

The Truth about Mary Magdalene

Intro: One Biblical character that seems to be getting a lot of attention these days is Mary Magdalene. Part of the attention is due to the great success of Dan Brown's best-selling fiction work, "The Da Vinci Code," which suggests the idea that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were married and actually had a child named Sarah from whom came a line of Merovingian kings. This view even suggests that Jesus intended for Mary Magdalene to be his "successor"; but his intentions were thwarted by the "male dominated" church. As strange as that may seem to you, the idea is growing in popularity due to the influence of Brown's book and a number of liberal theologians around the country who are enamored of some heretical Gnostic gospels discovered a few years ago.

Feminist theologians have long pointed to Mary Magdalene as proof that women should occupy public roles of leadership and teaching like those of men. So now the two join forces in affirming the importance of Mary Magdalene, affirming that she has been unduly slandered by "the church" and that she was Christianity's version of the "sacred feminine" and "apostle" of the church.

So it might be helpful to see what the Gospels really say about Mary Magdalene.

What Can We Know about Mary Magdalene?

Her Name, Mary Magdalene

Mary Magdalene is so-designated in Scripture to distinguish her from at least five other Mary's in the Biblical narrative including of course Mary the mother of Jesus.

To prevent confusion people were often identified either by their surname or by their city. This Mary hailed from a small town on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee called "Magdala". Thus she is commonly called Mary Magdalene.

Devoted Follower and Supporter of Jesus

Mary Magdalene is first mentioned in Scripture toward the end of Jesus' ministry. She was listed by Luke as among those who traveled with Jesus.

And it came about soon afterwards, that He began going about from one city and village to another, proclaiming and preaching the kingdom of God; and the twelve were with Him, and also some women who had been healed of evil spirits and sicknesses: Mary who was called Magdalene, from whom seven demons had gone out; and Joanna the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others who were contributing to their support out of their private means. (Luke 8:1-3)

The Lord had cast out seven demons out of her and she apparently in appreciation had devoted herself to the Lord's service by traveling with him and helping to support the teaching ministry of Jesus and the apostles (Lk. 8:1-3; Mt. 27:55).

And many women were there looking on from a distance, who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, (Matthew 27:55) Mary Magdalene's devotion to Jesus is further seen in following him to the cross along with Jesus' mother (Mk. 15:40).

And there were also some women looking on from a distance, among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the Less and Joses, and Salome. (Mark 15:40)

In addition the two of them are said to have noted where Jesus was buried (Mk. 15:47).

And Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses were looking on to see where He was laid. (Mark 15:47)

Mary was among the women who came on the first day of the week to anoint the body of Jesus (Mt. 28:1; Mk. 16:1).

Now after the Sabbath, as it began to dawn toward the first day of the week, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to look at the grave. (Matthew 28:1)

Seeing the tomb empty she left to report what she had seen to the apostles (Jn. 20:2), thinking that Jesus' body had been removed by someone.

And so she *ran and *came to Simon Peter, and to the other disciple whom Jesus loved, and *said to them, "They have taken away the Lord out of the tomb, and we do not know where they have laid Him." (John 20:2)

Mary's first thoughts were like everyone else's. Who expected Jesus to rise from the dead? She could only think of the other possibility—someone had come and removed his body. Notice then that you cannot explain Jesus' resurrection as hallucination that grows out of expectation! Neither the apostles or Mary expected to see Jesus alive again! But by God's favor, Mary was given the opportunity to be a witness of the resurrection.

Witness of the Resurrection

Apparently upon returning to the tomb Mary goes back to hunt for Jesus. It is a touching story (Jn. 20:11-18).

Mary's testimony gives the Gospels special evidential value. Every person of the first century knew that women were not allowed to be witnesses in courts. If someone were to fabricate a story about Jesus' resurrection, they would not have chosen women to report the resurrection! The fact that they are witnesses is evidence that the reports are factual!

Unfounded statements and conclusions about Mary Magdalene

There is no evidence that Mary was the sinful woman of Lk. 7:36-50. That idea originated with Pope Gregory in the 6th century and has been "corrected" by later Roman Catholic scholars.

There is no evidence that Jesus and Mary were married or had a child together as is suggested in the Da Vinci Code. That idea originated from

false inferences from the apocryphal Gnostic gospel called “the Gospel of Phillip” and from an ancient European legend that the Merovingian kings were descended from a child of Jesus and Mary Magdalene.

There is not evidence to suggest that Jesus intended for Jesus to be his “successor” and that such was thwarted by dominance of males in the early church. From the beginning it is clear that Jesus intended to give rulership of the kingdom to the twelve apostles He had chosen.

There is no evidence to suggest that because Jesus appeared to Mary and urged her to report to the apostles that He was alive that women should be “priests” or preachers.

Conclusion: There is an irony about Mary Magdalene. The most important thing we should learn from her people seem to be ignoring. She was devoted disciple who loved the Lord with all her heart, took him at his word, served Him faithfully, and did exactly what He asked of her. If only those who wanted to make Mary Magdalene a hero would do that!