

Jesus in the Home of Martha and Mary

Luke 10: 38-42

DIG: How do these two sisters differ? Why? What was Martha's motivation for rebuking Mary? Why is Miryam's choice better? What's the point Jesus is making here?

REFLECT: What, to you, are good points and blind spots of both Mary and Martha? Who are you most like? Why? How can you make sure you don't miss **the good part**?

Here we meet two extraordinary women - **Martha and Miryam**. They lived with their brother, Lazarus, in the small village of Bethany. It was just over the Mount of Olives and within easy walking distance **from Yerushalayim, less than two miles** southeast of the Temple's eastern gate. Both **Luke and Yochanan** record that **Yeshua** enjoyed hospitality in **the home** of this family. It seems to have been **His** "home base" when in Judea.

Martha and Mary make a charming pair - very different in many ways, but alike in one critical respect . . . **they** both loved **the Meshiach**. This is a consistent pattern of every woman whom the Bible treats as praiseworthy. They all point to **Jesus**. **He** was the center of heartfelt expectation for every one of the exceptional women in the TaNaKh, and **He** was greatly beloved by all the foremost women in the B'rit Chadashah. **Martha and Miryam** are timeless examples. They became precious personal friends of **the Master** during **His** earthly ministry. What is more, **He** had a profound love for **their** family. The apostle **John**, who knew **Yeshua** very well said that **He loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus (Yochanan 11:5)**.

We have no idea how this specific household became so close to **the Galilean Rabbi**. Since no family relationships are ever mentioned, it seems likely that **Martha and Mary** were merely two of the multitudes of people who heard **Messiah** teach early in **His** ministry, extended **Him** hospitality, and built a relationship with **Him** in that way. But however the relationship started, it obviously developed into a deeply personal fellowship.

Without doubt hospitality was a specific hallmark of this family. **Martha** is especially seen everywhere as a meticulous **hostess**. Here in **his** account **Luke** describes the family residence by saying **Martha opened her home**. That, combined with the fact that **her** name normally appears first when being listed with **her** siblings, strongly implies that **she** was the eldest sister. Lazarus seems to be the youngest of the three because his name appears last in **John 11:5**, and the fact that Lazarus isn't introduced first in any narrative - even including **Yochanan's** description of how he was raised from the dead.

Some think **Martha's** dominant position in the household indicates that **she** was a widow. But that's an argument from silence. All we know is that these three siblings lived together, and there is no mention that any of them had ever been married. Nor is any hint given about how old they were. Scripture gives us three significant accounts of **Messiah's** interaction with this family. First, here in **Luke 10:38-42**. Secondly, we get a close glimpse of the lives of these **two women** in the death of their younger brother Lazarus (see **Ia - The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Resurrection**). And thirdly, when **Mary** anointed the feet of **Jesus** to prepare **Him** for **His** burial (see **Kb - Jesus Anointed at Bethany**).

As **Yeshua** and his **talmidim** were on their way, **He** came to a village where a woman named **Martha** opened her home to **Him** (**Luke 10:38**). **Martha** seemed to be the elder of the **two sisters**. **Luke's** description of **her** behavior is one of the things that support the idea that these three siblings were still young adults.

To **her** great credit, hospitality was very important to **Martha**. **She** fussed over **her** household duties. **She** wanted everything to be just right. **She** was a meticulous and selfless **hostess**, and these were admirable traits. Much of **her** behavior was very commendable.

Miryam, on the other hand, was enthralled with **the Master**. **He** had obviously made **Himself** right at home, enjoying the fellowship and the conversation. No doubt **the Twelve** and other guests were asking **Him** questions, and **He** was giving answers that were thought provoking, authoritative and extremely enlightening. **Martha** had a sister called **Miryam**, who sat at the **Lord's feet**, enthralled, listening to what **He** said (**Luke 10:39**). But **Martha** was distracted by all the preparations that had to be made. Ever the meticulous one, **Martha** went right to work.

Soon, however, **Martha** grew irritable with **Miryam**. It's easy to imagine how **she** got so frustrated. **She** probably tried to drop a few subtle hints at first. Maybe cleared her throat loudly, or exhaled in a huff as if exasperated. Anything to remind **her sister** that **she** needed a little help. When all of that failed, **she** probably started cleaning right where **Mary** was sitting. But nothing worked (no pun intended). In the end, **she** just gave up all pretense of subtlety aired **her grievance** against **her sister** right in front of **Jesus**.¹⁰⁰⁵ **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 (**Luke 10:40**)! **Martha's** complaint sounds immature and girlish. **Messiah's** reply, though containing a mild rebuke, has an almost grandfatherly tone to it.

Martha, Martha, the Lord answered, you are worried and upset about many things, but only one thing is necessary, for Mary has chosen the good part, which shall not be taken away from her (Luke 10:41-42 NASB). **Martha** must have been utterly shocked. It didn't seem to have occurred to **her** that **she** might be the one in the wrong, but the little

scene earned **her** the most gentle of admonitions from **Yeshua**. **Luke's** account ends there, so we're probably safe to conclude that the message penetrated straight to **Martha's** heart and had exactly the sanctifying effect **Christ's** words always have on those who love **Him**. **Three important lessons emerge from Messiah's reprimand of Martha.**

First, we should honor others over ourselves (Romans 12:10; Philippians 2:3-4; First Peter 5:5). At first **Martha's** outward behavior seemed to be true servanthood. But her treatment of **Miryam** soon proved otherwise. **Martha's** words humiliated **her sister** in front of the other guests. **She** either didn't think about it beforehand or just didn't care. Not only that, **she** assumed **Mary** was lazy (Romans 14:4). But in reality, **Miryam** was the one whose heart was in the right place. And Jesus knew it.

Martha's behavior demonstrates how subtly and sinfully human pride can corrupt even the best of our intentions. Waiting on **Yeshua** and **her** other guests was not a bad thing. But the moment **she** stopped listening to **the Lord** and made something else other than **Him** the center of **her** attention, **she** became very self-centered. This made **her** susceptible to several other kinds of sins as well: anger, resentment, jealousy, distrust, unkindness and a critical spirit. All of that flared up in **Martha** in a matter of minutes.

Worst of all, **Martha's** words challenged **Christ Himself: Lord, don't you care?** Did **she** really imagine that **He** didn't **care**? Surely **she** knew better than that. **Messiah's** love for all three members of **her** family was obvious to everyone (John 11:5). But **Martha's** thoughts and feelings had become too focused on **herself**. Once **she** took **her** attention off of **Jesus** and began watching **Mary** with a critical eye, **her** evening was ruined.

Miryam, by contrast, was so preoccupied with thoughts of **Christ** that **she** was completely oblivious to **Martha's** anger. **She** was camped out at **His** feet absorbing every word as if it was the last thing **she** would hear in **her** life. **She** wasn't lazy; **she** merely recognized what was truly important. **The Son of God Himself** was a guest in **her** home. Listening to **Him** and worshiping **Him** at that moment were the very best use of **her** energies and the one right place for **her** to focus **her** attention. In other words, **she** had **her** priorities in order.

If **Martha** had truly preferred **Mary** over **herself**, **she** might have seen in **her sister** a depth of understanding and love for **Messiah** that surpassed even **her** own. **She** could have learned much from **her** more quiet, thoughtful **sister**. *But not right now.* **Martha** had a table to set, a meal to get out of the oven, and **many things she was worried and upset about**. Before **she** knew it, **her** resentment of **Mary** had built up and **she** could no longer restrain **herself**. **Her** public criticism of **Miryam** was an ugly expression of pride.

Second, worship is the highest of all priorities for every believer. Humanly speaking, **Martha's** feelings were natural and somewhat understandable. That may be one reason **Messiah's** rebuke was so mild. Normally, it would have been expected for the younger **sister** to help in serving a meal to guests. Nonetheless, what **Mary** did was still better. **She** had discovered the most important activity: true worship and devotion of one's heart and full attention to the **KING of kings and LORD of lords**. That was a higher priority even than service, and **the good part would not be taken away from her**, even for the sake of something as gracious and beneficial as helping **Martha** prepare a meal for **Yeshua**. **Miryam's** humble, obedient heart was a far greater gift to **Messiah** than **Martha's** well-set table.

This establishes worship as the highest of all priorities for every believer. Nothing, including even serving **the Lord**, is more important than listening to **Him** and worshipping **Him**. Remember what **Yeshua** told the Samaritan woman at the well: **God is seeking true worshipers (John 4:23 NASB)**. **The Anointed One** had found one in **Miryam**. **He** would not affirm **Martha's** reprimand of **her** because it was **Mary**, not **Martha**, who really understood that worship is a higher duty to **God** than works on **His** behalf.

It is a danger, even for people who love **Jesus**, that we not become so concerned with *doing things for Him* that we begin to neglect to *worship Him*. We must never allow our service to **Messiah** to crowd out our relationship with **Him**. The moment our works become more important to us than our worship, we have missed **the good part**.

Martha was a good person, servant, and believer. **She** loved **the Lord** and **her** faith was genuine. But by neglecting the most important thing and busying **herself** with mere external activity, **she** lost **her** spiritual compass. **Martha's** harshness toward **her sister** exposed the degree that **she** had wandered off course. This contamination can happen to any believer. Consequently, we should always be on the lookout for this and guard our hearts.

Third, what we believe is more important than what we do. All of **Martha's** **preparations** became a distraction from **the good part** that was really needed - a dynamic relationship with **Jesus Christ**. Good works always flow from this relationship and are the fruit of it. What we do is important, because it is the evidence that our faith is living and real (**James 2:14-26**). But our relationship with **Yeshua** must come first, and is the only viable foundation for true and lasting works. **Martha** seems to have forgotten these things momentarily. **She** was acting as if **Messiah** needed **her** work for **Him** more than **she** needed **His** work on **her** behalf.

Martha was a noble and godly woman with a servant's heart and a rare capacity for work. **Mary** was nobler still, with a gift for worship and wisdom. Both were remarkable in their own ways. If we weigh **their** gifts together, **they** are wonderful examples for us to follow.¹⁰⁰⁶