

Who was Simon the Leper?

Simon was a very common name in New Testament times, and at least eight men bearing that name appear in the Bible. Simon Peter was one of our Lord's closest companions (Matthew 10:2), Simon the Zealot was another of Jesus' disciples (Luke 6:15), and Simon of Cyrene (Matthew 27:32) carried Christ's cross. Thus, "Simon the Leper" was a label given to distinguish this Simon from many others in the Bible.

Simon the Leper emerges in a brief but dramatic scene recorded in Matthew 26:6-13 and Mark 14:3-9. While Jesus was staying in Bethany, one night He and the disciples were invited for a meal at the home of Simon the Leper. As Jesus reclined at the dinner table, an unnamed woman came in, broke an expensive flask of perfume and poured the oil over the Lord's head, anointing Him in an extravagant act of worship. The disciples reacted with indignation at the woman's waste of valuable resources. But Jesus told them to leave the woman alone, "for she has done a beautiful thing to me" (Matthew 26:10, ESV). Her anointing was a fitting way to honor the Messiah-King and prepare Him for burial. This dinner at Simon the Leper's home took place about one week before Jesus was crucified.

Similar but distinct episodes are featured in Luke 7:36-50 and John 12:1-8. The event in Luke transpired at the home of a different Simon, "Simon the Pharisee," with a woman referred to as only "a sinner." The event in John happened on a different day and involved Mary of Bethany.

Exactly who was Simon the Leper? This is a question that has long intrigued Bible students and scholars. In an attempt to connect Simon the Leper with the anointing recorded in John 12, some suggest that Simon was the father of Martha, Mary, and Lazarus

or the husband of Martha. All we know for sure is that this Simon lived in Bethany and that he was (or had been) a leper. Almost assuredly, Simon the Leper was one of the hundreds of people whom Jesus had healed during His ministry.

In any case, Simon the Leper could not have been leprous at the time Jesus visited his home. According to Leviticus 13:46, lepers were considered unclean and “must live outside the camp.” They were to live alone and could not dwell inside the house. Anyone who attended a meal with a leper would have been considered unclean also. Thus, many scholars believe the Lord had healed this Simon of leprosy, and, in an act of gratitude, the cured man welcomed Jesus and the disciples into his home for a meal.