



Mary of Nazareth: A Novel

By Marek Halter

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The ancient world through the eyes of a young Jewish woman—Mary of Nazareth.

Mary was born into a Palestine oppressed by Herod the Great; she is accustomed to living with uncertainty and unrest. But when her beloved father is wrongly imprisoned by the Romans, she takes action. She calls upon a well-known rebel by the name of Barabbas, and together they set out to save her father. A daring escape is planned. And against staggering odds, Mary's father is saved from crucifixion.

Barabbas—flush with his success—is intent on leading a full-scale rebellion against Herod and the Romans. But as he speaks before Jewish leaders, Mary feels great frustration as the men endlessly debate morality, rebellion, and God's will. She has almost lost her father, but she is nevertheless compelled to speak out against violence.

To her surprise, one man listens: Joseph. He makes Mary an offer that will change her life—and the history of the Jewish people—forever.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Halter, author of biblically-inspired novels such as *Zipporah*, *Wife of Moses* and *Sarah*, imagines the childhood and tumultuous young adulthood of Miriam (Mary) of Nazareth, mother of Jesus. Her loving parents Joachim and Hannah want to protect their daughter, but violence surrounds them as Herod's egregious taxation sparks Jewish insurrection. Miriam befriends a young revolutionary named Barabbas (yes, the same seditious Barabbas to be released more than three decades later instead of Jesus), and her world is upended by political uncertainty. In Halter's hands, Miriam is equal parts brazen temerity and quiet holiness, her deep courage an example to those who would submit to injustice, her scholarship unusual among women and her skill at healing remarkable. The novel offers brisk pacing and a good deal of adventure. Along the way, readers will learn a great deal of the ascetic Essene sect and the traditions and practices of first-century Judaism. And the novel's climax—the famous Annunciation—happens not out of the blue, but because a determined Miriam asks Yahweh to bring the Messiah and is blessed. In Halter's hands, Mary is not a passive receptacle of divine grace, but an active agent in changing the world.

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From [Booklist](#)

Halter, whose Canaan Trilogy dramatized the lives of Old Testament women Sarah, Zipporah, and Lilah, moves into New Testament territory with this novel about Mary. Although he always makes his characters his own, he takes Mary in a direction that borders on alternative history. This Mary is a feisty young woman, educated (she was schooled with the slightly younger Mary Magdalene) and so bold that she, along with her friend, the rebel Barabbas, stages a plot to remove her father from the Romans' cross. Disgusted watching men like her father, Joseph, as well as Nicodemus and Barabbas, debate ways to topple the Romans, she wills herself to become the vessel for a savior. The story seems to end with the birth of Jesus, but then Halter adds a curious epilogue in which he claims to have received a Gospel of Mary from a mysterious Righteous Gentile. The text of the purported gospel continues the story, telling of an unwilling Jesus and an overbearing Mary. This odd device doesn't quite work, but, nevertheless, the novel is an engaging and thought-provoking addition to the growing body of historical fiction on biblical women. --Ilene Cooper

Review

"[In *Mary of Nazareth*] Halter has created a memorable and appealing heroine."

—*Historical Novels Review*

"A worthy heiress to Anita Diamant's bestseller *The Red Tent*, [*Sarah* is] an entertaining read, with a heroine who uses both her brain and her femininity to astonishing effect."

—*Atlanta Journal-Constitution*

"A brilliant achievement: packed with drama and suspense, powerfully engaging and thought-provoking. This is Halter at his best—by offering his own intriguing interpretation of Mary's life, he builds bridges across the millennia and across different faiths and cultures."

—Eva Etzioni-Halevy, author of *The Song of Hannah* and *The Garden of Ruth*

"How much can a mother influence the path that her child chooses? Halter provides a dazzling new look at the most famous mother of them all—in the important years before motherhood. In the midst of the political turmoil of first-century Palestine, Mary shines forth as an advocate for liberation through peaceful means. Like the great biblical heroines before her, she is a woman of faith, courage, and action. *Mary of Nazareth*

will inspire women of all faiths who yearn for peace and freedom.”

—Rebecca Kohn, author of *The Gilded Chamber: A Novel of Queen Esther*

“By giving a voice to Mary of Nazareth, Merek Halter resurrects one of the most fascinating women in history. A story as richly imagined as it is illuminating.”

—Michelle Moran, national bestselling author of *Nefertiti*

From the Hardcover edition.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Robert Hester:

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