
MARY OF BETHANY

Introduction

Several Marys are written about in the New Testament, which can be confusing. Our study is based on the woman usually called Mary of Bethany.

Mary was the sister of Martha, a widow and Lazarus whom Jesus raised from the dead. The family was good friends with the Lord and He usually stayed at their home when He was in Bethany, a village about a mile east of the summit of the Mount of Olives.

Our Study

The following scripture is indicative of Mary's love and attachment to the Lord.

The Scripture: Luke 10:38-40

"As Jesus and His disciples went on their way, He came to a village where a woman named Martha opened her home to Him. She had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet listening to what He said. But Martha was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. She came to Him and asked, 'Lord, don't you care that my sister has left me to do the work by myself? Tell her to help me!'"

1. Where did this scene take place? _____

2. What was Mary doing? _____

3. What was Martha doing? _____

4. What was Martha's complaint? _____

5. What did she want Jesus to do? _____

This little scene displays the important differences in the two sisters' temperaments. While Martha was concerned about Jesus' physical comfort, Mary was intent on learning all she could from Him.

The Scripture: Luke 10:41-42

"'Martha, Martha,' the Lord answered, 'you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is needed. Mary has chosen what is better and it will not be taken away from her.'"

6. How did Jesus respond to Martha's request? _____

7. What did He say about Mary's choice? _____

Jesus was not downgrading Martha's work but saying that of the two choices, listening to Him was the better one.

The next scene takes place near the end of Jesus' life.

The Scripture: John 11:1, 3

"Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha so the sisters sent word to Jesus, 'Lord, the one you love is sick.'"

8. Who was sick? _____

Although Bethany was several days' journey away, Jesus did not immediately go to His friend's side. By the time He arrived, Lazarus was already dead. Martha met Him, then called Mary to come too.

The Scripture: John 11:32-36

"When Mary reached the place where Jesus was and saw Him. She fell at His feet and said, 'Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died.' When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come along with her also weeping. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. 'Where have you laid him?' He asked. 'Come and see, Lord,' they replied. Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, 'See how He loved him!'"

9. How did Mary greet Jesus? _____

10. What did she say to Him? _____

11. How did Jesus respond to Mary's grief? _____

12. What else did He do? _____

Some of the Jews who were with Mary were critical of Jesus, complaining that if He had come sooner He could have kept Lazarus from dying.

They moved to the cave where Lazarus had been buried. It had a stone across its entrance.

The Scripture: John 11:41, 43-44

“Take away the stone,’ He (Jesus) said.....” Jesus called in a loud voice, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face. Jesus said to them, ‘Take off the grave clothes and let him go.’”

13. What happened next? _____

Raising Lazarus from the dead caused many Jews to believe in Jesus. Others, fearful that the miraculous signs would cause many to believe in Him, went to the Pharisees who along with the chief priests began to seriously plot Jesus’ death.

The Scripture: Matthew 26:6-7

“While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to Him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume which she poured on His head as He was reclining at the table.”

14. Where does this scene take place? _____

Scripture does not make clear just who Simon the Leper was. Many authorities believe he was Martha’s husband.

Previous scriptures reveal that this was during the Passover season. The priests and elders were already plotting Jesus’ arrest and death, but they did not want to do this during the Passover for fear this might cause a riot among the people.

15. What happened while Jesus was eating? _____

John gives an account of this same event with some slightly different and additional details.

The Scripture: John 12:1-3

“Six days before the Passover Jesus arrived at Bethany, where Lazarus lived, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. Here a dinner was given in Jesus’ honor. Martha served, while Lazarus was among those reclining at the table with him. Then Mary took a pint of pure nard, an expensive perfume; she poured it on Jesus’ feet.”

16. When does John describes this as happening? _____

17. Who is the woman identified as? _____

18. What is the perfume identified as? _____

Nard (spikenard) was a very expensive perfume from India.

19. On what part of Jesus' body did Mary pour the perfume? _____

The Matthew account says the perfume was poured on Jesus' head.

The Scripture: Matthew 26:8-9

"When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. 'Why this waste?' they asked. 'This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor.'"

20. What was the attitude of the disciples? _____

The book of John gives a slightly different version of this same event.

The Scripture: John 12:4-5

"But one of the disciples, Judas Iscariot, who was later to betray Him, objected, 'Why wasn't this perfume sold and the money given to the poor. It was worth a year's wages.'"

21. Who objected in this version? _____

We should not let these discrepancies bother us. Remember these two accounts were written by two different men. So this tells us that both the head and the feet of Jesus were anointed.

The Scripture: Matthew 26:10-13

"Aware of this, Jesus said to them (the disciples), 'Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to Me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have Me. When she poured this perfume on My body, she did it to prepare Me for burial. I tell you the truth, wherever this gospel is preached throughout the world what she has done will also be told in memory of her.'"

22. What did Jesus say? _____

23. What did He say she was doing when she poured the perfume over His body? _____

24. What did He prophesy? _____

The fact that we are repeating this event is a fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy and emphasizes how He valued her devotion.

The Answers

1. At Martha's home in Bethany
2. Sitting at Jesus' feet
3. Making preparations for the meal.
4. That Mary wasn't helping her
5. To tell Mary to help her
6. He pointed out that while she was worried and upset, Mary had chosen what was better.
7. It would not be taken away from her.
8. Lazarus, the brother of Mary and Martha
9. She fell at His feet weeping
10. If He had been there her brother would not have died
11. He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled.
12. He wept.
13. Jesus told the men to take away the stone, then He called to Lazarus to come out. Lazarus came out still wrapped in the grave clothes and Jesus told the others to free him.
14. In Bethany the home of Simon the Leper
15. A woman came to Jesus with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume which she poured over Jesus' head.
16. After Jesus had raised Lazarus from the dead
17. Mary
18. Pure nard
19. His feet
20. They were indignant, claiming the perfume could have been sold and the money given to the poor
21. Judas Iscariot
22. To not bother Mary
23. Preparing His body for burial
24. That wherever the gospel is preached throughout the world, what Mary did would be told.

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