

Salome, Mother of the Zebedees: The Woman Who Wanted The Best For Her Sons

*Every generation must do its own seeking and its own finding.
~George Macdonald (4)*

Her name	Her name, the feminine form of “Solomon,” means “Peace”
Key Scriptures	Matthew 20:20-24; 27:56; Mark 15:40-41; 16:1-2
Promises In Scripture	Genesis 17:15-16, Psalm 113:9, Proverbs 31:28-29, Isaiah 49:15

JESUS AND WOMEN <i>Follow the Fascinating Trail!!</i>	
• First Person To Know That He Was Coming: Mary (Luke 1:30-32) • First Person To Profess Faith In Him: Elizabeth (Luke 1:42-43) • First Person To Proclaim Him to the World: Anna (Luke 2:36-38) • Longest Recorded Conversation Between Jesus and a Person: The Woman of Samaria (John 4:1-42) • First Person That Jesus Reveals His True Identity As The Messiah To: The Woman of Samaria (John 4:1-42) • First Person To Anoint Christ: The Sinful Woman (Luke 7:36-50) • First Person To Be Healed Through Touching Christ: The Woman With The Issue of Blood (Matt 9:20-22, Mark 5:25-34, Luke 8:43-48) • First People To Know Of The Resurrection: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (Luke 24:1-10) • First Human Heralds of the Resurrection: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Mary the mother of James (Luke 24:1-10) • Earthly Home/Place of Rest for Jesus: Martha of Bethany's home (Luke 10:38-42) • First Person to Express Knowledge/Sorrow of Jesus' Impending Death: Mary of Bethany (Mark 14:7-8) • Only Person Christ Pronounced Immortal Fame Over Because Of A Specific Deed: Mary of Bethany and her anointing of Christ (Mark 14:3-9)	

Her Background, Life and Times

Mothering: In biblical times, when a man married, he gained another possession. Every wife was under her husband's absolute authority. When a man decided "to marry a wife" the meaning of the phrase was closer to "become the master of a wife." But even though a woman's position in the household was one of subservience to her husband, she was still in a higher position than anyone else in the household. A woman's principal duty was to produce a family, preferable sons, who could ensure the family's financial future. Mothers generally nursed their youngsters until they were about three years old. During that time, husbands and wives did not usually engage in sexual intercourse, a natural form of birth control that gave the mother time to devote herself to her youngest child. Mothers had total care of their children, both sons and daughters, until they were about six years old. The children helped their mother with household tasks, and she taught them basic lessons on living in their cultures. After six years of age, most boys became the family shepherd or began to spend the day with their father, learning the family business. David, as the youngest son, took care of his family's sheep and goats (I Samuel 16:11), and Jesus probably spent time with his father Joseph learning his carpentry trade (Mark 6:3). Daughters stayed with their mothers throughout their growing-up years. Mothers taught their daughters spinning and weaving and cooking, as well as how to behave and what to expect in their future roles as wives and mothers. (1)

Family Connections: Legendary attempts have been made to connect Salome with Joseph by a previous marriage, and there fore link her up with the family Mary; or to make her a daughter of Zacharias. Inadequate attempts have sought to identify her as the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, using John 19:25 as the basis of association. Scripture is silent as to her genealogy. All we know is that she was the wife of Zebedee, the prosperous fisherman who had hired servants. (2)

Family Connections: Salome was the sister of the Virgin Mary. Though all do not agree that she was, a comparison of Matthew 27:55 and 56 and John 19:25 makes this relationship quite certain. That made Jesus Salome's nephew, John and James His cousins, and it was Uncle Zebedee who owned the big fishing business. This relationship may be a reason for bringing His family, friends and widowed mother to Capernaum (John 2:12). (3)

Who Was She? Salome was the wife of Zebedee, and was, accordingly, the mother of John and James. One notices this at once by comparing mark 15:40 with Matthew 27:56. Mark gives us the name of Salome as one of the women who supervised Jesus' burial. In Matthew her name is not given, but she is there designated as the mother of the sons of Zebedee. Salome could, therefore, consider herself a blessed woman, for she was the mother of two of Jesus' best-loved disciples. (17)

Legend: Legend tells us that Salome was born from Joseph by a first marriage, and attempts in this way to connect her with the family of Mary. Still another legend states that she was a daughter of Zacharias. These legends, at least, tend to bring out this one truth, namely, that James and John, inasmuch as they immediately left their father and their nets, must, in some way, have heard of Jesus before. (17)

Fishing Business: When we first read about Salome she had been married for many years, for she had two grown sons. Her husband, Zebedee, was a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee (Matthew 4:21). He owned boats, nets and all necessary equipment for his occupation. His sons, James and John, worked with him and there is evidence that peter and Andrew were partners with Zebedee and his sons (Luke 5:1-11). They had a prosperous business, catching and selling fish, and when we learn that John was a friend of the High Priest we presume that they had business dealings together. The fact that Zebedee had others in his employ (Mark 1:20) would indicate that he was a wealthy businessman and

consequently belonged to the upper middle class of his day. We know that Salome was a woman of means and social position for she had both the wealth to provide for the needs of Jesus and the time to follow him about. (3)

Capernaum: Where Salome likely lived, was on the north shore of Lake Galilee near Bethsaida which was the town of Andrew, Peter and Philip. (3)

James and John: There was policy by James and John in the management of this address, that they put their mother on to present it, that it might be looked upon as her request and not theirs. Though proud people think well of themselves, they would not be thought to do so. Therefore they affect nothing more than a show of humility, and others must be put on to court that honor for them which they are ashamed to court for themselves. It was their mother's weakness thus to become the tool of their ambition, which she should have given a check to. Those that are wise and good would not be seen in an ill-favored thing. (31)

James and John: The other disciples were angry with James and John, realizing that they had put their mother up to making the request. Matthew 20:24 (8)

Her Character

Devoted Follower: A devoted follower of Jesus, whose husband ran a prosperous fishing business, she shared the common misconception that the messiah would drive out the Romans and establish a literal kingdom in Palestine. Her name was probably Salome (1)

Devoted: Salome, one of the saintly women who followed Jesus in Galilee and ministered unto Him, appears to have been one of His disciples from the outset of His public ministry (Mark 15:40,41; Matthew 20:20-28). She had no doubt whatever as to His Messiahship, and faced no difficulty in persuading her sons, James and John, to accompany her in obedience to the Master's word. Both Zebedee and Salome by their life and teaching prepared their children to follow Jesus. (2)

Loyal: With many people looking on, Salome was taught a much needed lesson in humility. She learned that greatness comes in proportion to self-giving. Because of her record of service for Jesus, of her social position and the self-confidence that comes with wealth, she could have turned away with hurt pride, but Salome learned her lesson for she remained a loyal follower of Jesus to the end. She followed her Lord to Calvary. When every disciple but John had run from the scene of the crucifixion in terror and confusion Salome stood near the cross with John and the mother of Jesus. Hostile, mocking faces gleamed in the darkness all around them but they could not leave the One they loved, even though loyalty might involve personal danger. (3)

Ambitious: Salome was ambitious for her sons, and ambition is commendable when it is in full agreement with the mind and purpose of God. Ambition, when divinely directed can lead to the heights of honor but when selfishly pursued can cast one down to the depths of degradation. Salome knew she was an honored mother because her two sons, James and John, were two of Christ's best-loved disciples and along with Peter formed the inner circle among the Twelve. Salome knew that Christ was the Messiah, but as a millennialist could not separate Him from Israel's temporal glory. Feeling that the kingdom would soon be established, she requested that her sons be placed one on Christ's right hand and the other on His left when He inaugurated His kingdom. Although such a demand arose from maternal pride and jealousy, it did not arise from true faith. She knew not what she

asked (Matthew 20:20-24; Mark 10:35-40) when seeking seats of honor for her sons. (3)

Ambitious: She had unusually gifted sons and so we assume that she was an intelligent woman. However, because she did not understand the true nature of Jesus' Kingdom, she made a stupid mistake. She was not the only one who did not understand that His was a spiritual Kingdom. She was only sharing the views of all the disciples (John 1:49 and 6:15). Not even John, the closest of all to Jesus, understood when He spoke of His death (Matthew 20:17-22), that His Kingdom was not of this world. Though ambitious and sure of herself Salome was tactful as she made her daring request in the presence of so many people. She looked humble as she bowed low at the feet of the King of the Jews, but her heart was not humble. It was full of pride, presumption and selfishness. She had no concern for the hurt feelings, jealousy and bitterness (Matthew 20:24) which would surely ensue if both her sons would be favored. (3)

Generous: One of the more prominent of the group of notable women who ministered to Jesus. She is not mentioned with the original few women (Luke 8:2,3) who gave of their substance in the first year of His ministry. It seems that she joined them later when she was free to leave her home and devote herself to full time service for Jesus. She was deeply interested in the Kingdom that Jesus had come to establish, and was a generous contributor to His cause. (3)

Interested: She was a good woman, a reverent and faithful daughter of Israel. She was one of the few who still looked for the consolation of Israel. She did not object when John left home to attend the preaching of John the Baptist in the wilderness. John was captivated by the powerful spirit-filled preacher and became his disciple. When John came home to Salome with the exciting report of the Baptist's new gospel she believed that he was a great Prophet. (3)

Mother: In Mark she is called Salome Mark 15:40, 16:1), but Matthew calls her the mother of Zebedee's children (Matthew 20:20, 27:56). Matthew wrote at a later date than Mark, and by that time Zebedee may have died. Perhaps her son James was already in glory, and John had gained prominence as a great apostle and author. So Matthew thinks of her not so much for her own worthiness, or as the wife of a prosperous man, but as the mother of James and John. (3)

Fisherman's Wife: She lived on the coast of the Lake of Genesareth. Her husband, Zebedee, owned boats and nets, and Jesus called her two sons, John and James, as these were busy at assisting their father in mending the nets. (17)

Millennialist: The one sin which is recorded against her is that which she shared with the apostles. She acknowledged that Jesus was the Messiah, but she could not yet segregate that Messiah from Israel's temporal glory. She was what we would call a Millennialist, and did not yet comprehend that not they who are born of Abraham, but they whose faith resembles his, are the seed of Abraham. She noticed that Jesus preferred her sons and Peter to the rest of the apostles, and when she saw that, she eagerly wished that they might retain their position of honor in the Kingdom of Israel that was to be established. It even seems to have irked her somewhat as a mother, that the Lord sometimes seemed to prefer Peter to her own children. These reasons induced her to make the sinful petition of Jesus that He place her two sons on His right and on His left side, respectively, when He should come into his kingdom. That petition arose from maternal pride and maternal jealousy, but it was a sinful prayer all the same. It did not arise from faith, but it opposed faith. (17)

Her Sorrow
Witness: To have stood with other women at the cross, witnessing the death of Jesus of Nazareth. (1)
Rebuked by Christ: In His rebuke of Salome for her misguided ambition Christ did not reject the request of the mother for her children, but corrected it, and accepted it in a way mother and sons did not anticipate. To be intimately near Him on His throne meant fellowship with Him in His sufferings. Our Lord did not treat Salome's ambition as if it was sinful but he was compassionate because of the ignorance behind the request. In effect, Jesus asked if her sons were prepared to drink the cup of martyrdom, and implied that James and John would share His throne of suffering. This they did, for James was the first apostolical martyr and John, the last. Salome's dreams of the kingship of Christ with her sons sharing His rule were rudely shattered as she saw her much-loved messiah dying as a felon on a wooden gibbet. (2)
Death of a Son: James died the death of a martyr (Acts 12:2). Eleven men had witnessed Jesus' ascension from the Mount of Olives, and of these, James was the first to be called into blessed communion with the glorified Redeemer. (17)
Death of Sons: James would be the first to attain immortality as a martyr (Acts 12:2) and John the last disciple to suffer for the glory of the cross (Revelation 1:9). (3)

Her Joy
Witness: To have seen an angel at Christ's tomb, who proclaimed the Resurrection. (1)
Sons: Both her sons were beloved apostles. (17)
John: John had the special distinction of being the only one of the apostles to be called to witness the Revelations upon Patmos. (17)

Her Promises, Her Lessons, Her Legacy
Blessings of Motherhood: Though the typical woman in biblical times was in a subservient role, her position as a mother is exalted by Scripture. God the Father recognized from the very beginning the important role a mother would play in her children's lives, and he promised to bless her. Those same promises apply to you today. (1)
Parental Influences: As we leave "the mother of Zebedee's children," it is with the realization of the influence of a godly mother in, and over, the lives of her children. So often it is from a mother's tender affection that her child imbibes the love of God, so that it becomes almost part of the child's nature. Further, there is no more potent antidote against sin within or without than faith in God generated by the holy life and teachings of godly parents. (2)
Mothers: Mothers can often see other children as comparisons – even as competitors. We tend to rate our own kids by how well they measure up against their classmates and cousins – sometimes being too

hard on them for not making a better show, sometimes blinded to their flaws by our favoritism. And it doesn't necessarily stop at school age, but can continue into adulthood with the yardsticks of salary and success. But if God Himself doesn't grade our children this way, then why should we – unless we're really grading ourselves? (4)

Pushing Your Children: Ask yourself why you feel the need to push your children or to motivate them to excel. Make sure your reasons are honorable and godly, not short-sighted and self-centered. (4)

Bibliography

Please note that NO information contained in this study is original work of Susan McGeown, unless otherwise noted.

Source 1. Women of the Bible: A One-Year Devotional Study of Women in Scripture By Ann Spangler & Jean E. Syswerda, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1999, ISBN: 0-310-22352-0
Source 2. All the Women of the Bible by Herbert Lockyer, Zondervan Publishing House, Michigan, ISBN 0-310-28151-2
Source 3. she shall be called Woman by Frances Vander Velde, Kegel Publications, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1957, ISBN:0-8254-4003-3
Source 4. Women of Character Broadman & Holman Publishers, Nashville, Tennessee, 1998 ISBN: 0-8054-9277-1)
Source 5. Great Women of the Bible by Clarence Edward Macartney, Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1942, ISBN: 0-8010-5901-5
Source 6. Bad Girls of the Bible and What We can Learn From Them By Liz Curtis Higgs, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, Colorado, 1999, ISBN: 1-57856-125-6
Source 7: Women Who Loved God By Elizabeth George, Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, Oregon, 1999, ISBN: 1-56507-850-0
Source 8: The Bible Reader's Companion By Lawrence O. Richards, Chariot Victor Publishing, Wheaton Illinois, 1991, ISBN: 0-89693-039-4
Source 9: Man and Woman in Biblical Perspective by James B. Hurley, Academie Books, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids Michigan, 1981, ISBN: 0-310-42731-2
Source 10: Manners and Customs of the Bible , By James M. Freeman, Whitaker House, New Kensington, PA, 1996, ISBN: 0-88368-290-7
Source 11: Archaeology and Bible History , By Joseph P. Free, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1992, ISBN: 0-310-47961-4
Source 12: 30 Days to Understanding The Bible , By Max Anders, Word Publishing, Dallas, 1994, ISBN: 0-8499-3489-3
Source 13: Illustrated Dictionary of Bible Life and Times , Barbara J. Morgan, Editor, Reader's Digest, The Reader's Digest Association, Inc. Pleasantville, NY, 1997, 0-89577-987-0
Source 14: Women in Leadership By Bob Briner with Lawrence Kimbrough, Holman Reference, Nashville, Tennessee, 1999, ISBN: 0-8054-9193-7
Source 15: Illustrated Dictionary of the Bible , By Herbert Lockyer, Sr., Editor, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1986, ISBN: 0-7852-1230-2
Source 16: Holman Bible Atlas , Holman Reference, Nashville, Tennessee, 1998, ISBN: 1-55819-709-5
Source 17: Women of the New Testament , by Abraham Kuyper, Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1934
Source 18: Really Bad Girls of the Bible , By Liz Curtis Higgs, Waterbrook Press, Colorado Springs, 2000, ISBN: 1-57856-394-1
Source 19: Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs , By Howard F. Vos, Thomas Nelson Publishers, Nashville, 1999, ISBN: 0-7852-1194-2
Source 20: Warrior Dancer Seductress Queen , By Susan Ackerman, Doubleday, New York, 1998, ISBN 0-385-48424-0 SCL: 222ACK
Source 21: Atlas of Ancient Archaeology , Jacquetta Hawkes, McGraw-Hill Book Company, New York, 1974, ISBN: 0-07-027293-X. SCL: Q 921.1 H
Source 22: Battles of the Bible , By Chaim Herzog and Moedechai Gichon, Random House, New York, 1978, ISBN: 394-50131-4 SCL: 220.95 H
Source 23: Everyday Life in Bible Times : By Arthur W. Klinck and Erich H. Kiehl, Concordia Publishing House, St. Louis, MO, 1995, ISBN: 0-570-01543-X
Source 24: Discovering the Biblical World , By Harry Thomas Frank, Harper & Row, Publishers, New York, Hammond Inc., Maplewood, New Jersey, 1975, ISBN: 0-06-063014-0 SCL: Q220.95 F
Source 25: Oxford Bible Atlas , Edited by Herbert G. May, Oxford University Press, New York, 1974, ISBN: 0-19-211556 SCL: 220.0 May
Source 26: The Thompson Chain-Reference Bible , NAS, Frank Charles Thompson, D.D., Ph.D., B.B. Kirkbride Bible Co., Inc. Indianapolis, In, 1993, ISBN:
Source 27: Social World of Ancient Israel 1250-587 BCE , By Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, Henrickson Publishers, Peabody, Massachusetts, 1993, ISBN: 0-913573-89-2
Source 28: Peoples of the Old Testament World , Edited by Alfred J. Hoerth, Gerald L. Mattingly, Edwin M. Yamauchi, The Lutterworth Press, Cambridge, Baker Books, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1994, ISBN: 0-7188-2988 3
Source 29: The Archaeology of Ancient Israel , Edited by Amnon Ben-Tor, Yale University Press, The Open University of Israel, New Haven and London, 1992, ISBN: 0-300-04768-1 SCL 933 ARC
Source 30: Women in Leadership , By Bob Briner and Lawrence Kimbrough, Holman Reference, Nashville, Tennessee, 1999, ISBN: 0-8054-9193-7
Source 31. Matthew Henry's Commentary of the Whole Bible , By Matthew Henry, Sovereign Grace Publishers, Wilmington, DE, 1972,