

Mary Magdalene



Magdala, in Galilee

Magdala, in Galilee, was located on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee at the foot of Mt. Arbel. About an hour's walk from Tiberias to the south and on the road from Nazareth to Capernaum, Jesus was probably familiar with the town. Excavations in 2009 found a synagogue dating to the time of Jesus! It is the only synagogue dating specifically to the time of Jesus that has been uncovered in Galilee. There is no record of His having taught there, but it yields much information to us about His time in Galilee. The synagogue was the hub around which Jewish life revolved. It could hold about 200 people with bench seating around the sides and the famous Torah Stone was also discovered, revealing many symbols of Jewish religious life. The synagogue would have been a place for reading the scriptures, teaching, discussion, and collection of Temple taxes for Jerusalem.



<https://biblearchaeology.com/2016/04/25/the-jesus-boat/>

<https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/ancient-cultures/ancient-israel/the-magdala-stone/>

Magdala is Aramaic for **tower**, and in Greek is called Taricheae. It was a busy, prosperous town dedicated to the fish processing industry. According to historians, Magdala had a population of 30,000 – 40,000 people and was a major city.

We tend to picture Jesus traveling about with only the twelve men disciples, but what does Luke 8:3 tell us? Why might Jesus have needed both men and women in His ministry?

It is not by accident that Mary Magdalene is almost always mentioned **first** in a list of names. In biblical terms, the order of names is the order of importance and prominence. Women traveled with Jesus throughout His ministry. They were **not** the foundation of the ministry – Jesus **called** the disciples – but the women supported Jesus. A look at the various translations gives us a better idea of this support.

We are introduced to Mary Magdalene as part of the description of Christ's ministry. She is one of the best-known and least-understood people of the Bible. Most Bible translations read "Mary Magdalene," although the Greek actually reads "the Magdalen, Mary" or "Mary, called Magdalene". "Magdalene" is thought to indicate that she is from Magdala; it is not her last name. It would be like saying "Dixie Austinite" ... ha! *Try saying your first name and hometown!* Mary was the most popular female name at the time of Jesus and is the Greek form of the Hebrew name Miriam or Mariamme and means 'wise woman'. She has been misunderstood and falsely portrayed, thanks to Pope Gregory, as a prostitute, based on the episode just prior in Luke 7. The Catholic church finally corrected the issue in 1969, but the false picture continues in books, art, and movies.

How should Christians handle media falsely portraying Christians and Christianity?

As we begin to study Mary Magdalene, we need to keep in mind that every detail of the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus was planned by God to fulfill prophecies and bring redemption to mankind. So, we pay special attention to the **first person to witness the resurrection**: surprising because it was a woman, heartbreaking because of her past, not based on human reasoning, but on the eternal wisdom of Almighty God.

Luke 8:1 says "After this" which refers to Jesus' baptism, forty days temptation by Satan in the wilderness, a startling announcement of Messiahship in Nazareth, healings, calling the disciples, preaching the Beatitudes and many miracles! The disciples had hardly time to draw breath between miracles! All of this happened as a background to Jesus' focus of **proclaiming the good news of the kingdom of God!**

The women ministered, provided, supported, contributed out of their substance, private means, possessions, personal resources. *Think for a moment what those women did for three years – always in the background, but eyewitnesses to all of Jesus’ ministry, healings, and teachings! What an incredible story they will tell us one day! Mary Magdalene is both a follower and a leader!* It is even more amazing when we consider the status of women in society and culture at that time. It is speculated that Mary was a widow and had no children, otherwise she would not have been able to use her resources for Jesus. Luke 8:2 tells us of the women who were healed of evil spirits and disabilities. The Greek word for disabilities is *astheneia* and means illness, disability, weakness. Other translations all say evil spirits and mention specifically seven demons. There can be no doubt that Mary had some problems! Spurgeon notes that while Mary Magdalene was possessed with seven demons, it is an affliction, not a crime! We are never told that she is a sinner – there is never a word against her personal character! The Greek for evil spirits is *ta pneumata* (you can see the familiar root word -pneuma) – depicting creatures from the spirit world. We may be uncomfortable talking about demons, but to understand Mary Magdalene, we need to know her background.

Jesus Himself called them “demons” and “evil spirits” – see Matthew 17:18, Mark 1:39, 3:15, and Luke 4:33, 11:14 -- and the demons spoke back to Jesus! See Luke 4:41. *How did Jesus know the demons? It is a spirit world thing. Demons in the presence of Christ are powerless to do anything but acknowledge Him for who He is – the Son of God!* Jesus rebuked the demons (other versions say “cut them short” or even “shut them up”) with simple and direct commands from His Word – His irrefutable, spoken Word! *Many Bible teachers and scholars comment that while Jesus was on earth, demonic activity greatly increased. It was another form of testing by Satan, a public challenge to His authority!* Read Luke 11:24-26. Some teachers think that Jesus may have been referring to Mary Magdalene. Perhaps she had tried various reforms and works to cure herself, only making the problem worse. Whatever the case, Mary Magdalene owed Jesus her very life!

The other women mentioned are Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod’s household manager. You remember Herod Antipas – he is the king whose wife Herodias requested the head of John the Baptist – lovely people! Susanna is unknown to us, and other women mentioned are Mary the wife of Cleopas (said by historians to be the brother of Jesus’ earthly father, Joseph), Salome (sister of Mary, mother of Jesus), and others. Their heavenly heritage is providing and caring for the needs of Jesus and His disciples.

Remember the story of Jesus driving the demons into the herd of pigs in Mark 5:13.

What do you call demon-possessed pigs? **DEVILED HAM** 😊

At the Cross [Matthew 27:55-56](#), [Mark 15:40](#), [Luke 23:49](#), [John 19:25](#)

What brought the women to the cross? Think of what they saw, heard, and felt.

All four gospels make mention of the women at the cross, each giving us a slightly different perspective on who was there. It seems to have been a large number of people to witness the crucifixion, and all of them had a different reason for being there.

The women named were Mary Magdalene, Mary wife of Cleopas and mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome the sister to Mary (mother of Jesus) wife of Zebedee (mother of James and John). The women who had accompanied Jesus could not bear to watch but could not bear to leave. Matthew, Mark, and Luke note that the women watched from a distance. Roman soldiers were probably the closest to Jesus to maintain order and assure that the punishment was carried out. You remember that the soldiers threw dice for His robes. John gives us the additional information that the women were standing beside the cross and were close enough to hear Jesus' words to John about caring for His mother, Mary. The hours of darkness must have been particularly difficult to endure! *Nowhere are the disciples mentioned, other than John. Where were they?* The Gospel of Matthew was written for the Jews and Jews did not regard women as reliable witnesses for any legal matter. It is therefore the more amazing that Matthew included so much detail. Scholars think it is to make a bridge between the Cross, the Burial, and the Resurrection, because Mary Magdalene was at all three places.

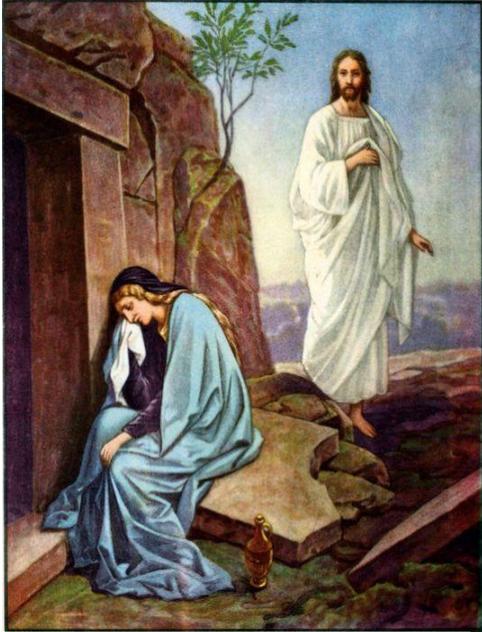
Matthew	Mark	Luke	John
Women at the cross			
many women ... who had followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to him, among whom were Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of James and Joseph and the mother of the sons of Zebedee 27:55-56	women ... among whom were Mary Magdalene, and Mary the mother of James the younger and of Joses, and Salome 15:40	the women who had followed him from Galilee 23:49	his mother and his mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene 19:25

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_at_the_crucifixion



The Romans did not permit mourning at the burials of criminals and left the bodies for the vultures. However, Jewish law forbade leaving a dead body to remain overnight and criminals would be buried in a common grave. **All four gospels record Joseph of Arimathea** asking for and retrieving the body of Jesus for burial. He was given this permission probably due to his prominent position in the Sanhedrin, the Jewish ruling assembly of rabbis or elders in the Temple. When Joseph went to Pilate, the ruler was surprised that Jesus was already dead!

Typically, someone suffering crucifixion would linger for hours, or even days. A Roman Centurion confirmed the death and Joseph could take the body. This takes place on Friday, late afternoon. The Sabbath began at sundown, so Joseph and Nicodemus were pressed for time. Matthew only mentions that a **rich** disciple received the body of Jesus. Scholars think this is to link Joseph to an OT prophecy. *Read [Isaiah 53:9](#) and think how this prophecy was fulfilled!* John gives the further information that **Nicodemus** brought a mixture of myrrh and aloes for anointing the body – **75 pounds**, enough for a royal burial! Joseph and Nicodemus brought Jesus to a new, unused garden tomb. Many scholars point out that these tombs were reserved for royalty, the Jewish kings. Mark adds that Mary Magdalene and Mary, the mother of Jesus followed secretly and “observed where He was laid”. *The details of the burial were given much importance in all the gospels and in the preaching of the early church to connect the death of Jesus with His Resurrection.* The men quickly prepared the body of Jesus with linen and spices. The Greek word for linen is **sendon** and specifically meant clean, expensive (new, never used) cloth. Matthew mentions Mary Magdalene and the other Mary sitting opposite to the tomb. As soon as the Sabbath was over, the women would come back and anoint the body with more spices. Mark adds that the women purchased more spices at the end of the Sabbath day. *How did the women think they would get past the Roman guards posted at the tomb, or roll the heavy stone away to enter? What emotions must they have endured during the waiting time, a whole long Sabbath Saturday! Anointing a body for burial was the responsibility of the deceased person’s family. I can only surmise that even if Mary Magdalene had any family, she now considered Jesus to be her family.*



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The Resurrection is central to our Christian belief and theology, but the Gospel writers did not deal with theology – they simply recorded the facts! We often know the name of the first person to do something amazing: the first person on the moon, the first person to climb Mt. Everest, the first person to see Jesus!

Why is it significant that Mary Magdalene is the first person to see the Resurrected Jesus?

Who would you have chosen to be the first person to see Jesus?

A timeline will help us keep the events of that Resurrection Day in order.

- **4:30 – 5:00 a.m.**
 - *Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome go to the tomb - [Luke 23:55-24:1](#)*
 - *The women find the stone rolled away – [Luke 24:2-9](#)*
 - *Mary Magdalene goes to tell the disciples – [John 20:1-2](#)*
 - *Mary the mother of James, draws near and sees the angel – [Matthew 28:1-2](#)*
 - *She goes back to meet the other women following with spices*
- **5:00 – 5:30 a.m.**
 - *Peter and John arrive, look in the tomb and depart – [John 20:3-10](#)*
- **6:00 – 8:00 a.m.**
 - *Mary Magdalene returns weeping, sees two angels and then Jesus! - [John 20:11-18](#)*
 - *The risen Christ tells Mary Magdalene to “Go, Tell the disciples!” – [John 20:17-18](#)*
 - *Mary the mother of James returns with the other women, who then see the two angels and hear the angel’s message – [Luke 24:1-5](#), [Mark 16:5](#), [Matthew 28:6-10](#)*

Angels were the link between the actual event of the Resurrection and the women because human eyes were not permitted to see the Resurrection itself. The angels were a reflection, like a mirror, to the women of the Resurrection. *Who did and who did not see the angels? Don't you think that is interesting! The presence and position of the two angels in the tomb reflect the cherubim of the Mercy Seat on the Ark of the Covenant, Exodus 25:17-19.*

The angels asked Mary Magdalene “why weepest thou?” Jesus asked her the **same question**. *Why did they ask?* The Greek word for weepest is *klaio* and means to cry, wail, lament, a loud expression of pain or sorrow. In other words, Mary Magdalene was having a big fit of UGLY CRYING! *Did you notice that Mary Magdalene responded to the angels as if they were just ordinary men?* The angel invited Mary Magdalene and the women to “come and see” then, “go quickly and tell”. The Greek word for tell is *apostellein* – we can see the root word *apostle*. Mary Magdalene is often called the **Apostle to the Apostles!**

Jesus had clearly explained about His death and resurrection, so why didn't everyone understand or believe the empty tomb? Why do people not understand even today?

The angels also reminded the women of Jesus' words, that Jesus had predicted His death and resurrection, meaning that the women knew the teaching as well as the disciples. Mark simply refers to a young man in a white robe and he uses the term “Sabbath day” instead of saying the third day.

Although the empty tomb, even though impressive and important, was not sufficient evidence for the Resurrection. Why not? Only eyewitness testimony of seeing Jesus alive is reliable evidence and Mary Magdalene was that first eyewitness! How did she handle her important task to go and tell the disciples?

Scripture says the women went with “fear and great joy”, “terrified and ecstatic”, “deep in wonder and full of joy.” But how did the disciples respond? The words of the women “appeared as nonsense”, seemed to them as idle tales”, “didn't believe a word of it”. *Are you as exasperated with the disciples as I am?*

There is one more point I would like for you to see. Beth Moore said that when the feet of Jesus are mentioned, something miraculous is about to happen! Matthew 28:9 says that Mary Magdalene and the women held on to the feet of Jesus and worshipped Him.

Do your own search into the scriptures that mention the feet of Jesus and you will be amazed and blessed at what you learn.

After the Resurrection, we have a new relationship with the Holy Spirit, we have new relatives with brothers and sisters in Christ and we have a new responsibility to tell someone about Jesus. I hope you have enjoyed learning about Mary Magdalene.