



Week 1: LIE: God uses shame to correct me and change me.

#2: GOD IS NOT CONCERNED WITH MY EVERYDAY LIFE, ONLY THE THINGS I DO FOR HIM.

[A study of Mary and Martha and Lazarus? Jesus living his everyday life and the relationships. Tie in his love for Peter.]

Concept #1: God is too big to be concerned with the small things.

Concept #2: God is too busy to be concerned with the everyday.

Concept #3: God is only concerned with what I do FOR Him.

God is too strong to be concerned with the weak. To rich to be concerned with the needy.

The more power one has, the less significant the simple becomes. **T/F**

The mighty forget the weak. **T/F**

The big eliminate the small. **T/F**

Is this in the Character of God?

1 Corinthians 1:26-28

For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. ²⁷ But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; ²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,

Judges 6:14-16 - Gideon

¹⁴ And the Lord turned to him and said, "Go in this might of yours and save Israel from the hand of Midian; do not I send you?" ¹⁵ And he said to him, "Please, Lord, how can I save Israel? Behold, my clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my father's house." ¹⁶ And the Lord said to him, "But I will be with you, and you shall strike the Midianites as one man."

He knows we need Him...it is designed to work this way...us **NEEDING** Him.

John 15:4

*⁴ Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch **cannot bear fruit by itself**, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.*

He has already proven He would pay the ultimate price for the small, the weak, those in need.

Romans 5:7-9

⁷ For one will scarcely die for a righteous person—though perhaps for a good person one would dare even to die— ⁸ but God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. ⁹ Since, therefore, we have now been justified by his blood, much more shall we be saved by him from the wrath of God.

"God's "bigness" isn't the kind of bigness that overlooks smallness. Rather it is a bigness that encompasses smallness."

Wolgemuth, R. D., & Morley, P. (2018). *Lies men believe: and the truth that sets them free*. Moody Publishers.

Does this smell of Gnosticism?



Summer of Lies

Week 2: God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.

Physical World is Bad...Not worth the investment.

Gnosis = Knowledge

The physical/material world is not of value.

Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, early Christian writings against Gnosticism were our main source of information about gnostic belief. The overall picture of Gnosticism provided by these polemical texts has been largely confirmed by the gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi.

Smith, Z. G. (2016). [Gnosticism](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

Many strands of belief.

Prominent facets:

- Gnostic texts often describe God as incomprehensible, unknowable, and transcendent.
- God cannot be observed with our senses nor easily grasped with our understanding.
- “God is superior to deity.” Known as “Ultimate Ground of Being”. Who resides in the divine realm.
- World created by a lesser deity as it is all material.
- humans are split between the physical and spiritual world: “the true human self is as alien to the world as is the transcendent God” (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 13).
- Assert that the true human self or soul is naturally divine, belonging to the same realm as the Ultimate Ground of Being, but is trapped and imprisoned by the material world.
- Physical body is a prison.
- Gnostics believed that *gnosis* frees the divine spark within humans, allowing it to return to the divine realm of light (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 13).
- Salvation is thus initially brought about by *gnosis*, but ultimately constitutes a return of the human soul to the divine realm in which it belongs.

GNOSIS = REVEALED KNOWLEDGE. KNOWLEDGE IS GOD

Simon Magus: A sorcerer found in Samaria by Phillip, worked wonders among the people before Phillip converted him to Christianity (Acts 8:13).

Hymenaeus and Philetus (1 Tim 1:20; 6:20)

The Nicolaitans (Acts 6:5; Revelation 2:6, 15, 18–29)

Smith, Z. G. (2016). [Gnosticism](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

Concept #2: God is too busy to be concerned with the everyday.

Concept #1: God is too big to be concerned with the small things.



Concept #3: God is only concerned with what I do FOR Him.

A. The Wedding at Cana

John 2:1-11

2 On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee, and the mother of Jesus was there. 2 Jesus also was invited to the wedding with his disciples. 3 When the wine ran out, the mother of Jesus said to him, "They have no wine." 4 And Jesus said to her, "Woman, what does this have to do with me? My hour has not yet come." 5 His mother said to the servants, "Do whatever he tells you."

6 Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. 7 Jesus said to the servants, "Fill the jars with water." And they filled them up to the brim. 8 And he said to them, "Now draw some out and take it to the master of the feast." So they took it. 9 When the master of the feast tasted the water now become wine, and did not know where it came from (though the servants who had drawn the water knew), the master of the feast called the bridegroom 10 and said to him, "Everyone serves the good wine first, and when people have drunk freely, then the poor wine. But you have kept the good wine until now." 11 This, the first of his signs, Jesus did at Cana in Galilee, and manifested his glory. And his disciples believed in him.

- Only John's Gospel tells this one
- John picks only 7 miracles of Christ to list.
- Because they pointed to Jesus' Divinity and His unique Mission: Jesus has the power to Transform

NOTE:

Three days prior, Jesus was baptized by John AND identified by the Holy Spirit as the Son of God.

John 1:29-34 *The next day he saw Jesus coming toward him, and said, "Behold, the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world!" 30 This is he of whom I said, 'After me comes a man who ranks before me, because he was before me.' 31 I myself did not know him, but for this purpose I came baptizing with water, that he might be revealed to Israel." 32 And John bore witness: "I saw the Spirit descend from heaven like a dove, and it remained on him. 33 I myself did not know him, but he who sent me to baptize with water said to me, 'He on whom you see the Spirit descend and remain, this is he who baptizes with the Holy Spirit.' 34 And I have seen and have borne witness that this is the Son of God."*

Four of His soon to be named disciples were with Him: Andrew, Peter, Philip, Nathaniel (possibly John?)

The Wedding:

- Two stage celebration: Stage 1 is the betrothal: Sign the binding agreement between the two families. The couple are considered husband and wife.
- A year later, Stage 2: The Ceremony and celebration
- The Groom goes and gets his bride to bring her to her new home
- The entire community attends
- Could be a week long
- Requires a Master of Ceremonies – a Governor if you will

The Wine: [AN EVERYDAY ITEM]

- Wine was normally diluted with water. 3H2O/1Wine or even 7H2O/1Wine



Summer of Lies

Week 2: God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.

- Undilute wine = strong drink
- Running out of wine =
- The ask by Mary...how panicked was she?
- Did she know she was asking for a miracle? [What had she privately seen of Jesus' Messiahship?]

Jesus' Reply: was putting things in proper perspective.

He knew His mother wanted Him to use His supernatural ability to fix the problem, which He knew would reveal something about His amazing identity.

But was it time for that?

- "My **hour** has not yet come"
In the New Testament, Jesus' "hour" most often refers to his crucifixion Mt.26:45/Jn7:30
What Jesus may have been saying was, "Once I act and reveal who I am, my course is fixed, and I have set out for the cross."
- Mary: "to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.'"

Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons" (vv. 5–6).

- Foot washing water?
- This was more than 100 gallons of water.
- What did the servants think of Jesus' instructions?
- They did what He asked.

Results:

- Jesus did act. This first miracle marked him: it revealed his glory and **led his disciples to believe in him.**
- **He protected the host from a legacy of rejection attached to their family name.**
- He went so far as to make it GREAT wine.
- Mary's faith was shown to the Disciples that were with Him.
- The servants seen what intense faith looked like through Mary's confidence:
Mary's words remind them of O.T. Saints who did not take NO for an answer:
Gen 32:26-30 – Jacob wrestling...I will not let you go until you bless me.
1 Kings 18:36-37 – Elijah calling down fire consume the offering to show God's power over all. Esp. Baal.
2 Kings 4:14-28 – Elisha tells the Shunamite woman she will have a son
- Jesus owns The power to Transform

Doug Newton. (2018). [*Fresh eyes on Jesus' miracles: discovering new insights in familiar passages.*](#) Colorado Springs, CO: David C Cook.

Jesus INTENTIONALLY revealed His glory Jesus is concerned with the every day-ness of our lives.

B. Hang Time

John 2:12 *After this he went down to Capernaum, with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, and they stayed there for a few days.*

Jesus was a son and a brother. He lived both.



Concept #3: God is only concerned with what I do FOR Him.

Concept #1: God is too big to be concerned with the small things.

Concept #2: God is too busy to be concerned with the everyday.

Mary, Martha, Lazarus

Some scholars believe that Lazarus may have been the young man whom Jesus told to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, and he could not (**Matt. 19:16-22**).

16 And behold, a man came up to him, saying, "Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?" 17 And he said to him, "Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments." 18 He said to him, "Which ones?" And Jesus said, "You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, 19 Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself." 20 The young man said to him, "All these I have kept. What do I still lack?" 21 Jesus said to him, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me." 22 When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 256–257). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

**Can this mindset exist once we understand the process of Salvation?
Is this a baby born from the idea we need to earn our Salvation?**

"They were among Jesus' most intimate friends."

[Lazarus](#). (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

Luke 10:38-42

38 Now as they went on their way, Jesus entered a village. And a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. 39 And she had a sister called Mary, who sat at the Lord's feet and listened to his teaching. 40 But Martha was distracted with much serving. And she went up to him and said, "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to serve alone? Tell her then to help me." 41 But the Lord answered her, "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things, 42 but one thing is necessary. Mary has chosen the good portion, which will not be taken away from her."

- Martha's outburst...could she have this in front of the Teacher if there wasn't an everyday relationship in existence already?
- She definitely believed she needed "To Do" something for Jesus' love...to SHOW her love?
- Mary did not believe that...so against her cultural role!
- Scripture outright states the Jesus loved this family
John 11:5 **Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus**
- John 11:34, 38 – Jesus deeply moved and greatly troubled over their grief.
- John 11:35 – Jesus wept – He knew he was going to be raising Lazarus...why did He weep?

- After Lazarus' resurrection, they got together for dinner. **Jn 12:1-3:**

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. 2 So they gave a dinner for him there. Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. 3 Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.



- Judas protested and Jesus responded: **Jn 12:7-8**

⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."

- Jesus did 'let' Lazarus die. **An act of trust knowing this family could handle this?**
So he could be raised from the dead as a foreshadow of Christ's resurrection.
- Do I "like" the idea of :

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because it removes this Mary, Martha, Lazarus responsibility from my life?

Jesus let Lazarus die...An act of intimate trust with Mary and Martha and Lazarus...so Lazarus could be raised from the dead as a witness to the upcoming Resurrection of Christ. **Do I trust Jesus' plan for my life?**

John 11:1-45

The Death of Lazarus

11 Now a certain man was ill, Lazarus of Bethany, the village of Mary and her sister Martha. ² It was Mary who anointed the Lord with ointment and wiped his feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was ill. ³ So the sisters sent to him, saying, "Lord, he whom you love is ill." ⁴ But when Jesus heard it he said, "This illness does not lead to death. It is for the glory of God, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it."

⁵ Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. ⁶ So, when he heard that Lazarus was ill, he stayed two days longer in the place where he was. ⁷ Then after this he said to the disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." ⁸ The disciples said to him, "Rabbi, the Jews were just now seeking to stone you, and are you going there again?" ⁹ Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. ¹⁰ But if anyone walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." ¹¹ After saying these things, he said to them, "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep, but I go to awaken him." ¹² The disciples said to him, "Lord, if he has fallen asleep, he will recover." ¹³ Now Jesus had spoken of his death, but they thought that he meant taking rest in sleep. ¹⁴ Then Jesus told them plainly, "Lazarus has died, ¹⁵ and for your sake I am glad that I was not there, so that you may believe. But let us go to him." ¹⁶ So Thomas, called the Twin said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with him."

I Am the Resurrection and the Life

¹⁷ Now when Jesus came, he found that Lazarus had already been in the tomb four days. ¹⁸ Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles off, ¹⁹ and many of the Jews had come to Martha and Mary to console them concerning their brother. ²⁰ So when Martha heard that Jesus was coming, she went and met him, but Mary remained seated in the house. ²¹ Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died. ²² But even now I know that whatever you ask from God, God will give you." ²³ Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." ²⁴ Martha said to him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection on the last day." ²⁵ Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, ²⁶ and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die. Do you believe this?" ²⁷ She said to him, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world."

Jesus Weeps

²⁸ When she had said this, she went and called her sister Mary, saying in private, "The Teacher is here and is calling for you." ²⁹ And when she heard it, she rose quickly and went to him. ³⁰ Now Jesus had not



yet come into the village, but was still in the place where Martha had met him. ³¹ When the Jews who were with her in the house, consoling her, saw Mary rise quickly and go out, they followed her, supposing that she was going to the tomb to weep there. ³² Now when Mary came to where Jesus was and saw him, she fell at his feet, saying to him, "Lord, if you had been here, my brother would not have died." ³³ When Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who had come with her also weeping, **he was deeply moved in his spirit and greatly troubled.** ³⁴ And he said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to him, "Lord, come and see." ³⁵ **Jesus wept.** ³⁶ So the Jews said, "See how he loved him!" ³⁷ But some of them said, "Could not he who opened the eyes of the blind man also have kept this man from dying?"

Jesus Raises Lazarus

³⁸ Then Jesus, **deeply moved again**, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. ³⁹ Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of the dead man, said to him, "Lord, by this time there will be an odor, for he has been dead four days." ⁴⁰ Jesus said to her, "Did I not tell you that if you believed you would see the glory of God?" ⁴¹ So they took away the stone. And Jesus lifted up his eyes and said, "Father, I thank you that you have heard me. ⁴² I knew that you always hear me, but I said this on account of the people standing around, that they may believe that you sent me." ⁴³ When he had said these things, he cried out with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out." ⁴⁴ The man who had died came out, his hands and feet bound with linen strips, and his face wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Unbind him, and let him go."

The Plot to Kill Jesus

⁴⁵ **Many of the Jews therefore, who had come with Mary and had seen what he did, believed in him,**

⁴⁶ but some of them went to the Pharisees and told them what Jesus had done. ⁴⁷ So the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered the council and said, "What are we to do? For this man performs many signs. ⁴⁸ If we let him go on like this, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and our nation." ⁴⁹ But one of them, Caiaphas, who was high priest that year, said to them, "You know nothing at all. ⁵⁰ Nor do you understand that it is better for you that one man should die for the people, not that the whole nation should perish." ⁵¹ He did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus would die for the nation, ⁵² and not for the nation only, but also to gather into one the children of God who are scattered abroad. ⁵³ So from that day on they made plans to put him to death.

⁵⁴ Jesus therefore no longer walked openly among the Jews, but went from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim, and there he stayed with the disciples.

⁵⁵ Now the Passover of the Jews was at hand, and many went up from the country to Jerusalem before the Passover to purify themselves. ⁵⁶ They were looking for ^f Jesus and saying to one another as they stood in the temple, "What do you think? That he will not come to the feast at all?" ⁵⁷ Now the chief priests and the Pharisees had given orders that if anyone knew where he was, he should let them know, so that they might arrest him.

John 12:1-11

12 Six days before the Passover, Jesus therefore came to Bethany, where Lazarus was, whom Jesus had raised from the dead. **2 So they gave a dinner for him there.** Martha served, and Lazarus was one of those reclining with him at table. **3** Mary therefore took a pound of expensive ointment made from pure nard, and anointed the feet of Jesus and wiped his feet with her hair. The house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume.

⁴ But Judas Iscariot, one of his disciples (he who was about to betray him), said, ⁵ "Why was this ointment not sold for three hundred denarii and given to the poor?" ⁶ He said this, not because he cared about the poor, but because he was a thief, and having charge of the moneybag he used to help himself to what was put into it.

⁷ Jesus said, "Leave her alone, so that she may keep it for the day of my burial. ⁸ For the poor you always have with you, but you do not always have me."



The Plot to Kill Lazarus

⁹ When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was there, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. ¹⁰ So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, ¹¹ because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.

i.e. Peter

Jesus' handling of shame: Peter

Matthew 26:30-35, 69-75

³⁰ And when they had sung a hymn, they went out to the Mount of Olives. ³¹ Then Jesus said to them, "You will all fall away because of me this night. For it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'" ³² But after I am raised up, I will go before you to Galilee." ³³ Peter answered him, "Though they all fall away because of you, I will never fall away." ³⁴ Jesus said to him, "Truly, I tell you, this very night, before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." ³⁵ Peter said to him, "Even if I must die with you, I will not deny you!" And all the disciples said the same.

⁶⁹ Now Peter was sitting outside in the courtyard. And a servant girl came up to him and said, "You also were with Jesus the Galilean." ⁷⁰ But he denied it before them all, saying, "I do not know what you mean." ⁷¹ And when he went out to the entrance, another servant girl saw him, and she said to the bystanders, "This man was with Jesus of Nazareth." ⁷² And again he denied it with an oath: "I do not know the man." ⁷³ After a little while the bystanders came up and said to Peter, "Certainly you too are one of them, for your accent betrays you." ⁷⁴ Then he began to invoke a curse on himself and to swear, "I do not know the man." And immediately the rooster crowed. ⁷⁵ And Peter remembered the saying of Jesus, "Before the rooster crows, you will deny me three times." And he went out and wept bitterly.

Mark 16:1-8

When the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, so that they might go and anoint him. ² And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb. ³ And they were saying to one another, "Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?" ⁴ And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large. ⁵ And entering the tomb, they saw a young man sitting on the right side, dressed in a white robe, and they were alarmed. ⁶ And he said to them, "Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He has risen; he is not here. See the place where they laid him. ⁷ But go, tell his disciples and Peter that he is going before you to Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you." ⁸ And they went out and fled from the tomb, for trembling and astonishment had seized them, and they said nothing to anyone, for they were afraid.

John 21:15-19

¹⁵ When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon, son of John, do you love me more than these?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Feed my lambs." ¹⁶ He said to him a second time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" He said to him, "Yes, Lord; you know that I love you." He said to him, "Tend my sheep." ¹⁷ He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep. ¹⁸ Truly, truly, I say to you, when you were young, you used to dress yourself and walk wherever you wanted, but when you are old, you will stretch out your hands, and another will dress you and carry you where you do not want to go." ¹⁹ (This he said to show by what kind of death he was to glorify God.) And after saying this he said to him, "Follow me."



Summer of Lies

Week 2: God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.

NOTES:

MARY AND MARTHA OF BETHANY

Scripture references: *Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–45; 12:1–8* See also pages 158–59.

Date:

A.D. 30

Name:

Mary [MAIR-ee: “loved by Yahweh”]

Martha [MAHR-thuh: “lady”]

Main

contribution:

These two sisters were friends of Jesus. Jesus rewarded their trust when He raised their brother Lazarus from death.

MARY AND MARTHA’S ROLE IN SCRIPTURE

The **two unmarried sisters** lived with their brother Lazarus in Bethany, a small town just two miles east of Jerusalem. Jesus and His disciples often stayed with them when they came to the religious festivals held in Jerusalem. While the two sisters had distinctly different personalities, they were usually together when mentioned in Scripture.

How did they differ? Martha held firmly to traditional values. She saw her place as being in the kitchen. **Mary was more “liberated,” comfortable in the role of a disciple and eager to learn all she could at Jesus’ feet. Because Mary was willing to break the traditional mold, we know more about her than we do her sister.**

Both Mary and Martha were women of faith. When their brother fell sick the sisters immediately sent a messenger to Jesus, completely confident that Jesus could heal him. Each expressed her faith when Jesus finally showed up, some four days after Lazarus had died and been buried. While sure that Jesus was Lord of life and would raise their brother in the final resurrection, neither imagined that Jesus could exercise His power that day to restore their brother’s earthly life.

EXPLORING MARTHA’S RELATIONSHIPS

Martha’s relationship with Mary (Luke 10:38–42). Mary and Martha were unmarried sisters, living in the home their brother Lazarus had possibly inherited from their father. The two women were close but different. Martha took the duties assigned to her gender seriously. She took pride in caring for the home and preparing meals. Mary, far more of a free spirit, irritated Martha at times. We can assume that Martha was older for she took the lead in welcoming Jesus on one of the occasions on which He visited them. That day her irritation with Mary exploded into exasperation. As she worked in the kitchen to prepare a meal, Mary settled at Jesus’ feet to listen to His dialog with the disciples. It was hot in the kitchen, and Martha was harried as she struggled to do everything herself. Finally she burst into the room where Jesus was seated, and querulously demanded that He send Mary to the kitchen to help her.

Jesus refused, gently telling Martha that Mary “has chosen that good part” (Luke 10:42). Food for the body was important, but food for the soul was more important. Martha’s worry over preparing a special meal showed that her priorities were misplaced. It was not wrong to be committed to fulfilling the role society assigned to women, but it was wrong to place so much emphasis on fulfilling that role that Martha had no time for her own personal growth in faith.

Martha stands for all of the too-busy individuals of today who expend their energy doing good things and have no time to deepen their relationship with God.



Summer of Lies

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Martha's relationship with Jesus (John 11). While Martha may have been too concerned with performing tasks, Martha did not lack faith. John notes that "Jesus loved Martha and her sister" (John 11:5)—not only naming Martha but identifying her first and by name as an object of His love.

When Lazarus died and Martha learned that Jesus was coming, she hurried to meet Him, while Mary stayed in the house. Martha expressed great faith in Christ, saying that "even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You" (11:22). While Martha did not think that Jesus was about to restore her brother's life, she was certain that whatever He asked, God would surely do.

It is helpful to compare the two sisters' responses in John 11 when Jesus finally came.

When we compare the dialogue, the bulk of Jesus' recorded conversation was with Martha rather than Mary. We also see that while both expressed faith in Jesus, Martha's expressed faith went beyond that of her sister in affirming that Jesus could act "even now" (John 11:22).



Martha

Mary

20 Then Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him.

20 Mary was sitting in the house

21 Then Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.

29 [Mary] arose quickly and came to Him ...

22 But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give you."

32 She fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

23 Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again."

33 When Jesus saw her weeping ... He groaned in the spirit and was troubled.

24 Martha said to Him, "I know that He will rise again in the resurrection at the last day."

25 Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life ... Do you believe this?"

27 She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world."

28 And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The Teacher has come and is calling for you."

39 Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days."

40 Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?"



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At the same time Martha was not fully aware of what she had affirmed. When Jesus called for the stone that blocked the entrance to Lazarus's tomb to be taken away, Martha objected. She reminded Jesus that her brother's body had started to decay.

How like Martha most of us are. We have faith in Jesus—even great faith. Yet when we are called on to exercise that faith in impossible situations, we focus on the obstacles rather than on God's unlimited ability to act.

Martha and Mary had faith enough, and Jesus had power enough; Lazarus *was* restored. What makes all the difference is not the amount of faith we have in Jesus, but the fact that our faith is *in Jesus*.

EXPLORING MARY'S RELATIONSHIPS

Mary's relationship with Martha (Luke 10:38–42). Mary's attitude toward women's traditional roles, and especially Mary's view of "women's work," differed from that of her sister. This inevitably caused friction between the two women.

Mary and her sister lived together comfortably **in their brother's house(Where does it state this? Was it his house or their house or Martha's house?)**, even though the younger Mary refused to let her older sister press her into Martha's mold. Undoubtedly Mary helped around the house but not when Jesus visited. Then there was something more important for her to do.

Mary's relationship with Jesus (Luke 10:38–42; John 11:1–45; John 12:1–8). While John 11 highlights Martha's relationship with Jesus, both Luke 10 and John 12 highlight Mary's relationship with Him.

Luke reports Jesus' commendation of Mary for choosing "what is better" (Luke 10:42 ΝΙΥ) by giving priority to listening to Him rather than being preoccupied with preparing a meal. John 12 portrays Mary's special love for and sensitivity to Jesus.

The occasion was a meal in their home. The text says that while Lazarus was seated at the table with Jesus, "Martha served" (12:2 ΝΚΙΥ). One could always count on Martha!

On that occasion Mary took ointment worth a year's wages, and anointed Jesus' feet and wiped them with her hair. When Judas complained that the ointment should have been sold and the money given to the poor, Jesus rebuked him. " 'Let her alone,' " Jesus said. " 'She has kept this for the day of My burial. For the poor you have with you always, but Me you do not have always' " (12:7, 8). Mary apparently sensed the imminent suffering and death of her Lord while the others remained unaware. She displayed a unique spiritual sensitivity. Mary's gift showed a love and appreciation for Jesus that we might well imitate. For Mary, nothing was too good for Jesus, and nothing was so precious that it should be withheld from Him.

MARTHA AND MARY: A CLOSE-UP

Martha and Mary were quite different persons. Yet they were members of the same family and lived together in harmony. Their differences did lead to irritations and disputes, but they were family. They were bound together by family ties and by a common faith in and love for Jesus.

Martha was one of those dependable persons we can count on to do what's needed. We see her working in the kitchen and serving. She was a worker, task oriented sometimes to the extreme. Martha was a significant person in the family, and her contribution to its well being was vital.

We must not mistake Martha's practical approach for a lack of faith. The text protects us from this misunderstanding by reporting Martha's affirmations of faith in Christ, and by making it clear that "Jesus loved Martha" (John 11:5).

Mary on the other hand was a freer spirit. Her first priority was spending time with Jesus—not cooking in the kitchen. Mary was spiritually sensitive, displaying an awareness of Jesus' moods that none of the disciples seemed to have. Mary was also emotionally expressive, weeping freely, and loving generously. While John wanted us to understand that Jesus loved Martha, He also loved her sister.



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These two women were so different; yet, they had so much in common. They remind us that whatever our personality type, we are able to love and serve Jesus in our own way and that Jesus loves and values us as well.

MARY AND MARTHA: EXAMPLES FOR TODAY

- There is room for different personality types in Christ's kingdom. Indeed, God made us all different with our own strengths and weaknesses. Let's be careful not to force other believers into our molds, assuming that our personality is "Christian" and theirs is not. Instead we need to learn from one another because Christ is speaking to us through all our brothers and sisters.
- Mary sat at Jesus' feet. She knew that she would not always have Him nearby, but while she did, she drank in everything He had to say. It's so easy to become task oriented in our fast-paced lives. But when our frenzied pace denies us time to draw near to Jesus, the quality and meaning of our lives begins to drain away.
- Mary wanted to do something special for Jesus. So she met His personal need by anointing Him. Christ tells us that when we do anything "for the least of these," we do it for Him. Jesus is not physically present with us today; yet we can help meet His needs by offering food to the hungry, drink to the thirsty, clothing for the naked, hospitality to strangers, and visiting those in prison.¹

MARTHA (Μάρθα, *Martha*). Sister of Lazarus and Mary; lived at Bethany.

Biblical Relevance

Peters notes that "[t]he character of Martha as portrayed by Luke and John is remarkably consistent. She is practical, active and outspoken" (Peters, "The Legends," 150). In Luke 10:38–42, Martha and her sister, Mary, received Jesus and the other disciples into their home. When Martha became frustrated that Mary chose to sit at Jesus' feet rather than help her, Jesus told Martha that "Mary has chosen the better part" (Luke 10:42 NRSV). In John 12:1–8, Martha served during the dinner given in Jesus' honor six days before the Passover. In this account, Mary anointed Jesus' feet instead of serving with Martha. This may be John's way of combining the account from Luke 10:38–42.

John—including Martha as being present when Jesus raised her brother, Lazarus—portrays Martha as an example of faith (John 11:1–44). When Martha runs to meet Jesus, both she and Mary are confident that Jesus could have prevented Lazarus' death (John 11:20–21, 32). Her acknowledgement that Jesus is the Messiah is one of the few in the gospel of John (John 11:27). Howard argues that the raising of Lazarus and the sisters' faith in John point toward Christ's resurrection (Howard, "The Significance," 75–77).

Interpretations

Martha is often compared with her sister, Mary. Luke 10:40–42 is often viewed as a comparison between a good, prayerful woman and a bad, restless woman—Martha served men while Mary served God (Schüssler-Fiorenza, "A Feminist Critical," 26–27; 32). Martha and Mary were also interpreted as examples of the active and contemplative states. Throughout history, monastic authors often used Martha as an example of the inferiority of active life. However, Jesus only admonishes her for being "anxious and troubled," not for being active (Luke 10:41). Some monastic communities interpreted this passage to mean that both manual labor and contemplative study are necessary for spiritual development and Christian leadership (Constable, *Three Studies*; Metteer, "Mary Needs Martha").

Selected Resources for Further Study

Carter, Warren. "Getting Martha Out of the Kitchen: Luke 10:38–42 Again." *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 58 (1996): 264–80.
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Heffner, Blake R. "Meister Eckhart and a Millennium with Mary and Martha." *Lutheran Quarterly* 5:2 (Summer 1991): 171–85.
Howard, James M. "The Significance of Minor Characters in the Gospel of John." *Bibliotheca Sacra* 163 (Jan–March 2006): 63–78.
Metteer, Charles A. "Mary Needs Martha": The Purposes of Manual Labor in Early Egyptian Monasticism." *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 43:2 (1999): 163–207.
Peters, Diane E. "The Legends of St. Martha of Bethany and Their Dissemination in the Later Middle Ages." *American Theological Library Association Summary of Proceedings* 48 (1994): 149–64.
Schüssler-Fiorenza, Elisabeth. "A Feminist Critical Interpretation for Liberation: Martha and Mary: Luke 10:38–42." *Religion and Intellectual Life*, 3:2 (Winter 1986): 21–36.
Yamaguchi, Satoko. *Mary and Martha: Women in the World of Jesus*. Maryknoll: N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2002.

¹ Richards, S. P., & Richards, L. (1999). *Every woman in the Bible* (pp. 191–195). T. Nelson Publishers.



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MICHELLE J. MORRIS²

Martha. Sister of Mary and Lazarus, and friend of Jesus. Martha's family lived in Bethany, a small town on the eastern slope of the Mt of Olives. It is possible that Martha was the wife of Simon the leper.

Luke gives an account of an incident concerning Martha when she was busy preparing and serving food while her sister Mary was listening to Jesus. Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping her; Jesus corrected Martha gently: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and troubled about many things; one thing is needful. Mary has chosen the good portion, which shall not be taken away from her" (Lk 10:41, 42). In saying this, Jesus challenged Martha's anxiousness by pointing out that fellowship with him was life's highest and most rewarding priority.

In John's account of the death and resurrection of Lazarus, it is Martha who, upon Jesus' arrival, goes out to meet him while Mary remains in the house (Jn 11:20). Once again, Martha complains to Jesus, this time saying that if he had come earlier Lazarus would not have died (v 21). When Jesus replied that her brother would rise again, Martha naturally assumed that Jesus was speaking of the future resurrection. Jesus reassured Martha that he in fact was the resurrection and the life and that she must trust in him (vv 23–26). Martha then confessed her belief that Jesus was the Christ (v 27). When Jesus asked that the tomb be opened, Martha protested that the smell would not be pleasant. Jesus replied firmly to her doubts, "Did I not tell you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" (v 40). Jesus then proceeded to raise Lazarus from the dead.

In John 12:1–11 Martha is again serving a meal for Jesus and Lazarus; this time, however, she does not protest Mary's elaborate show of affection for Jesus.³

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Luke gives an account of an incident concerning Martha when she was busy preparing and serving food while her sister, Mary, was listening to Jesus. Martha complained to Jesus that Mary was not helping her; Jesus corrected Martha gently: "My dear Martha, you are so upset over all these details! There is really only one thing worth being concerned about. Mary has discovered it—and I won't take it away from her" (Lk 10:41–42, NLT). In saying this, Jesus challenged Martha's anxiousness by pointing out that fellowship with him was life's highest and most rewarding priority.

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MARY OF BETHANY (Μαριάμ, *Mariam*; Μαρία, *Maria*). The sister of Martha and Lazarus in Bethany (e.g., Luke 10:39; John 11).⁵

4. Mary of Bethany. This Judean Mary was the sister of Martha and Lazarus. We know three facts about her. First, she was such a devoted follower of Jesus that she neglected her household duties to listen to him (Lk 10:38–42; Jesus approved this). Second, she was apparently upset with Jesus when he did not come to heal her brother before he died (Jn 11:20, 28–33). Finally, before Jesus died she anointed him with an expensive ointment while he

² Morris, M. J. (2016). [Martha](#). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

³ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). [Martha](#). In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, pp. 1410–1411). Baker Book House.

⁴ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 864). Tyndale House Publishers.

⁵ [Mary of Bethany](#). (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Klippenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.



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feasted at her home in Bethany (Mt 26:6–13; Mk 14:3–9; Jn 12:1–8—the story in Lk 7:37–50 surely concerns another unnamed woman in Galilee, not Judea).⁶

4. Mary of Bethany. This Judean Mary was the sister of Martha and Lazarus. We know three facts about her. First, she was such a devoted follower of Jesus that she neglected her household duties to listen to him (Lk 10:38–42; Jesus approved this). Second, she was apparently upset with Jesus when he did not come to heal her brother before he died (Jn 11:20, 28–33). Finally, before Jesus died, she anointed him with an expensive ointment while he feasted at her home in Bethany (Mt 26:6–13; Mk 14:3–9; Jn 12:1–8).⁷

Martha

Martha was the sister of **Mary** and **Lazarus** of Bethany, although the identification of the three as siblings and the statement that they lived in Bethany are found only in **John's** Gospel. **Luke** only offers some fragments about Martha, but it was not his intent to follow chronology or give details of the people in **Jesus'** life. Rather, his interest was in portraying Jesus and his acts, so Luke's lack of attention to Lazarus and his sisters need not cast any doubt on John's account of them. Both accounts are consistent, however, in portraying Martha as a practical woman who was careful about proper preparations and the details of her hospitality, while Mary was more spiritual and contemplative.

When Jesus visited them (before Lazarus's death), Martha complained to him that Mary was not helping her with the household duties. Jesus gently chided her, saying in effect that while Mary was perhaps not sufficiently concerned with worldly responsibilities, Martha was not focusing enough on the spiritual ones. " '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' " (Luke 10:41). The kingdom of God transcends all worldly concerns, and Jesus pointed out that Martha must pay closer attention to that.

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. Always the proper hostess, it was she who served the dinner after the raising of Lazarus (John 12:2).

Jesus loved the three of them (John 11:5), and it is evident that they were probably his best friends outside the twelve apostles (and possibly **Mary Magdalene**). It appears that they were wealthy, and it is very likely that they were financial supporters of his ministry and thus among his patrons. (For a discussion of patronage and clientage see *Twelve Apostles, The*).

It appears that Martha was the head of the household, indicating that she was probably the oldest of the three. Luke identifies their home as Martha's house (10:38). As a man Lazarus would have been the official head, but a strong woman like Martha, if she were the oldest, would probably be in charge in practice if not by law.

Matthew and Mark tell the story of a woman anointing Jesus' feet and wiping them with her hair at the home of **Simon the Leper** in Bethany (Matt. 26:6ff.; Mark 14:3). John tells a similar story about Mary doing the same at the dinner after Lazarus' raising (12:3), and he identifies her as "the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair" (11:2). These stories are so similar that it is reasonably sure that Mark's account and John's reference to the earlier anointing refer to the same event.

It has been suggested by some scholars that Simon the Leper had been cured by Jesus and was father of the three, or possibly that he was Martha's husband. Some have also proposed that Martha's house may have originally been owned by Simon.

In spite of Martha's practicality and busyness, she was nonetheless a true believer in Jesus. Her affirmation of his messiahship is as powerful as any confession of faith in the Bible: "I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who was to come into the world" (John 11:27).

Mary of Bethany

⁶ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Mary*. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1412). Baker Book House.

⁷ Elwell, W. A., & Comfort, P. W. (2001). In *Tyndale Bible dictionary* (p. 864). Tyndale House Publishers.



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Mary, the sister of **Martha** and **Lazarus**, appears in three stories in the New Testament.

Luke tells of a dinner at Martha's house, to which **Jesus** and his disciples (undoubtedly the twelve) were invited (10:38ff.). While Martha bustled about preparing the meal, Mary sat at Jesus' feet to listen to his teachings. Finally Martha complained to Jesus that her sister was not helping. Jesus gently chided her, reminding her that there are more important things than the concerns of this world: "Martha, Martha, 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" (Luke 10:41).

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.). Martha met Jesus on the road, and he asked for Mary. Martha went back to get her, and Mary then came out to him. When she fell at his feet weeping, Jesus had them take him to where Lazarus was buried, and there Jesus raised him from the dead.

The third story of Mary takes place at a dinner in Jesus' honor at their home some time after the raising of Lazarus, when Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem to be crucified. Martha was serving, and suddenly Mary took a jar of pure nard, a very expensive perfumed ointment. "She poured it on Jesus' feet and wiped his feet with her hair. And the house was filled with the fragrance of the perfume" (John 12:3). Judas immediately objected, saying that the perfume should have been sold and the money given to the poor. Jesus, however, told him to leave her alone. He said that this act was a precursor of the anointing of his body when he was dead. "You will always have the poor among you, but you will not always have me" (John 12:8).

Mary is not the same as **Mary Magdalene**, nor is she the woman who washed Jesus' feet with her tears (Luke 7:36ff.). It is entirely possible, however, that she is the same as the woman who anointed Jesus' feet in the home of **Simon the Leper** (Matt. 26:6ff.; Mark 14:3ff.), who some scholars believe may have been associated with Lazarus's family. John identifies Mary as "the same one who poured perfume on the Lord and wiped his feet with her hair" (11:2), and later John tells about another similar anointing (12:3). The first is almost certainly the same as the incident related by **Matthew** and **Mark**.

Luke and John present somewhat different views of Mary. Luke shows her as a spiritual and contemplative woman who wants to learn from Jesus, while John sees her as inconsolably grieved by the death of Lazarus, passionately devoted to Jesus, and deeply grateful for his raising of her brother. In either case she is an example of deep love and unquestioning commitment.⁸

Lazarus of Bethany

Lazarus of Bethany, the brother of **Mary** and **Martha**, is mentioned by name only in the fourth Gospel, at the time that **Jesus** raised him from the dead (John 11:1ff.). Luke mentions Mary and Martha but never mentions their brother by name or otherwise (Luke 10:38ff.). Mary was the woman who had anointed Jesus' feet with perfume and wiped them with her hair (John 11:2), and it may have been through her that Jesus met Lazarus. While little is told about Lazarus, it is apparent that they were friends (John 11:5). **Some scholars believe that Lazarus may have been the young man whom Jesus told to sell all his possessions and give to the poor, and he could not (Matt. 19:16ff.).**

The most spectacular of all Jesus' miracles was the raising of Lazarus. The raisings of **Jairus's** daughter (Mark 5:22ff.) and the son of the widow at Nain (Luke 7:11ff.) took place immediately after their deaths, while that of Lazarus was after he had been dead four days. While one might argue that the first two were not really dead but only comatose, there can be little question that Lazarus was dead.

John reports that the word of this miracle shocked his enemies to the point that they were ready to kill Jesus (John 11:53), and it was unquestionably one of the most important events in Jesus' ministry short of the passion itself. This immediately raises the question of why such an important event is not mentioned by any of the other three evangelists. Some believe that the story is a fiction, having grown out of the parable of **Lazarus and Dives** (in which Jesus said that they would not believe even if one returned from the dead). This, however, does not account for the presence of Mary and Martha in the story. It is also possible that the others had not heard of it, but this is unlikely. A reasonable explanation is that **Matthew**, **Mark**, and **Luke** chose not to tell the story during the lifetime of

⁸ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A-Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 276–277). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.



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Lazarus, because his very existence was a threat to the enemies of Christianity, who would be happy to see him dead.

In the novel *The Last Temptation of Christ*, Nikos Kazantzakis presents an entirely different view of Lazarus. In his account Lazarus is restored to life but retains the ravages of four days' decay in order to demonstrate the unimportance of life in this world compared to everlasting life with God. He is then murdered by fanatics. While this is out of the mainstream of Christian theology, it is certainly not inconsistent with it. It presents a fascinating image to contemplate.⁹

2. Lazarus of Bethany. Jesus performed the most spectacular of all his miracles (excluding his own resurrection) when he restored Lazarus of Bethany to life four days after death. Lazarus lived with his two sisters, Mary and Martha. **They were among Jesus' most intimate friends** (Jn 11:3, 5, 36). On several occasions he visited in their home, which also served as his headquarters during passion week (Mt 21:17; Lk 10:38–42; Jn 11:1–12:11). Lazarus was at the banquet in Jesus' honor when Mary anointed Jesus' feet with costly ointment (Jn 12:1–3).

The raising of Lazarus, climax of the signs in John's Gospel, receives the fullest treatment of Jesus' miracles. It produced three notable results: (1) many Jews in the vicinity of Jerusalem believed in Jesus (Jn 11:45) and some weeks later escorted him into the city (Jn 12:17, 18); (2) the Jewish leaders, hardened in their rejection of Jesus, resolved that he must die (Jn 11:53); (3) those leaders also plotted Lazarus' death (Jn 12:10, 11). The miracle not only showed Jesus' power over death but set the stage for his own resurrection.¹⁰

LAZARUS (Λάζαρος, *Lazaros*). Jesus' friend in Bethany whom He restored back to life. Lazarus was the brother of Mary and Martha (John 11:1–44; John 12:1).¹¹

JOHN 12

12:3–7 Jewish pilgrims were preparing for the Passover Feast, which was only six days away. Jesus visited His good friends Lazarus (whom He had raised from the dead), Martha, and Mary in Bethany. Martha cooked and served the supper (see Martha). Jesus would die during the Passover feast, and Mary seemed to sense Jesus' approaching death. With actions symbolic of preparing a body for burial, Mary took her most precious possession, "fragrant oil," and lovingly poured it over Jesus' feet (v. 5; see Mary of Bethany). Then, not caring what the others thought of her, she wiped His feet with her hair. A woman in Mary's day would never let her hair down in public but would keep it firmly bound or braided. The fact that Mary anointed His feet instead of His head demonstrated her humility. Only servants attended to the feet. When Judas (the money-keeper and betrayer) objected to Mary's extravagance, Jesus silenced Judas and praised Mary's actions.

12:10, 11 The chief priests wanted to kill not only Jesus but also Lazarus, who had become important evidence of Jesus' miracles (John 11:43–45). The Sadducees feared an insurrection by Jesus and His followers. Such disruption of peace might cost them their position of power and influence. The chief priests, who were all Sadducees, did not believe in the resurrection of the dead. Confronted with a clearly living Lazarus, they felt their foundation of power slipping away.¹²

⁹ Losch, R. R. (2008). In *All the People in the Bible: An A–Z Guide to the Saints, Scoundrels, and Other Characters in Scripture* (pp. 256–257). William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company.

¹⁰ Elwell, W. A., & Beitzel, B. J. (1988). *Lazarus*. In *Baker encyclopedia of the Bible* (Vol. 2, p. 1318). Baker Book House.

¹¹ *Lazarus*. (2016). In J. D. Barry, D. Bomar, D. R. Brown, R. Kloppenstein, D. Mangum, C. Sinclair Wolcott, L. Wentz, E. Ritzema, & W. Widder (Eds.), *The Lexham Bible Dictionary*. Lexham Press.

¹² Thomas Nelson, I. (1995). *The Woman's Study Bible* (Jn 12:10). Thomas Nelson.



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Week 2: God is not concerned with my everyday life, only the things I do for Him.

“God isn’t actually involved in or concerned with the details of my life.”

Several summers ago, I visited the Grand Teton National Park for the first time. Nothing could have prepared me for the mighty size, splendor, and beauty of what I saw.

The next week, back in Michigan, I spotted a little chipmunk scampering across our deck, his tail was straight in the air. He stopped. He ran again. Then he stopped, sat up on his haunches, and nibbled on his little front paws. You may hate chipmunks. You may consider them rats with stripes. I think they’re cute.

Question: Which of these—the grandeur of the mountains or the sprightly movements of a chipmunk—best characterizes our Creator God? That’s right. They both do.

If we know anything about God, we realize that *He is big*. We tend to see His role as akin to a four-star general. He assesses the battlefields, counts His battalions, considers His supply lines, and plots how to win. It’s the war that’s His concern, the big picture, not every little skirmish or detail of the battle.

With an entire universe to create, uphold, and rule over, we may surmise that God surely doesn’t have the time or inclination to attend to the petty details that make up our days. That stuff is on autopilot, like a wound-up clock moving according to its own design.

AND HE IS SMALL

The Bible moves swiftly through the mighty accounts of the patriarchs: Adam and the creation, Noah and the flood, Abraham to the grand sweep of the exodus and the conquest of the promised land. But then the Bible gently tells the small story of a single godly woman, Ruth, and the man who would redeem her and make her his bride.

Ruth had been a widow, poverty stricken, surviving by the charity of a wealthy man named Boaz. The biblical account of her story opens with these words:

Now it came to pass ... (1:1 NKJV)

Applying these words to each scene of the drama, the death of Ruth’s first husband *came to pass*. Boaz catching sight of Ruth *came to pass*. Boaz waking to find Ruth at his feet *came to pass*. And out of this, eventually *came to pass* the birth of King David, and finally, the birth of Jesus Himself.

There is much to learn from the story of Ruth and Boaz, but one thing we should not miss is the principle found in the saying that goes like this:

For want of a nail the shoe was lost.

For want of a shoe the horse was lost.

For want of the horse the rider was lost.

For want of the rider the battle was lost.

For want of the battle the war was lost.¹

The loss of a single nail, in the end, made the difference in the outcome of the war. In other words, there are no small, free-standing details in life, only carefully intertwined events and circumstances that create one grand tapestry called history.

God is big; God is small.

Sometimes we divide our lives into large moments of great import and small moments of ordinariness. However, when God gave us the Great Commandment—that we must love Him with all our heart, mind, soul, and strength—He was telling us that He wants all of us, and that means all of our moments, great ones and little ones alike.

God’s “bigness” isn’t the kind of bigness that overlooks smallness. Rather it is a bigness that encompasses smallness. He does not farm out the management of the details to underlings while He looks after the big stuff. He is all-knowing, His power is inexhaustible, and His control is absolute.

Sometimes this truth sounds scary; sometimes it’s comforting. Knowing that God sees everything can be frightening when we want the freedom to sin outside His gaze. But it’s comforting to know that there’s no shadowed place He does not see. When we feel alone and insignificant, when we find ourselves consumed with our worries, it helps to remember that He has numbered the hairs on our head (Luke 12:7).

He reminds us that since He provides for the lilies of the field, we can be assured that He will meet our needs (Matt. 6:28). He promises us that since He knows when even a sparrow falls to the ground, we can know He cares about us (Matt. 10:29).



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We rightly ought to be scared when we are tempted to think we can safely disobey, so long as our infraction is a small one. And we ought to be comforted in knowing that every moment of our lives matters. Everything we do has meaning and significance; our faithful Father directs our every step.

Coram Deo is a Latin phrase meaning “in the presence of God” or “before the face of God.” This is how we are called to live our lives. Every moment, every word, every decision, every act, every thought counts. No matter how insignificant they may seem, they are done before the face and in the presence of the living God.

And not only are we to live in fellowship with Him, we are to actually be connected to Him. In recounting the story of the final dinner the Savior hosted with His disciples before His mock trial and crucifixion, the apostle John, one of Jesus’ closest friends, quotes Him:

“Abide in me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit by itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in me.” (John 15:4)

When a tree branch is connected to the trunk, it draws life from the sap that flows into it. There is never a time when the branch doesn’t need this life-giving substance. If it’s disconnected, the branch dies. Should this fruit-bearing limb ever decide that it no longer needs to be connected, it becomes kindling. An ordinary stick.

Or another way to say this is that I am never *not* Nancy’s husband. No activity, no word I speak, or even random thought I may entertain can afford to be in isolation. She and I belong to each other. All day. Every day.

My life should reflect this truth. People should be able to quickly tell that I am a delightfully married man.

When you and I abide in God, it should be obvious. Again, everything we do, say, or think should make this obvious to everyone.

THE TRUTH

Nothing is too grand or too insignificant for God’s care. He made us and is involved in every detail of our lives, large and small.

THINK ABOUT IT ... *The word “love” is sometimes thrown around like cheap candy. What does God’s kind of love look like?*¹³

Job 4:3-4

*Behold, you have instructed many,
and you have strengthened the weak hands.*

*⁴Your words have upheld him who was stumbling,
and you have made firm the feeble knees.*

GNOSTICISM A variety of second-century AD religions whose participants believed that people could only be saved through revealed knowledge, or γνῶσις (*gnōsis*). Gnostics also held a negative view of the physical or material world. Early church fathers, such as Irenaeus, deemed Gnosticism heretical.

Introduction

Gnosticism shared some characteristics with Judaism and Christianity, but remained markedly distinct from either. Traditionally, Gnosticism was thought to have emerged from within Christianity (Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 18–25). Recent scholarship, however, has acknowledged that Gnosticism may have been an existing belief that only later came into contact with Christianity (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 11; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 44).

Origins and Definitions

Origins of the Term

The earliest example of a group being described as “gnostic” comes from the work of Irenaeus, a second-century Greek church father (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 9), who described certain groups of heretics as the gnostic

¹³ Wolgemuth, R. D., & Morley, P. (2018). *Lies men believe: and the truth that sets them free*. Moody Publishers.



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heresy. Henry More coined the modern term “Gnosticism” in the 17th century to describe the heresy of the church in Thyatira (Rev 2:18–29; Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 9).

Definition of the Term

The term “Gnosticism” may be an inadequate description of “the great variety of phenomena attributed to it” (Logan, *The Gnostics*, 1) because it elicits “misleading generalizations and unwarranted stereotypes” (Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 8). Williams has argued that the term reflects a “dubious category” which should be dismantled and abandoned (Williams, *Rethinking “Gnosticism”*). Pearson has likewise acknowledged that there is a “bewildering degree of variety” in the historical expressions of Gnosticism (Pearson, “Gnosticism as a Religion,” 89).

Pearson argues that Gnosticism is purely a historical term used to classify religious features that are “clearly distinguishable from anything that is found in Christianity, Judaism, or other religions of antiquity” (Pearson, “Gnosticism as a Religion,” 95–96). Therefore, Gnosticism should be defined as a descriptive category arising from historical observations rather than a prescriptive system of unilateral belief.

The Church Fathers and Gnosticism

The church fathers of the second century and later condemned gnostic teachers and beliefs as heretical. Church fathers who spoke against gnosticism include the following people:

- Justin Martyr’s (ca. 100–165) lost work *Compendium against the Heretics* (mentioned in Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 26) included arguments against Simon Magus and his disciple Meander, who came to be seen as proto-gnostics. In the brief discussion in his *First Apology*, he says that the followers of Simon Magus worshipped him as a god and that Meander persuaded his followers that they would not die (Justin Martyr, *First Apology* 26).
- Hegesippus (late 2nd c.) mentions as heretical a variety of gnostic groups and traces their origin back to Simon Magus; an excerpt of his work is preserved in Eusebius (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.22). In this passage, Hegesippus does not describe the teachings of the gnostic groups in detail but says that the founder of each group introduced his own opinion and that their teachers divided the church with doctrines against God and his Christ.
- Irenaeus of Lyons’ (ca. 140–198) main work, *Adversus haereses* (“Against Heresies”), is dedicated to refuting Gnosticism.
- Hippolytus of Rome’s (ca. 170–235) work *Refutatio omnium haeresium* (“Refutation of All Heresies”) argues against 33 gnostic groups, as well as against some non-gnostic groups.
- Eusebius of Caesarea (ca. 260–340) devotes a chapter of his *Ecclesiastical History* to gnostic groups, whom he rejects as false teachers (*Ecclesiastical History* 4.7). For the most part, he does not describe or specifically refute their teachings in this section; however, he states that the gnostic teacher Basilides invented prophets who had never existed, and that the gnostic followers of Carpocrates required those who wanted to become full participants of their mysteries to practice various forms of wickedness in order to escape what they called the cosmic powers.
- Epiphanius of Salamis’ (ca. 310–403) work *Panarion* (“Medicine Chest”) contained arguments against various heresies, including gnostics.

In addition, Origen and Tertullian wrote against gnosticism; however, they themselves held some beliefs rejected by other church fathers.

Until the discovery of the Nag Hammadi texts, early Christian writings against Gnosticism were our main source of information about gnostic belief. The overall picture of Gnosticism provided by these polemical texts has been largely confirmed by the gnostic texts found at Nag Hammadi.

Common Gnostic Beliefs

The second-century church fathers identified a set of common characteristics of gnostics. These characteristics differ by region or school of thought but provide a general picture of gnostic belief (Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 8–10). Our understanding of Gnosticism has grown exponentially through a close study of the Nag Hammadi Library of gnostic texts, discovered in 1945 (see Robinson, *The Nag Hammadi Library in English*). Acknowledging the



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multiplicity of gnostic beliefs represented in the Nag Hammadi Library, the following examples are merely representative of a prominent strand of gnostic belief.

God

Gnostic texts often describe God as incomprehensible, unknowable, and transcendent. For example, one text describes God as: “God and father of the all, the holy, the invisible ... existing as pure light into which it is not possible for any light of the eye to gaze” (*Apocryphon of John*, 22:17–19 [King, 4:2]). The *Apocryphon of John* demonstrates the gnostic view of the nature of God when it states that it is not “fitting to think of [God] as divine or as something of the sort, for [God] is superior to deity” (*Apocryphon*, 33–36 [Layton, 1:29]). Thus, Gnosticism holds that God cannot be observed with our senses nor easily grasped with our understanding. Gnostic texts commonly speak of God only in negative terms, such as “the unknown God,” “the unknown Father,” “ineffable,” “unspeakable”; God is even described as “nonexistent” because he is viewed by gnostics as not existing in the usual manner of being (Foerster, *Gnosis*, 4). Additionally, gnostic texts commonly address God as the “Ultimate Ground of Being” (Foerster, *Gnosis*, 4).

Dualism and Dichotomy

For gnostics, the world was divided into the physical and spiritual realms. Gnostics held that the world was not created by the “Ultimate Ground of Being” (God), but by a lesser deity resulting from the fall of the divine personification of Wisdom (Perkins, *Gnosticism*, 15). This lesser deity or demiurge created the material world, which is entirely isolated from the divine realm in which the “Ultimate Ground of Being” exists (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 16).

Likewise, gnostics believed that humans are split between the physical and spiritual world: “the true human self is as alien to the world as is the transcendent God” (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 13). They asserted that the true human self or soul is naturally divine, belonging to the same realm as the Ultimate Ground of Being, but is trapped and imprisoned by the material world. They viewed the physical body as a prison which malevolently trapped the “divine spark” within humanity (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12–14). Because of this imprisonment, Gnosticism incorporates an active hatred of the physical body, similar to Docetism. This dualistic split between the body and the soul means that the divine spark of the human soul must be freed from the material constraints of the world in order to attain salvation and unity with the Ultimate Ground of Being.

Gnosis and Salvation

Gnostics advocated *gnosis*, or “revealed knowledge,” as the basis for salvation (Pearson, *Gnosticism, Judaism*, 7). Rather than being a philosophy, *gnosis* is a single revelation of the true nature of human and divine selves (Foerster, *Gnosis*, 1). The gnostics’ goal is to attain salvation from the fallen physical world in which they are trapped through obtaining the secret knowledge, or *gnosis* (Logan, *The Gnostics*, 63). Gnostics believed that *gnosis* frees the divine spark within humans, allowing it to return to the divine realm of light (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 13). Gnostics likewise believed that when all elect gnostics have been restored through *gnosis*, the physical world will be destroyed, and the chosen humans will return to their divine state (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 13–14). Salvation is thus initially brought about by *gnosis*, but ultimately constitutes a return of the human soul to the divine realm in which it belongs.

The *gnosis* which brings about salvation varies greatly within the different gnostic schools, as each group of gnostics claimed to exclusively possess the necessary knowledge (Foerster, *Gnosis*, 8). However, the *gnosis* generally took the form of a special revelation of the divine, transcendent realm to a mediatory figure who was required to spread the true knowledge of God among humanity (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 12). Thus, *gnosis* was both a revealed knowledge of the transcendent God as the Ultimate Ground of Being and a revealed knowledge that the human soul ultimately belongs to the divine transcendent realm. This revealed knowledge frequently took the highly complex and spiritualized form of mythopoeic revelation in which *gnosis* involves understanding the true nature of God and the human soul as immanently divine.

Myth

The elaborate gnostic myths function, for Gnosticism, to reveal *gnosis* through a complex series of cosmological, anthropological, and soteriological developments. While features of gnostic mythology vary among sects, the gnostic *Apocryphon of John* is typical of the elaborate mythopoeic formulation. It indicates that the divine mother,



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Pronoia-Barbelo (“Thought” or “Foreknowledge”), was the first of the transcendent God’s created beings (*Apocryphon of John* 4:26–5:6 [Layton]). From the divine mother, the self-generated Christ appeared and produced four great Lights with three pairs of Aeons who embody abstract esoteric principles—Life, Grace, and Wisdom (Sophia) (King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 3; *Apocryphon of John*, 5:10–10:4 [Layton]). Sophia wished to create a being with her own likeness, but instead produced an evil being known as the “Chief Ruler.” According to gnostic belief, the evil “Chief Ruler” was the creator God of Genesis, whose true name was Yaldabaoth (King, *The Secret Revelation of John*, 3–4). Yaldabaoth then stole some of the Spirit from Sophia, which he used to create Adam. The mythological system in the *Apocryphon* develops further in what Pearson describes as “extended commentary” on several texts from the book of Genesis to account for sin, sexual lust, and human ignorance of their divine spirit (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 66). Finally, the “Spirit of Life” descends to earth to teach humans of the power of *gnosis* to save humanity through recognition of the divine spirit humans unknowingly possess (King, *Secret Revelation of John*, 4–6; *Apocryphon of John*, 27:31–28:29 [Layton]).

The New Testament and Gnosticism

Simon Magus

According to Irenaeus, Simon Magus was the one “from whom all the heresies take their origin” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.2 [Foerster]). Simon Magus, a sorcerer found in Samaria by Phillip, worked wonders among the people before Phillip converted him to Christianity (Acts 8:13). Following his conversion, Simon attempted to purchase the power of the Holy Spirit from Peter before being rebuked (Acts 8:9–24). Perhaps because the New Testament claims that Simon assumed the divine title of “the Great Power of God” (Acts 8:10, NAS), Irenaeus records that Simon actually believed himself to be God (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.2 [Foerster]). In Irenaeus’ account, Simon preached himself as the god who first created “Thought, the mother of all”—his female companion (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.2 [Foerster]). Irenaeus further records that Simon claimed that from thought, the angels and human beings were created, but because “the angels were governing the world badly,” Simon descended into human form “to bring things to order” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.3 [Foerster]). Irenaeus goes on: Simon promised that when “order” came, his followers would be saved, and “the world will be dissolved” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.3 [Foerster]). Although the account of Simon’s religious beliefs includes no reference to a saving *gnosis*, Irenaeus concludes that Simon gave the “falsely so-called *gnosis*” its beginnings (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.23.4 [Foerster]).

Hymenaeus and Philetus (1 Tim 1:20; 6:20)

Discussion of false teachers like Hymenaeus and Philetus provide the framework for the beginning and conclusion of 1 Timothy; both Hymenaeus and Philetus have traditionally been identified as gnostic teachers. First Timothy begins with an admonition to keep “certain men” from teaching “strange doctrines” centering on “fruitless discussion” (1 Tim 4). First Timothy then warns that teachers of the strange doctrines, including “Hymenaeus and Alexander, whom I have delivered over to Satan, so that they may be taught not to blaspheme” (1 Tim 1:20). First Timothy concludes with an exhortation to avoid “worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called ‘knowledge’ ” (τῆς ψευδωνύμου γνώσις, *tēs pseudōnymou gnōsis*; 1 Tim 6:20). Irenaeus picked up the concept of “falsely called knowledge” when he undertook his heresiology (or catalog of heresies). This work by Irenaeus, although generally known as *Against Heresies*, is formally titled, *On the Detection and Overthrow of the Falsely Called Knowledge*.

Johnson argues that the use of *gnosis* in 1 Timothy should be interpreted broadly, asserting, “there is no need to take [*gnosis*] as referring to a second century Christian elitist movement” (Johnson, *First and Second Letters*, 312). By contrast, Wisse argues that the author of 1 Timothy deliberately placed Hymenaeus and Philetus “in the context of the despised gnostics” (Wisse, “Prolegomena”, 143).

The Nicolaitans (Acts 6:5; Revelation 2:6, 15, 18–29)

The Nicolaitans of Rev 2 were identified as an early gnostic-like heresy. According to Irenaeus, the Nicolaitans originated from Nicolaus, the proselyte of Antioch who was given church leadership in Act 6:5 (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 1.26.3). Although Irenaeus did not initially identify Nicolaus as gnostic, he later referred to the Nicolaitans as an offset of the “falsely called knowledge” (Irenaeus, *Adversus Haereses*, 3.11.1). However, Pearson argues that there is no explicit reason other than the testimony of Irenaeus to relate either Nicolaus or the



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Nicolaitans to Gnosticism (Pearson, *Ancient Gnosticism*, 36–37). Likewise, Fitzmyer points out that no substantial evidence has been found associating the Nicolaitans with Gnosticism since the second century AD (Fitzmyer, *Acts of the Apostles*, 350).

1–3 John

Individuals such as Smalley have examined potential gnostic-like thoughts in the Gospel and letters of John (Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 44). Although the noun *gnosis* is entirely absent from the Johannine literature, the verb “to know” (γινώσκειν, *ginōskein*) appears over 80 times. Additionally, the idea of the knowledge of God is an important motif throughout John’s works (e.g., John 17:3; 1 John 2:13; Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 44). Smalley contends, however, that this knowledge of God is markedly different than the *gnosis* of the gnostic sects, for it is, “not intellectual and speculative, but experimental and dynamic” (Smalley, *1, 2, 3 John*, 45).

Both Bultmann and Marshall have argued that the secessionist opponents of 1 John were themselves gnostics (Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, 11; Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 14–18). In this reading, 1 John may be seen as a deliberate polemic against Gnosticism (or an early belief very similar to Gnosticism); 1 John would then especially be opposed to Gnosticism that appropriates its beliefs into the Christian faith. Bultmann contended that the author of 1 John used specific verbs of knowing and sense perception in order to counter the “Gnosticizing Christians against whom the letter is directed” (Bultmann, *The Johannine Epistles*, 11). Marshall believed that the Johannine opponents were “forerunners” of the later gnostic sects (Marshall, *The Epistles of John*, 15).

In recent years, however, the idea that the Johannine letters were written against any strand of Gnosticism has been largely abandoned. Thompson notes that, “While the secessionists may have held beliefs that lent themselves to Gnostic interpretation, it is doubtful that they ought to be called Gnostic” (Thompson, *1–3 John*, 17; see also Perkins, “Gnostic Revelation”). This viewpoint has only emerged during scholarship of the latter half of the 20th century, as Gnosticism has begun to be understood as a belief system that exists in its own right.

This viewpoint has led scholars such as Brown to also suggest parallels between the beliefs seen in 1–3 John and early gnostic belief (Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 59–65), including the nature of knowledge of God and the dualism between light and darkness (e.g., 1 John 1:6–7; Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 60–62). However, Brown cautioned that “at most, similarity is suggested,” (Brown, *The Epistles of John*, 60). Likewise, commentator Yarbrough relegated discussion of any gnostic parallels in 1–3 John primarily to footnotes (Yarbrough, *1–3 John*). Thus, in commentaries such as Yarbrough’s, the parallels between gnostic belief and the Johannine letters are primarily seen in terms of their unique differences, which seem to triumph over any thematic similarities.

Problems for Further Study of the New Testament and Gnosticism

A major problem with connecting the New Testament and Gnosticism is the prominent use of the word “*gnosis*” throughout the Gospels and the Pauline letters. Johnson maintained that the use of the word was “non-technical” and referred only to a generalized knowledge throughout the New Testament (Johnson, *First and Second Letters*, 311–12). Perkins, though, demonstrates that a closer correlation between the New Testament and Gnosticism is plausible—particularly in light of the absence of an early fixed canon (Perkins, *Gnosticism*, 29–38). Smith advocated extreme caution: “Although it must be admitted that Paul addressed issues similar to those of Gnosticism, it also must be emphasized that he came to radically different conclusions regarding them” (Smith, *No Longer Jews*, 157). Further study of Gnosticism must be careful to recognize both the similarities and the differences between gnostic writings and the New Testament.

Related Articles

For examples of texts from some of the strands of Gnosticism, see this article: Nag Hammadi Codices. For further details on the criticisms of Gnosticism by early church fathers, see this article: Irenaeus. For information on the process of canonization, see this article: Canon, New Testament.

Selected Resources for Further Study

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