

Who Were the Disciples on the Road to Emmaus?

The answer to this question is not as uncertain as most people, who are accustomed to referring merely to the “Emmaus disciples,” are likely to assume. For one thing, the story itself gives the name of one of them.

If you turn to Luke 24:18, you will find that one of the disciples was called Cleopas. Moreover, if you will then use any good concordance of the words occurring in the New Testament and look up the word “Cleopas,” you will find a second mention of his name in another account of the Resurrection. The reference is John 19:25. There we read, “Now there stood by the cross of Jesus his mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.”

It is true that John spells the name a bit differently. But the spelling of names often varied in antiquity, and here the two names undoubtedly refer to the same person. Thus, we learn that the wife of Cleopas was also present in Jerusalem at the time of the Crucifixion. And we may, therefore, assume that she was the one returning to Emmaus with him on the morning of the Resurrection.

Moreover, I believe that we can know even more than this. For it seems clear to me that John has given us her name when he writes of “his [Jesus]’ mother, and his mother’s sister, Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene.” I must admit that because of the way John has written this verse it is not at once obvious whether John is identifying the first Mary he mentions as the sister of the virgin Mary or as the wife of Cleopas. But a little thought shows that the second of these should be preferred.

Why?

1. For one thing, John seems to be distinguishing between two different Marys in the second part of the verse—Mary, the wife of Cleopas, and Mary Magdalene. At least this is the most natural way of interpreting the sentence.

2. Second, if this is not the case, then either there is an unidentified Mary in the story (making five persons) or else there is a Mary who is the sister of the Virgin Mary.

The first case is unlikely in itself as well as unlike John’s literary style. And the second is unlikely simply because it would mean there were two sisters, both named Mary. These reasons seem to point to the wife of Cleopas being named Mary, a woman who (we are told elsewhere) was also the mother of James the less and Joses and who had been a follower of Jesus as well as a helper of Jesus and His immediate disciples (Mark 15:40, 41: cf. Mark 16:1 and Luke 24:10).

The whole of the argument means that, after His appearance to Mary Magdalene in the garden early in the morning, Jesus next appeared (not counting a private, unrecorded appearance to Peter) to a man and his wife, Cleopas and Mary, and this before He appeared to any of the so-called “regular” disciples.

Taken from “The Way to Emmaus” by Dr. James Boice

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