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Mary Magdalene Apostle to the Apostles?

By

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Introduction

Mary Magdalene is one of most-mentioned names of women in the New Testament. The woman mentioned the most often was Mary, the mother of Jesus. Even as much false teaching arose concerning the Lord's mother, so it has with Mary Magdalene.

The false teaching I refer to concerning Mary of Magdalene is that Jesus called her to be the first woman apostle and an "apostle to the apostles." It is true that the resurrected Jesus told Mary to give the apostles a specific message about His ascending to God the Father, but does that make Mary Magdalene the first woman apostle and an "apostle to the apostles?"

Let's see if it does.

Why Ask?

You might wonder why I bother asking if Mary Magdalene was an “apostle to the apostles?” What does it matter, really?

The first reason is because of what the Apostle Paul wrote about being an apostle:

Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone, in whom the whole building, being fitted together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit. Ephesians 2:19-22

The Church was built on the foundation of the **apostles and prophets** with Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. This building, the Church, the household of God, “goes into a holy temple in the Lord, in whom you also are being built together for a dwelling place of God in the Spirit.” The “apostles” are listed with the “prophets” as being the foundation upon which the Church is built. Jesus Christ is the “cornerstone,” the massive foundation undergirding the foundation.

We also know the “twelve apostles” had a very special place in the Lord’s earthly ministry based on His private meetings with them prior to His death, His special commissioning of them after His resurrection, and how the “eleven” apostles chose a twelfth apostle between the defection and death of Judas Iscariot and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It was necessary that there be “twelve” apostles, as we see explained for us in Revelation 21 concerning the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven from God, “prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.”

Now the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and on them were the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

Revelation 21:14

Notice that the word “foundations” is used for the twelve apostles of Christ even as Paul wrote about the apostles being the “foundation” of the Church. The same Greek word is used in both places (*themelios* – belonging to a foundation).

Another reason for asking whether Mary Magdalene was the first woman apostle and an “apostle to the apostles” is because Pope Francis officially elevated her to that position several years ago, declaring a feast day for Mary Magdalene similar to the feast days for the Twelve Apostles. July 22nd was the annual liturgical memorial of “St. Mary Magdalene” and became the official feast day in 2016. Pope Francis was following an ancient designation concerning Mary Magdalene. Thomas Aquinas called her “an apostle to the apostles” in his *Lectura super Ioannis* written during the 13th century AD.

Another reason to ask is because of how many ancient false teachings there are about Mary Magdalene. She was the focus of many gnostic writings in the 2nd century, including the *Gospel of Mary*. That has led to 21st century writings about Mary Magdalene including *The Gospel of Mary of Magdala: Jesus and the First Woman Apostle* (2003) and *Mary Magdalene, The First Apostle: The Struggle for Authority* (2003). The gnostics believed they had secret knowledge about Jesus and that is what we find in the *Gospel of Mary*. According to the ancient writing, Mary knew things about Jesus' Gospel that other apostles did not. The *Gospel of Mary* presents Peter and Andrew as objecting to her teaching. Mary taught them according to secret knowledge she said Jesus had given her in a vision. If that was true, it would mean that the New Testament is lacking information we need to know the full and true Gospel of Jesus Christ. It also would mean that Peter was mistaken in some of what he taught and wrote as an apostle because he lacked the secret knowledge that Mary Magdalene possessed.

So, what's the truth about Mary Magdalene? Who was she, really?

The Real Mary Magdalene

We first meet the real Mary Magdalene in Luke's Gospel.

... and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities—Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons. Luke 8:2

The term “Mary called Magdalene” probably means she was from an area of Galilee known as Magdala. The ancient archaeological site is located near the western part of the Sea of Galilee near the modern town of Migdal, Israel. Magdala was located about 23 miles northeast of Nazareth.

The context of Luke 8 is Jesus was traveling with the “twelve,” as He did most every day after selecting them.

He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him. Luke 8:1

The “twelve” were known as “apostles” (e.g. Matthew 10:2; Luke 6:13; 22:14; Revelation 21:14). The word “apostle” is a transliteration of the Greek word *apostolos* (masculine noun – messenger, one sent on a mission, one sent with a commission, commissioned envoy, representative). The word comes from the verb *apostelló* which means “to send.” We know the “twelve” had a very special place in the Lord’s earthly ministry based on His private meetings with them, His special commissioning of them and how then “eleven” apostles chose a twelfth apostle between the defection and death of Judas Iscariot and the coming of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.

Mary Magdalene was one of many women who provided for the personal needs of Jesus “from their substance” (Luke 8:3). Mary is mentioned as having had seven demons cast out of her. She, along with Joanna the wife of Chuza (Herod’s steward), Susanna and many other women believed in Jesus and supported Him from their personal wealth. Keep in mind that thousands of people followed Jesus in the early days of His earthly ministry. His teachings, healings and miracles caught the attention of masses of people who loved Him, along with the Jewish leaders of the day who despised Him.

The next time Mary Magdalene is mentioned by name is when she is standing with other women as Jesus was being crucified.

And many women who followed Jesus from Galilee, ministering to Him, were there looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joses, and the mother of Zebedee’s sons. Matthew 27:55-56

We know from these verses that “many” female followers of Jesus from Galilee were standing near the cross of Christ. We don’t know how many, but the Gospel writers give us some of the names.

There were also women looking on from afar, among whom were Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the Less and of Joses, and Salome, who also followed Him and ministered to Him when He was in Galilee, and many other women who came up with Him to Jerusalem.

Mark 15:40-41

We also learn from John’s Gospel that the mother of Jesus was also standing near the cross with Mary Magdalene and the other women.

Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus therefore saw His mother, and the disciple whom He loved standing by, He said to His mother, ‘Woman, behold your son!’ John 19:25-26

We know from Mark 15:47 that Mary Magdalene and Mary the mother of Joses saw where the body of Jesus was buried. Matthew also wrote about that event.

When Joseph had taken the body, he wrapped it in a clean linen cloth, and laid it in his new tomb which he had hewn out of the rock; and he rolled a large stone against the door of the tomb, and departed. And Mary Magdalene was there, and the other Mary, sitting opposite the tomb. Matthew 27:59-61

The next time we see Mary Magdalene is when she and other women from Galilee went to Jesus' tomb to anoint His body with spices. What they found at the tomb surprised them.

Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him. Very early in the morning, on the first day of the week, they came to the tomb when the sun had risen. And they said among

themselves, 'Who will roll away the stone from the door of the tomb for us?' But when they looked up, they saw that the stone had been rolled away—for it was very large. And entering the tomb, they saw a young man clothed in a long white robe sitting on the right side; and they were alarmed. But he said to them, 'Do not be alarmed. You seek Jesus of Nazareth, who was crucified. He is risen! He is not here. See the place where they laid Him. But go, tell His disciples—and Peter—that He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him, as He said to you.' Mark 16:1-7

We see from Mark's Gospel that one of the angels at the tomb told "them" (the women) to go and tell the disciples, with an emphasis on telling Peter, that Jesus was alive and would see them in Galilee. We see the same thing in Matthew's Gospel account.

Now after the Sabbath, as the first day of the week began to dawn, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary came to see the tomb. And behold, there was a great earthquake; for an angel of the Lord descended from heaven, and came and rolled back the stone from the door, and sat on it. His countenance was like lightning, and his clothing as white as snow. And the guards shook for fear of him, and became like dead men. But the angel answered and said to the women, 'Do not be afraid, for I know that you seek Jesus who was crucified. He is not here; for He is risen, as He said. Come, see the place where the Lord lay. And go quickly and tell His disciples that He is risen from the dead, and indeed He is going before you into Galilee; there you will see Him. Behold, I have told you. So they went out quickly from the tomb with fear and great joy, and ran to bring His disciples word. Matthew 28:1-8

The angel spoke with the “women” and told them to go quickly and tell the disciples that Jesus was alive and would meet them in Galilee.

Luke's Gospel specifies which women told the "apostles" about the resurrection of Jesus.

Now on the first day of the week, very early in the morning, they, and certain other women with them, came to the tomb bringing the spices which they had prepared. But they found the stone rolled away from the tomb. Then they went in and did not find the body of the Lord Jesus. And it happened, as they were greatly perplexed about this, that behold, two men stood by them in shining garments. Then, as they were afraid and bowed their faces to the earth, they said to them, 'Why do you seek the living among the dead? He is not here, but is risen! Remember how He spoke to you when He was still in Galilee, saying, 'The Son of Man must be delivered into the hands of sinful men, and be crucified, and the third day rise again.' And they remembered His words. Then they returned from the tomb and told all these things to the eleven and to all the rest. It was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Mary the mother of

James, and the other women with them, who told these things to the apostles. Luke 24:1-10

Several women told the apostles about the resurrection of Jesus. It wasn't just Mary Magdalene. They left the empty tomb and went to the apostles because the angel told them to go. Angels telling people to do something is not how people become "apostles" of Christ. So, why do some people believe that Mary Magdalene alone is the "apostle to the apostles?"

Apostle to the Apostles?

The reasoning comes from what the Apostle John records. John's Gospel focuses on a special meeting Mary Magdalene had with Jesus after His resurrection. John did not mention other women being with Mary Magdalene, though we know they were also involved. That special focus is why people view Mary Magdalene differently than the other women who were at the empty tomb, heard the angel's directive and went to tell the apostles that Jesus was alive.

Here's how John detailed the event.

Now the first day of the week Mary Magdalene went to the tomb early, while it was still dark, and saw that the stone had been taken away from the tomb. Then 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.' Peter therefore went out, and the other disciple, and were going to the tomb. So they both ran together, and the other disciple outran Peter and came to the tomb first. And he, stooping down and looking in, saw the linen cloths lying there; yet he did not go in. Then Simon Peter came, following him, and went into the tomb; and he saw the linen cloths lying there, and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen cloths, but folded together in a place by itself. Then the other disciple, who came to the tomb first, went in also; and he saw and believed. For as yet they did not know the Scripture, that He must rise again from the dead. Then the disciples

went away again to their own homes. But Mary stood outside by the tomb weeping, and as she wept she stooped down and looked into the tomb. And she saw two angels in white sitting, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping?' She said to them, 'Because they have taken away my Lord, and I do not know where they have laid Him.' Now when she had said this, she turned around and saw Jesus standing there, and did not know that it was Jesus. Jesus said to her, 'Woman, why are you weeping? Whom are you seeking?' She, supposing Him to be the gardener, said to Him, 'Sir, if You have carried Him away, tell me where You have laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Jesus said to her, 'Mary!' She turned and said to Him, 'Rabboni!' (which is to say, Teacher). Jesus said to her, 'Do not cling to Me, for I have not yet ascended to My Father; but go to My brethren and say to them, 'I am ascending to My Father and your Father, and to My God and your God.' Mary Magdalene came and told

the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her. John 20:1-18

Jesus did give Mary Magdalene a specific message for the apostles — that He would ascend to His Father — but did that make her the first female apostle and an “apostle to the apostles?”

Where's Mary?

We do not see the name Mary Magdalene mentioned outside of the Gospel accounts. She's not mentioned in the Book of Acts. She's not mentioned in the Letters of Paul or John or Peter or James or Jude. If Mary was the first female apostle and an “apostle to the apostles,” where's Mary in the history of the Church after the resurrection of Christ? We can make an assumption that Mary Magdalene was one of the people praying in the upper room because of these words:

Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey. And when they had entered, they went up into the upper room where they were staying: Peter, James, John, and Andrew; Philip and Thomas; Bartholomew and Matthew; James the son of Alphaeus and Simon the Zealot; and Judas the son of James. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers. Acts 1:12-14

Mary Magdalene was probably one of “the women” mentioned in verse 14, though we don't know for sure. The one woman we know was in the upper room as the mother of Jesus. We also know that eleven of the apostles were in the upper room, along with the half brothers of Jesus.

If Mary was the first woman apostle, we should have seen that happen when Peter and the other apostles chose a successor for Judas Iscariot. However, Mary's name was not even brought up for consideration.

Therefore, of these men who have accompanied us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, beginning from the baptism of John to that day when He was taken up from us, one of these must become a witness with us of His resurrection.’ And they proposed two: Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias. Acts 1:21-23

We might assume that the Holy Spirit fell on Mary Magdalene on the Day of Pentecost, but we don't know for sure because Acts doesn't mention her name. We might assume that Mary Magdalene was part of the Jerusalem assembly that continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, praising God, having favor with all the people (Acts 2:40-47), but we can't know for sure because Acts doesn't mention her name.

We might also assume that Mary was among the large crowd of people who saw Jesus in Galilee after His resurrection (Matthew 28:16-17) and was one of the more than 500 people who saw Jesus at the same time as Paul mentioned in 1 Corinthians 15:6.

We are left with little to no information about Mary Magdalene after the Gospel accounts. I do not say that to denigrate her in any way, but simply to point to the facts available to us in Scripture. It would appear she continued as a follower of Christ through the apostles' teachings, but there is no evidence of her being an apostle or an "apostle to the apostles."

In Summary

Mary Magdalene played an important role in the earthly ministry of Jesus Christ. She helped support Him as He preached the Gospel. She stood close to the cross as Jesus died for her sins and our sins. She stood near the tomb when His body was placed inside. She looked inside the empty tomb and saw and heard the angels. She went with other women to tell the apostles that Jesus was alive. She saw Jesus alive in the garden near the tomb and took a special message from Jesus back to the apostles. She was most likely part of the large group of people who saw Jesus speak in Galilee after His resurrection. She was most likely in the upper room when the Holy Spirit came upon the 120 at Pentecost. She was most likely a faithful member of the Jerusalem assembly.

I am deeply concerned when I hear Bible preachers and teachers present things as being in the Bible and true when what they present is neither in the Bible nor true. I wonder why they do that.

I am disturbed when I hear Bible preachers and teachers proclaim something is true because they read something in heretical literature like the gnostic gospels. I wonder why they would do that.

Do they just not know better or **do** they know better? In other words, are they unaware they are teaching false doctrine or are they false teachers purposely proclaiming false doctrine?

We must be vigilant because the enemy is on the prowl using every trick in his extensive playbook to confuse those who profess the name of Christ.

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