

# The Resurrection of Lazarus: The First Sign of Jonah

## John 11: 1-44

**DIG:** How did Mary and Martha feel about Jesus' late arrival? How did Mary and Martha differ in the way they expressed their feelings? Do you think Messiah's words to Martha were reassuring to her? Why or why not? How did Martha communicate her belief to Yeshua? How did Christ respond to Mary, Martha, and the others mourning? Since the Lord knew He was going to raise Lazarus (John 11:11), why did He weep in verse 35? How did Martha's response demonstrate both faith and a lack of faith?

**REFLECT:** Have you ever felt like God was not listening when you prayed? How did you deal with it? How does the way in which Messiah postpone His response to the sister's request help you in understanding your own prayer life? When have you been faced with a tough situation recently that ended up stretching your faith? What would have been different for you if that struggle had simply been avoided? How do the words and actions in this passage comfort you? How has God helped you during a disappointing time?

Jesus had previously said that He would perform no more public miracles to convince Isra'el that He was the Son of God. Now the only sign left to them would be the sign of Jonah (see Eo - The Sign of the Prophet Jonah).

The resurrection has a purpose. The primary purpose was to build the faith of Christ's talmidim because in a short time He was about to die. He was building their faith. His first miracle at the wedding in Cana in Galilee was not in public view, but the purpose of building the disciples' faith in Him before he began His ministry; this miracle is likewise not in public view and was performed to build the faith of His apostles in Him before His impending death and crucifixion on the cross. But the secondary reason was a sign to the nation of Isra'el. This was the sign He promised to give them: **the first sign of Jonah.**

In this context, John described the prelude to the raising of Lazarus. Yeshua had left Jerusalem because His life was in danger there, but it was not time for Him to die. So Jesus went back across the Jordan to Perea, the place where John had been baptizing in the early days. There he stayed. Great crowds of people came out to hear Jesus preach. And in that place many believed in Him (Yochanan 10:40-42). This may have been the most fruitful time of ministry the Twelve had witnessed in all the time since they began to follow the miracle-working Rabbi. People were responsive. Souls were being saved. And Yeshua was able to minister freely without the opposition of the religious rulers of Yerushalayim. But something happened to interrupt their time together in the wilderness.

Now a man named Lazarus was sick. He was from Bethany on the outskirts of Yerushalayim, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. Christ had formed a close and loving relationship with this little family. He loved them with a special affection. He stayed with them and they provided for His needs. John informs us that this Mary, whose brother Lazarus now lay sick, was the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. So the sisters sent word to Jesus, "Lord, the one you love is sick" (John 11:1-3). They knew that if Yeshua came to see Lazarus, He would be able to heal him. This was one day's walk. The Great Physician could have gotten there in plenty of time. However, He delayed going for He had a special purpose.

When he heard this, Jesus said: **This sickness will not end in death. No, it is for God's glory so that God's Son may be glorified through it.** Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that Lazarus was sick, He stayed where He was two more days after the day He had received word that His friend was sick. Then He said to His apostles: **Let us go back to Judea** (Yochanan 11:4-7). So this was a one-day journey that took four days (John 11:17 and 39).

This presented a problem. If Messiah went that close to Tzion, He would be walking into the lion's den of the worst kind of hostility. His Jewish opponents were trying to seize Him (John 10:39). They were already determined to kill Him. Yeshua had eluded their grasp once already, but if He returned to Bethany, which is only two miles from the City of David, they were almost certain to find out, and possibly fulfill their bloodthirsty desire.

The Twelve thought Jesus was crazy. "But Rabbi," they said, "a short while ago the Jews there tried to stone you, and yet you are going back?" Honestly, they didn't want to go back either. The ministry in Perea was phenomenal and in Zion they all risked being stoned. Yeshua's answer was interesting. He gave them an illustration, saying: **Are there not twelve hours of daylight? Anyone who walks in the daytime will not stumble, for they see by this world's light. It is when a person walks at night that they stumble, for they have no light** (Yochanan 11:8-10). In other words, there was no need for Christ to sneak around like a common criminal. He was determined to do His work in the bright light of day, because that's what you do in order not to stumble. The apostate religious leaders were the ones who were walking in darkness and they were the ones in danger of stumbling.

Jesus said that to His talmidim to calm them down. He obviously wasn't going back to die right then. It wasn't His time yet. Besides, He knew the exact time of His death and the death of His friend Lazarus. After Jesus had said this, He went on to tell them: **Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I AM going there to wake him up** (John 11:11).

But Christ's apostles missed His meaning and replied, "Lord, if he sleeps, he will get better" (Yochanan 11:12)." They thought, "If he's only **asleep**, why not let him rest? After all, **Messiah** already said he wasn't going to die." The **Twelve** couldn't see the urgency of the situation. It sounded like he was already on the way to recovery.

Jesus had been speaking of His death, but His apostles thought He meant natural sleep. So then he told them plainly: **Lazarus is dead, and for your sake I AM glad I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him. Consequently, Jesus performed this miracle to support the faith of the apostles in His person and in His power. They would need faith in the face of the opposition of the nation that would soon put Him to death. But, Jesus concluded, let us go to him (John 11:13-15).** Now they understood. The **Master Teacher** had to go back. There would be no talking Him out of it. But it seemed like a suicide mission to them. They were convinced that if **Yeshua** returned to **Bethany**, they would all be killed in short order. Nevertheless, He had made up His mind.

Then Thomas (also known as Didymus) said to the rest of the talmidim, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him" (John 11:16). Some have unfairly criticized Thomas' gloomy outlook. But he merely acknowledged the truth of the situation. The Pharisees wanted little more than to see **Jesus** dead, and they were willing to do *anything* to kill Him. But **Thomas** grimly stood beside the **Lord** in the face of what appeared to be certain death.

*For the most part, losses are not an enjoyable part of life. And losing friends is particularly sad. God's presence in our lives ought to cast a slightly different light on the loss - especially those that are caused by death. Why? Because death does not limit God's power. If we can trust Him to bring good out of even matters of life and death, can we not learn to trust Him in smaller losses? Think of a time in your life when a bad experience turned into good? How did that affect you?<sup>1141</sup>*

On his arrival, Jesus found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb for four days. The rabbis taught that the spirit hovered over the body for three days and during that time there was always the possibility of resuscitation. But at the end of the third day, the spirit descended down to Sh'ol. At that point the rabbis taught that there was no hope of resurrection.<sup>1142</sup> So by delaying His arrival for four days, no one would be able to claim his spirit was merely the spirit hovering over the body.

Now Bethany was less than two miles from Jerusalem, and many Jews had come to Martha and Mary to comfort them in the loss of their brother. When Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she ran out to meet Him, but Miryam continued sitting [shiv'ah] in the house (Yochanan 11:17-20).

The word **shiv'ah** means *seven* and the phrase **sitting [shiv'ah]** refers to the Jewish custom of **sitting** in mourning for *seven* days following the death of a deceased parent, spouse, sibling or child. The *Greek* here says only **sitting**, which is the usual word if all that is meant is that **Mary** stayed in the house when **Martha** went out. In his Jewish New Testament Commentary, David Stern comments, "Because it is so clear from the context that **Miryam** was mourning **her brother** I have added **shiv'ah** in the text to show that **her sitting** was in fact specifically mourning and not pouting or sulking. The Jewish mourner sits barefoot on the floor or on a low stool in the home of the deceased or near relative and abstains from all ordinary work and diversions and even from required synagogue prayers, while friends visit him or her for comfort and prayer. Both sisters observed the practice, which was not significantly different then and now; but **Martha**, who evidently had digested **Yeshua's** earlier counsel (see **Gx - Jesus in the Home of Martha and Mary**), was now the one willing to set custom aside and leave **the house and she ran out to meet Him**.<sup>1143</sup>

**Mary and Martha** responded to the **death of their brother** with the same kind of disillusionment and anger any one of us would. "Lord," **Martha** said to **Jesus**, "if you had been here, my brother would not have died." Basically, she scolds **Christ** for not coming when **He** was first called. "But I know that even now **God will give you whatever you ask**" (**John 11:21**). She did not recognize **His** power over **death** and **He** basically had to *coax* a confession of faith out of **Martha**. And even *that* was pretty shaky (**John 11:39b**). Yet **Messiah** dealt tenderly with **her**, offering no rebuke and expressing no disappointment. And on **her** part, **His** delay and apparent decision not to act didn't lessen **her** confidence in **Him**.

**Jesus** reassured **Martha** with a statement having a double meaning, saying to her: **Your brother will rise again**. **Martha** answered, "I know he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day" (**Yochanan 11:22-24**). **Martha** did not immediately understand that **Christ** would raise **Lazarus** from the **dead**. She assumed that **Jesus** is talking about the last resurrection of the faithful (see my commentary on **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**), that is, the **Meshiach** would raise the **dead** when **He** came to set up **His** messianic Kingdom at the end of the age. Yet, she did not understand the **Lord's** full meaning. She would before sunset.

**Christ** clarified the teaching for **her**, by declaring: **I AM the resurrection and the life**. This is the fifth of **Jesus' seven I AM's** (**John 6:35, 8:12, 10:7, 10:11, 14:6, 15:1**). Hope was not to be found in a program, but rather in a person; **resurrection and life** were in **Him!** **He** further instructed **Martha** by saying: **The one who believes in Me will live, even though they die; and whoever lives by believing in Me will never die** (**John 11:25-26a**). The one who believes in **Messiah** receives **His** eternal life as a present possession. The one who possesses eternal life can never die (see **Ms - The Eternal Security of the Believer**). Physical death cannot interrupt the continuation of eternal life. The one who possesses

eternal life may experience the separation of the soul from the body, but will never experience the separation of the soul from **God**.

Therefore, the **good Shepherd** was speaking words of comfort to **Martha**, whose **brother** had **died** physically. Because **Lazarus** had believed in **Christ**, he was not **dead** but alive, for he had eternal life. This was true even though he might enjoy that life in another sphere. **Jesus** had directed **Martha's** faith to **Himself**, and now **He** asked: **Do you believe this?** "Yes, Lord," she replied, "I believe that you are the **Messiah, the Son of God, who is to come into the world**" (John 11:26b-27). Her declaration was almost identical to that of **Peter** (see Fx - **On The Rock I Will Build My Church**). She confessed her faith in His person, calling Him the **Son of God**, and confessed faith in His work, referring to Him as **Messiah** who was to redeem and reign. **Martha's** fears were now at rest because of her faith in **Jesus**.<sup>1144</sup>

After she had said this, she went back and called her sister **Mary** aside. The Rabbi is here, she said, and is asking for you. When **Miryam** heard this, she got up quickly and went to Him (Yochanan 11:28-29). **Yeshua** evidently wanted a private conversation with **Mary**. This may be the reason that **Jesus** remained outside the village for a while.

Now the **Supreme Commander of Life and Death** had not yet entered the village, but was still at the place where **Martha** had met Him. When the **Jews** who had been with **Miryam** in the house, comforting her, noticed how quickly she got up and went out, they followed her, supposing she was going to the tomb to mourn there (John 11:30-31).

The sound of footsteps interrupted **Jesus'** thoughts. **Miryam** and a group of mourners were heading toward Him. From a distance **Christ** could probably see **Mary's** dark and swollen eyes. More than likely, her cheeks were covered with muddy streaks from her tears. Without hesitating, **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. Her remarks reflected those of her sister, but apparently **Miryam** was not gripped by the same fears that held **Martha**. It was not necessary for **Christ** to instruct her in order to lift her burden. Her body shook with anger and grief. When **Jesus** saw her weeping, and the **Jews** who had come along with her also weeping, He was deeply moved in spirit and troubled. Seeing **Mary's** sorrow and tears, the **good Shepherd** also trembled with emotion. He asked: **Where have you laid him?** "Come and see, Lord," they replied (John 11:32-34).

**Jesus wept** (John 11:35). The shortest verse in the Bible is also one of the most telling. As **Miryam** walked away, **Jesus** knew **Lazarus'** resurrection was only moments away. But that didn't eliminate His pain and sorrow. And it is the same for you and I. He understood that while the knowledge of **Lazarus'** resurrection could bring comfort, it didn't eliminate His

sorrow any more than it will eliminate your anguish. He understands. You are not alone in your pain and sorrow. The same **Messiah** who **wept** with **Mary** then, **weeps** with you today.

As was and is the case, these **Jews** failed to enter the mind of **Christ**. Then the **Jews** said, "See how He loved him!" They mistook His tears as no more than a sign of His love. But some of them said, "Could not He who opened the eyes of the blind man have kept this man from dying" (Yochanan 11:36-37)? These words were not spoken in mockery. They were sincere, but they mistook **Yeshua's** tears for frustration.<sup>1145</sup>

**Jesus**, once more deeply moved, came to the tomb. It was a cave with a stone laid across the entrance. In an act forbidden by rabbinic tradition, He said: **Take away the stone** from the entrance. The men who acted upon His command risked ritual defilement; nevertheless, they obeyed. But it was **Martha**, not **Mary**, who once again objected and sought to prevent the opening of the tomb. "But, Lord," said **Martha**, the sister of the dead man, "by this time there is a bad odor, for he has been there four days." Then **Yeshua** had to remind her of what He had told her just shortly before: **Did I not tell you that if you believe, you will see the glory of God** (John 11:38-40)?

So they took away the stone. Then **Jesus** looked up. **Yeshua** prayed with his eyes open, as Jewish people do today. Christians usually pray with eyes closed. The reason most often given is in order to screen out visual distractions and concentrate on **God**. Which to do so is a matter of individual choice. The Bible does not require either.<sup>1146</sup> **This prayer was designed to show His talmidim and the other people present that all He did was in complete dependence of His Father. And He said: Father, I thank You that you have heard Me. I knew that you always hear Me, but I said this for the benefit of the people standing here, that they may believe that You sent Me** (John 11:41-42).

When he had said this, the **Great Physician** called in a loud voice so His apostles could hear: **Lazarus, come out!** It's a good thing **Jesus** called **Lazarus** by name. If He would have just said: **come out**, the resurrection of the righteous of the **TaNakh** might have happened a little early (see my commentary on **Revelation Fd - The Resurrection of the Righteous of the TaNaKh**). In the New Covenant, when a voice speaks in regards to the resurrection it is always the voice of the **Meshiach**. The dead man came out, his hands and feet wrapped with strips of linen, and a cloth around his face (John 11:43-44a).

**Lazarus** emerged from the tomb still wrapped in the spice-soaked linen strips of cloth, perhaps even struggling to move. Corpses were typically encased in 75 to 100 pounds of perfumed resins (John 19:39-40). It must have been a strange sight indeed. The witnesses to the miracle had to help **Lazarus** out of the burial wrappings. **Jesus** said to them: **Take**

off the grave clothes and let him go (Yochanan 11:44b). Lazarus did not **come** by his own power, but by the power of the **One** who had commanded him to **come out**.

**Jesus** had also raised a widow's son (see **Eb - Jesus Raises a Widow's Son**), and Jairus' daughter (see **Fh - Jesus Raises a Dead Girl and Heals a Sick Woman**), from **the dead**. The TaNaKh also reports that Elijah and Elisha had raised people from **the dead** (**First Kings 17:17-24; Second Kings 4:17-37**). The incident is reported in such a way that no one could miss its significance. **Christ** had physically brought back to life a four-days-old dead, cold, stinking corpse. This miracle crowns **Yeshua's** career prior to **His** own death and resurrection. This is the last of **Jesus'** seven miracles in **John's** book (**Yochanan 2:1-11; 4:43-54; 5:1-15; 6:1-15; 6:16-24; 9:1-34**).

Isra'el was to receive no more signs but **the sign of Jonah**, which was **the sign of resurrection** (see my commentary on **Jonah**). This **sign** would occur **three different times**. The **first sign of Jonah** was the resurrection of **Lazarus (Ia)**, which was rejected when the Sanhedrin plotted to kill **Jesus (Ib)**. The **second sign of Jonah** was the resurrection of **Messiah (Mc)**, which was rejected when the Sanhedrin rejected the truth of the Gospel and stoned Stephen in **Acts 7:1-60**. The **third sign of Jonah** will be the resurrection of the Two Witnesses (see my commentary on **Revelation Dm - The Resurrection of the Two Witnesses**), which will be accepted and all of Isra'el will be saved (see my commentary on **Revelation Ev - The Basis for the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**).

In 1915 Pastor William Barton started to publish a series articles. Using the archaic language of an ancient storyteller, he wrote his parables under the pen name of Safed the Sage. And for the next fifteen years he shared the wisdom of Safed and his enduring spouse Keturah. It was a genre he enjoyed. By the early 1920s, Safed was said to have a following of at least three million. Turning an ordinary event into an illustration of a spiritual truth was always a keynote of Barton's ministry.

The daughter of the daughter of Keturah came unto our habitation, and she sought the Cookie Jar of Keturah. And thus did Keturah's own children in their day. And thus have I done often. Save that I never eat one Cookie. I can eat none and I can eat four or five, but I cannot eat one of the Cookies of Keturah and stop. And the little maiden ate of the Cookies of Keturah. And I think that there will always be Cookies in her Cookie Jar.

Now as the damsel ate, she cried out in terror.

And I wondered what had happened unto her, for that is not the way the Cookies of Keturah affect people. And she cried not in pain, but in terror. And she said, Oh, Grandpa, my tooth has come out. And she held up a tiny front tooth in her little hand.

Now the loss of a Tooth is a matter of some importance to me; for I fear lest the time come when the grinders cease because they are few. But I knew that for her it was not a serious matter.

And I comforted her, and I said, Fear not. It is of no consequence.

And she said, Oh, Grandpa, canst thou put it back?

And I told her that I could not, and that I would not if I could.

And she understood it not, but she was comforted when she saw that I did not share her fear.

And I said, Have no fear, my little girl. The teeth that **God** gave to thee when teeth first came unto thee, were baby teeth, and they will leave thee one by one, and fall out. Trouble not thyself, for there shall grow others in their place that will be stronger and better and last longer.

And she was comforted.

Then I considered the losses of life, and the pain and the fear of them, and how they are even as the fear that was in the heart of the little maiden when she lost the Tooth. Yea, I went where people suffered by reason of losses that I could not explain so easily, and my words of comfort had behind them no knowledge of what blessing **God** should provide instead of the thing that had been taken away.

But I remembered that it is written in the Word of **God** how **God** hath provided Some Better Thing.

And I took the little pearly tooth from the hand of the little maiden, and she sat upon my knee and ate the residue of her Cookie, and I stroked her Golden Hair, and I prayed unto **God** for all those who have losses in life and who know not how **God** shall provide any better thing in place of them.

For their sorrow is like unto the sorrow of the daughter of the daughter of Keturah, and there are times when my wisdom stoppeth short of their need.<sup>1147</sup>