David learned of governmental affairs which would better prepare him for his future roll.

“The young David showed his courage as well as his ability as a warrior when he confronted Goliath.” (*All the People in the Bible*) “David suddenly appears before his brothers in the camp of the army and hears the defiant challenge of the Philistine giant Goliath.” (*Peboulet’s Dictionary*) “Saul called the shepherd boy to battle with Goliath whom he killed with a single stone from his sling.” (*Easton Dictionary*) “The story of David defeating Goliath throws light on David’s essential nature, highlighting those characteristics that made him an ideal king.” (*Mysteries of the Bible*)

“Although Saul should have been grateful for this feat, he became jealous of the prophecy of David being the future king and remained hostile to him.” (*Ibid*) “Finally Saul gave up his devious attempts to eliminate David and gave direct orders to his guard to kill him.” (*All the People of the Bible*) This forced “David to flee with Saul in pursuit. He at first found a home at the court of Achish, among the Philistines; but his stay was short. His presence revived the national enmity of the Philistines against their former conqueror, and he only escaped by feigning madness. His first retreat was the cave of Adullam. In this vicinity he was joined by his whole family and by a motley crowd of debtors and discontented men, which formed the nucleus of his army.” (*Mysteries of the Bible*)

“As David’s forces grew, he became in effect a warlord in southern Judah, spending much of his time in the lands of the Philistines.” (*All the People of the Bible*) After Saul, and his son Jonathan, were killed in battle, the tribe of Judah elected David king and placed him on the throne in Hebron for 7 ½ years.

Before taking the throne, David “protected the local villagers from Saul’s raids, and in the process met Abigail...” (*Ibid*) “Abigail of Maon intervened with David to prevent him from punishing her foolish husband Nabal.” (*Holman Dictionary*)

### **King David (1011-971 BC)**

The success and glory of David’s reign from its beginning to its end reflect David’s dependence upon his living God for guidance in everything he considered doing. He established Jerusalem as the capital of his new kingdom and moved to re-establish the worship of God. “During his reign, David increased the status of ‘the city of David’ by bringing to it the ancient Ark.” (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) “He brought the Ark, with ceremony, sacrifices, and rejoicing, from Kiriath-jearim [**8 mi NW of Jerusalem**] (Josh 15:9; II Chron 1:4), and placed it within a tabernacle that he had pitched for it in the city of David (II Chron 6; I Chron 13, 15:1-3).” (*Westminster Dictionary*) He also started the construction of a temple to worship God. Solomon, David’s son and successor finished the temple. “In the phase of consolidation following his coronation David triumphed over nearly all the then neighboring nations in a series of military campaigns. In the north he encountered the Aramaic states,

and Damascus, Hamath, and Zobah rendered him tribute; in the east and southeast, David subjected the Ammonites and Moab; in the south he took over Edom; in the southwest he subjected small desert tribes like the Amalekites; and in the west he defeated the Philistines." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*)

Although David was a righteous king, he was subject to sin. "Although he had over twelve wives, he was noted as a lascivious man." (*All the People in the Bible*) "David's affair with Bathsheba (II Sam 11:1-12:25), one of the best known incidents in his life, occurred during the last phase of the Ammonite campaign." (*Interpreter's Commentary*) On one occasion when his army went to battle, David stayed home. While Uriah, the Hittite, Bath-sheba's husband, was away in battle, David committed adultery with her. Then in an effort to cover his sin, he finally had Uriah killed in battle.

"It would be wrong to consider the outcome of the meeting and liaison between David and Bathsheba—the culmination of a love story which overcomes the barriers between high and low in society—as a happy ending. It is in fact exactly the opposite, and the prophet Nathan is charged to open the king's eyes to this reality." (*Great Couples of the Bible*) Faced with his sin, David repented and asked for God's forgiveness (See Psalms 51).

"David...became an absolute ruler after the model of the region, and his place above the law ran counter to the sense of justice and the religious beliefs of many of his subjects....these growing feelings of discomfort came to a head during Absalom's revolt." (*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*)

"Toward the close of David's life the Lord gave him a plan for the future temple (1 Chron. 28:11-12)." (*Baker's Encyclopedia*) "The closing period of David's life, with the exception of one great calamity, may be considered as a gradual preparation for the reign of his successor." (*Peloubet's Dictionary*) During all David's calamities and in spite of David's failures, God gave David the unspeakable comfort of loyal friends. David's greatness is seen in many ways, especially in the extremes of devotion given to him by men of noble character. This mark of true leadership is also an evidence of God's special grace. Such men were:

David's own household  
Ittai the Gittite  
Zadok and Abiathar, the priests who returned to Jerusalem  
The messengers who were the sons of Zadok and Abiathar  
Hushai the Arkite, in Jerusalem  
Barzillai the Gileadite, in Mahanaim in Transjordan

It was Solomon, David's son and successor, who finally erected the first temple in Jerusalem.

"When David died he left the kingdom vastly enlarged, militarily very strong, and financially secure." (*All the People In the Bible*) He "died and was buried in the city of David." (*Baker Encyclopedia*) He served for more than 40 years as King. Jesus' genealogy was traced back to the ancestry of David by both Matthew and Luke.

### **"woman...which was a sinner"**

"The woman is identified as a sinner, and her gesture, which consists of washing Jesus' feet with her tears, wiping them with her hair, anointing them with ointment, and kissing them, is both highly erotic and abject; it appears to indicate penitence (7:37-38)." (*Women in Scripture*) "All four gospels tell of Jesus' anointing by a woman (Matt 26:6-13; Mark 14:3-9; John 12:1-8) though all three others [than Luke] link the anointing to Jesus' passion and record a complaint about the waste of money. Whereas Matthew and Mark have an anointing of Jesus' head, Luke, like John, tells of the anointing of his feet." (*Oxford Commentary*) "The woman is not named in the Synoptic Gospels, but John 12 identifies her as Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus." (*People's NT Commentary*) "This [an alabaster box of ointment, Luke v.37] is similar in many ways to the events described in [Matthew, Mark, and John], but it is clearly a different incident." (*MacArthur Bible Commentary*) Note: There

is not total agreement on this position; for instance, The Women of the Passion, says “It is also recorded in [Matt 26: 10-11], but [Matthew] uses the story to give a different teaching.” “The woman's sin is not specified. This woman is not Mary Magdalene of Luke 8:2, since in that passage she is introduced as a new figure.” (*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*)

Jesus' “final word to the saved sinner was, “Thy faith hath saved thee, go in peace.” (*All the Women of the Bible*)

“We group this story with three others (the Samaritan woman, the woman judged forgiven, and the daughters of Jerusalem)...because they are examples of ‘women changed by Jesus’....This woman is described not only as a sinner but as someone who is known to be a sinner. Many presume that this is a euphemism for saying that she is a prostitute. But there is nothing in Luke's story to suggest this.” (*Women in the New Testament*)

“This woman from Bethany had left the shadow of sin behind her and moved into the light because of her experience of Jesus.” (*Women of the Passion*)

### **Simon (the Pharisee)**

“This Simon was of the city of Jerusalem, and of a very noble family of the sect of the Pharisees, which are supposed to excel others in the accurate knowledge of the laws of their country.” (*Josephus*) “Jesus was invited to a dinner in his honor hosted by a Pharisee named Simon (Luke 7:36ff). It seems that Simon was interested in what Jesus had to say, but he also seems to have considered Jesus as an inferior. Simon was friendly to him, but he failed to offer the usual courteous amenities, including a welcoming kiss and having a servant wash his guest's feet when he entered.” (*All the People in the Bible*)

“A Pharisee who invited Jesus to dinner in his home, where a penitent woman anointed Jesus' feet with her tears, and Jesus in a parable taught the relationship between appreciation and forgiveness (Luke 7: 36-50).” (*Eerdmans Dictionary*) “He may have been identical with Simon “the leper,” whose story is recorded by Mark and Matthew, but the story of Simon the Pharisee as recorded by Luke has many distinct features and probably refers to another person and occasion.” (*Who's Who in the New Testament*) He is briefly mentioned as “the Pharisee whose house was the scene of Jesus' anointing by a ‘sinful’ woman.” (*HarperCollins Dictionary*)

*Easton's Bible Dictionary* says, “A Pharisee in whose house ‘a woman of the city which was a sinner’ anointed our Lord's feet with ointment.” *“Who Was Who in the Bible,”* says “A Pharisee in whose house Jesus ate.” The *Holman Bible Dictionary* says, “A Pharisee who hosted Jesus at a dinner. Simon learned valuable lessons about love, courtesy, and forgiveness after a sinful woman anointed Jesus at this event.” The *Interpreter's Dictionary* says, “The Pharisee in whose house Jesus was anointed by a sinful woman (Luke 7:36-50). The location of the house is not indicated, though it seems to have been in Galilee and possibly in Capernaum.”

### **Lazarus**

[Laz'uh russ] (from Heb. Eleazar “God has helped”)

**Martha** = Simon the leper?

**Mary** (of Bethany)

**Lazarus**

“The English reader would at first sight hardly recognize the New Testament “Lazarus” as identical with the Old Testament ‘Eleazar.’” The two words are, however, the same. In the dialect of the Jerusalem Talmud, words that begin with an *aleph* (in English, say, an un aspirated initial vowel, like a or e) often drop that initial. Eleazar (AL'AZR) thus becomes L'azar (L'AZR); and so the name occurs, in point of fact, more than once in the Talmud.

When the word "Lazar," again, was taken into the mouth of any person speaking Greek, he naturally added to it the Greek termination os (Latin, *us*), and so by gradual stages the Old Testament "Eleazar" became the New Testament "Lazarus." (*The Biblical Illustrator*)

"Lazarus is a figure in two different passages in the Gospels. In Luke 16: 19-31, Jesus tells the parable of the rich man [Dives] and Lazarus; in John 11: 1-44, Jesus raises his friend Lazarus from the dead. It is uncertain whether the same individual is intended in both cases, but there are apparent connections." (*HarperCollins Bible Dictionary*) "The consensus, to the extent there is one, remains that the two figures are unrelated." (*Eerdmans Bible Dictionary*)

"The Lazarus of John's Gospel reportedly lived in Bethany [**village near Jerusalem**] with his sisters Mary and Martha." (*Ibid*) "Lazarus...is mentioned by name only in the fourth Gospel....Luke mentions Mary and Martha but never mentions their brother by name or otherwise (Luke 10:38ff.)." (*All the People in the Bible*)

He is not mentioned in the Synoptic Gospels, and on account of the silence of Luke and the order in which the three are named in John, he is supposed to have been the youngest of the family, the circle of whose acquaintance it is inferred was large, and their circumstances comfortable. "The resurrection of Lazarus has been recorded only by John. Various reasons have been conjectured why the other evangelists did not mention so signal a miracle. The most probable is, that at the time they wrote Lazarus was still living. The miracle was well known, and yet to have recorded it might have exposed Lazarus to opposition and persecution from the Jews." (*Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testament*)

"On the narrative level, Lazarus' four days in the tomb (John 11: 6,17,39; cf. vv.13-14) point to the reality of his death. His death, though real, is not ultimate." (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*) His resurrection from the dead after he had been in the tomb for four days forms the climax of the miracles of Jesus recorded by John (11:1-44).

"He had been dead for four days, whereas the other recorded raisings had been of persons only recently dead—Jairus' daughter (Mark 5:22-43) and the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11-17). Both these, it can be argued, were not really dead, but only deeply unconscious—indeed, Jesus says in the former case: 'The child is not dead but sleeping' (Mark 5:39)." (*Interpreter's Dictionary*)

"[Lazarus] is described as subsequently making a feast for Jesus in Bethany, at which Mary anointed the feet of Jesus. In Luke, Mary sits at Jesus' feet, while Martha serves; in John, Mary anoints Jesus' feet, and again Martha serves. Because of the publicity surrounding this event, the chief priest plotted to kill Lazarus (John 12: 9-11)." (*Easton Bible Commentary*) "He became a target for murder by the chief priests because of his celebrity." (*Holman Bible Dictionary*)

"His resurrection constituted the occasion for many Jews believing in Jesus, and also was the determining cause of the Sanhedrin's plot to put Jesus to death. Much critical interest centers about this miracle, its problem being inseparably connected with the larger one of the authorship and historicity of the Fourth Gospel." (*Easton Bible Commentary*)

"The most interesting question raised by John 11-12 is the curious description of Lazarus as one whom 'Jesus loved' (11:3,5,36)." (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*) "One point that is emphasized throughout the story is Jesus' special love for and relationship with Lazarus (John 11:3,5,11,35-36). This emphasis has led some to propose that Lazarus may have been the 'Beloved Disciple' (e.g., John 13:23; 21:7,20) whose death seems to have been so troubling to the Johannine community (21:23). There remains, however, no scholarly consensus on the identity of the Beloved Disciple." (*Eerdmans Dictionary*)

## Mary (of Bethany)

TIME LINE: The Last Months (just prior to Passion Week)

MENTIONED IN: Luke 10:38-42; John 11:1-5, 17-20, 28-33; 12: 1-8

Martha = Simon the leper?

Mary (of Bethany)

Lazarus

[Mair'ee] (Gr. Maria or Mariam; Heb. Marah "bitter" or "grieved," or Miryam, "rebellion")

"Mary, the sister of Martha and Lazarus, appears in three stories in the New Testament." (*All the People in the Bible*) She "is frequently remembered as she is depicted in Luke's very short exemplary story, or confused with either the anonymous woman penitent who washes and anoints Jesus' feet in Luke 7:36-50 or the famous disciple and witness to the resurrection, Mary of Magdala.

"Luke's story appears to pit Martha and Mary against each other." (*Women in Scripture*) Mary and her sister Martha appear in Luke as receiving their friend Jesus in their house "whenever he came up from Jerusalem, particularly for the Passover festival." (*Who's Who in the New Testament*) "As with Martha, we know nothing of Mary's family background. Martha was probably older than Mary since the house is referred to as Martha's; but she could have inherited it from an unmentioned husband [maybe Simon, the leper]." (*Who Was Who in the Bible*)

According to Luke, when Jesus visited their house in Bethany, Mary sat at Jesus' feet and listened to his teachings while Martha worked in the kitchen. Mary sat listening eagerly for every word that fell from the divine teacher. When Martha complained that Mary was no help, Jesus gently rebuked Martha. She had chosen the good part, the "one thing needful." "In John's version Mary anoints Jesus' feet with costly ointment and wipes them with her hair, while Martha serves (12:1-3)." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*)

"The next time we see Mary is at the raising of Lazarus. When they heard that Jesus was coming, Martha ran out to meet him, and Mary stayed at home (John 11:20ff)." (*All the People in the Bible*) "Without doubt both Martha and Mary loved their brother Lazarus, but we do not read of Martha weeping when death claimed him. We have mention only of Mary's tears." (*All the Women in the Bible*) Mary's grief was deeper, but less active than Martha's. "Mary's role in the dialogue with Jesus prior to the resurrection of Lazarus is less significant than that of Martha (John 11:1-40)." (*Anchor Dictionary*) "When Jesus reached the house, after Lazarus had been 4 days dead, Mary at first 'sat in the house' (John 11:20 RSV), but afterward was summoned by Martha to meet the Lord who had called for her (v.28)." (*Westminster Dictionary*) Her first thought when she saw Jesus in whose power and love she had trusted was one of complaint. But the great joy and love which her brother's return to life called up in her more than compensated for her previous grief.

Following Lazarus' resurrection, Mary showed her gratitude by anointing Jesus' feet with "*a pound of very costly oil of spikenard*" and wiping his feet with her hair. Judas called this anointing extravagant, but Jesus answered, "*Let her alone; she has kept this for the day of my burial.*" Jesus called Mary's unselfish act "*a memorial to her.*"

"It must further be borne in mind that anointing was a usual courtesy; and that not unnaturally two deeply loving women would very probably at different times be impelled to show their devotion by humbly outpouring their precious gifts upon His sacred feet. Very possibly Mary never had heard of the poor sinful woman's act, occurring as it did probably two years previously and many miles away in Galilee; but even if she had, why should she not act similarly when her heart impelled her to a like act of devotion?" (*Hastings' Dictionary of the Bible*)

## **Martha**

TIME LINE: The Last Months (just prior to Passion Week)

[Mar'tuh] (Aramaic "lady, mistress")

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**Martha** ⇔ Simon the leper?

Mary (of Bethany)

Lazarus

"Martha, identified as the sister of Mary, tends to be remembered primarily as she is depicted in Luke's very short exemplary story." (*Women in Scripture*) Martha and Mary also appear in John's Gospel (John 11:1-12:8) and live in Bethany near Jerusalem. "The setting of Bethany whose distance from Jerusalem is correctly given in John 11:18 as fifteen stadia (c. 3 kilometers) from Jerusalem, as been ascertained by modern excavations." (*Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels*)

Martha is the sister of Mary and Lazarus of Bethany. "Martha is named first, before Mary and Lazarus, as loved by Jesus (11:5)." (*HarperCollins Dictionary*) The three were tenderly attached to Jesus, but Mary and Martha expressed their love for him in different ways. Martha loved him and desired to make him comfortable and show him respect in her house; she was one of Jesus' best loved disciples. "The character portrayal of the sisters in Luke and John are strikingly similar." (*Interpreter's Dictionary*)

While Martha busied herself making Jesus comfortable and cooking for him in her home, Mary listened intently to his teaching. Martha tried to have Jesus rebuke Mary for not assisting her to attend to his external wants, but Jesus explained that Mary's deeper hunger for spiritual fellowship were more important than concern for his external honor. Jesus recognized that Martha was working for him, but he reminded her that she was permitting her outward activities to hinder her spiritually.

"Martha is even more prominent in John's narrative. John 11:1-12:19 forms a unit bound together by references to the persons of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus. The section opens with the introduction of Lazarus as being from 'Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha' (11:1). The author goes on to identify Mary as 'the one who anointed the Lord' (11:2), apparently expecting the reader to know both the anointing story and the names Mary and Martha. The progress of the story is explained through the relationships between Jesus and the three, but the emphasis is placed on Martha: 'Jesus loved Martha and her sister and their brother Lazarus' (11:5)." (*Women in Scripture*) "When Lazarus died it was Martha who ran out to meet Jesus on the way (John 11:20). While she rebuked him for not coming earlier, she nonetheless showed her faith in stating that she knew he could still help them." (*All the People of the Bible*) Both sisters were sincere believers, but it was Martha who made the confession of faith. "In John 11:21-27, Jesus led Martha from an inadequate to a lofty confession. Faced with the realities of death, Martha, however, later doubted (John 11:39)." (*Holman Dictionary*)

"It appears that Martha was the head of the household, indicating that she was probably the oldest of the three." (*All the People in the Bible*) The house where Jesus was received is called Martha's, and the supper that was given to him at Bethany, at which Lazarus was present and Martha again served, where Mary anointed his feet was at the house of Simon the leper. Accordingly it has been suggested that Martha may have been the wife or widow of Simon.

"Many of the traits attributed to Martha by the evangelists correspond to those of deacons in early Church communities. Her portrait could be cited as a precedent for women deacons." (*Anchor Bible Dictionary*)

"Martha is first mentioned by John - the only other Gospel writer who refers to Martha - in his account of the raising of Lazarus from the dead at Bethany (John 11:1-44). The narrative indicates, however, that Jesus was already on terms of the closest friendship with her and her household. In the incident which John here records, Martha again displayed her more practical nature by going out to meet Jesus, while Mary sat in the house. But she was not behind her sister in her love for her brother in her faith in Jesus and in her belief in the final resurrection. The power of Him, whom she termed the "Teacher," to restore Lazarus to life even upon earth was beyond her understanding. To the words of Jesus concerning this she gave, however, a verbal assent, and went and informed Mary, "The Teacher is here, and calleth thee". Yet she remained inwardly unconvinced, and

remonstrated when Jesus ordered the stone before the grave to be removed. Jesus then recalled His previous words to her remembrance, and vindicated them by restoring her brother to life. After the raising of Lazarus, Jesus then made His departure, but after a short stay in Ephraim He returned to Bethany. While He supped there, Martha once more served, and Lazarus was also present. It was on this occasion that Mary anointed the feet of Jesus." (*International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*)

\*The weekly Bible Lessons are made up of selections from the *King James Version* of the Bible and the Christian Science textbook, *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* by Mary Baker Eddy, the Discoverer and Founder of Christian Science and are published and copyrighted by The Christian Science Publishing Society. The *King James Bible* and *Science and Health with Key to the Scriptures* are in the public domain. Articles from the Christian Science periodicals prior to 1923 are also in the public domain.

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