

# Introduction

## The Twelve Women of the Chalice

The idea of the number twelve as a symbol of spiritual fulfillment is as old as time. In the dawn of the New Thought movement in America, Mrs. Emma Curtis Hopkins, called the “Teacher of Teachers,” spoke of the twelve jewels of *High Mysticism*. Among her students, Mrs. Annie Rix Miltz, wrote of the twelve disciples as representing twelve spiritual faculties, and Charles Fillmore (Cofounder of the Unity Movement), wrote of the *Twelve Powers of Man*, likening the twelve disciples of Jesus Christ to twelve spiritual powers of humanity. In a movement of religious thought wherein women have always served and shone as co-equal partners in spirituality and in ministry with men, the time has arrived to acknowledge that there are also female representatives of the twelve powers of humanity to be found in the Bible, the basic Unity text.

Searching for a criterion for selecting these female representatives, we turn to the Gospels. Several women are named there, including Joanna and Susanna, who are mentioned as being among the women who helped support the ministry of Jesus (Luke 8:3). Also named in the Gospels is Herodias--the infamous wife of Herod, who instigated the beheading of John the Baptist. We also read about three women healed by Jesus, and Jairus' daughter whom He raised from the dead. Unnamed, but also noted, are the women of Canaan and Samaria, the poor widow who placed two small coins in the Temple treasury, and Pilate's wife.

We also read of the woman with the alabaster jar at the house of Simon. She is not named in the Gospels of Matthew and Mark, and is identified in Luke only as a “sinful woman” at the Pharisee’s house. (In John, it is Mary of Bethany who anoints the feet of Jesus with costly perfume and dries His feet with her hair. There does not appear to be any scriptural basis for identifying Mary of Bethany as the same woman as Mary Magdalene, nor for identifying Mary of Bethany or Mary Magdalene as sinful women; there is no biblical account of Mary Magdalene ever having anointed Jesus).

Seeking criteria for twelve female representatives of the spiritual powers of humanity, we can begin with the first book of the New Testament. There, in the genealogy of Jesus as recorded in the Book of Matthew, we find the names of four women: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and, of course, Mary of Nazareth. Although Bathsheba is not personally named here, she is referred to in the “family tree” as King Solomon’s mother, so we count her among the five women noted in Jesus’ genealogy.

Four “great grandmothers” of Jesus are mentioned in all the generations leading to the birth of Jesus by Mary of Nazareth: 1.) Tamar, 2.) Ruth, 3.) Rahab, 4.) Bathsheba, and 5.) Mary of Nazareth.

A careful search of the Gospels reveals three women *named* in the gospels as being blood relatives either of Jesus or of at least one of the disciples: 6.) Elizabeth (cousin to Mary of Nazareth); 7.) “the other Mary”--sometimes noted as the sister of Mary of Nazareth--the mother of James, who was the son of Alphaeus (who is also identified by tradition as Clopas); 8.) and Salomé (the wife of Zebedee, mother of James and John).

The remaining four women were selected as representatives of spiritual faculties because they were *named* in the Gospels, and their *conversations* with and concerning Jesus, in His presence, express their acknowledgment of Him as their spiritual Teacher. These women walked with Him and talked with Him. Along with the twelve disciples, they could be called the first women “ministers” of The Way. Anna the Prophetess blessed the infant Jesus when He was brought to the Temple by His mother and Joseph, and declared His spiritual mission. Martha welcomed Jesus to her home as honored guest, friend, and Teacher. Her sister, Mary of Bethany, sat at His feet, anointed His feet, and dried them with her tears. Mary Magdalene was the first to greet Jesus after He had risen, and was the first minister commissioned to deliver the announcement of the Resurrection. Without these four women, no account of the ministry of Jesus would be complete: 9.) Anna, the Prophetess; 10.) Martha of Bethany; 11.) Mary of Bethany; 12.) Mary Magdalene.

The complete pattern is: I.) five women noted in the genealogy of Jesus in the Book of Matthew; II.) three women named as relatives of Jesus and/or His disciples; and III.) four other female followers named, who declared the spiritual leadership of Jesus Christ in His presence. The total is twelve--a number symbolic of spiritual fulfillment.

Following logic and spiritual intuition (as did Charles Fillmore), we align each of these women to a spiritual faculty, taking into prayerful consideration the meanings of each woman’s name, her relationship to the disciple who was chosen to represent that faculty in Charles Fillmore’s writings, and her own integral involvement in the ministry of Jesus, as revealed by the Bible account.

The result is a teaching model of twelve spiritual faculties of the Christ nature, intuitively revealed through twelve women of power connected to Jesus Christ in the Gospel story. The idea of taking the “cup” of Christ indicates willingness to follow the Christ and to be a vessel to the holy purpose of the Christ. The women who expressed this willingness are called the Twelve Women of the Chalice.

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### **A note about women of the Old Testament connected to the twelve sons of Jacob . . . .**

Rachel, wife of the patriarch Jacob, is also mentioned in the Gospels. A set of twelve representatives of the Divine Feminine could be drawn from the Old Testament to align with the twelve sons of Jacob, who had been mentioned as forerunners of the disciples in the writings of Charles Fillmore (*Christian Healing*, pp. 72-6). The list would include the following: I.) the wives of the four patriarchs; II.) the four mothers of the sons of Jacob, and III.) the four women who were also noted in the New Testament as predecessors of Jesus: Tamar, Rahab, Ruth, and Bathsheba. They might be seen as representing the twelve spiritual faculties of humanity in this way: Sarah (faith), Rebekah (love), Rachel (understanding), Leah (will), Bilhah (order), Zilpah (discernment or judgment), Asenath (imagination), Jochebed (power), and, as in the model outlined above, Tamar (strength), Ruth (zeal), Rahab (life), and Bathsheba (as a replacement of Dinah--the only daughter of Jacob, who, like Bathsheba, was abducted and suffered loss--representing release or renunciation). Refinement of this proposed exegesis concerning these twelve women and the twelve sons of Jacob promises to be an interesting forthcoming project.