"When the church and the world jog comfortably along together, you can be sure something is wrong. The world has not compromised-its spirit is exactly the same as it ever was. If Christians were equally as faithful to the Lord, separated from the world, and living so that their lives were a reproof to all ungodliness, the world would hate them as much as it ever did. It is the church that has compromised, not the world."
Catherine Booth

First Love Ministries, Inc., of Perry, Georgia USA
Prayer Study #535

MARY MAGDALENE: THE FIRST TO SEE THE RISEN CHRIST

I recently read where a Biblical scholar claimed that her research showed that 50% of the women in Biblical times in Palestine were named either Mary or Salome. Thankfully we have to deal with only 6 Mary's in the New Testament. Scofield distinguishes these 6 Mary's:

1) Mary, the mother of Jesus, who was always clearly identified by the context of the scripture.

2) Mary, the mother of the Apostle James (called "the less," Mark 15:40, to distinguish him from James the brother of John) and the wife of Cleophas (john 19:25) [sometimes written as Clopas] or as Cleophas was called in Matthew 10:3, Mark 3:18, and Luke 6:15, Alpheus. This second Mary was a cousin of Mary, the mother of Jesus. This Mary watched the crucifixion (Matthew 27:56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25), visited the garden tomb (Mark 15:47; 16:1; Luke 24:10) and was presumably among the women who saw

the risen Lord on the resurrection day (Matthew 28:7-9; Luke 24:9; Luke 24:22-24). Some argue that this Mary was the sister of Mary, the mother of Jesus, but it is highly improbable that two sisters would be given the same name.

3) Mary of Bethany, sister of Martha and Lazarus, mentioned by name only in Luke 10:39 & 42; John 11: 1, 2, 19, 20, 28, 31, 32, & 45; John 12:3, but referred to in Matthew 26:7; Mark 14:3-9.

4) Mary Magdalene, a woman from a prosperous, thriving village of Magdala, on the coast of Galilee and about three miles from Capernaum, "out of whom went seven demons' (Luke 8:2). She is never mentioned apart from the identifying word "Magdalene" and is not to be confused with the sinful woman with the alabaster box who anointed the Savior's feet in Nain, a city of Galilee (Luke 7:36-50). She was from Nain, not Magdala, and was well known in Nain as a sinner.

5) Mary, the mother of John Mark, and the sister of Barnabas (Acts 12:12).

6) Mary, a Christian woman of Rome, to whom Paul sent his salutation (Romans 16:6)

This study will focus on the fourth Mary, Mary Magdalene. There is no record of Mary's family. We are not given her parentage, whether she was married or not, if she had children,

or her age. We assume that her ability to travel with the disciples freely is an indication that she had no family obligations. We also assume she was a woman of means because she was able to serve the Lord with her substance. Luke indicates that she was independently wealthy.

Magdala was not only a fishing village but also had a textile factory and dye works business which added to the wealth of the community. In a Jewish fisherman's village, the day begins when the sun sets as the fish would come to the surface of the Sea of Galilea at night. The fishermen would fish at night and repair their nets and sell their fish in the morning hours. Magdala was deeply Jewish and a hot bed of activity because of its dissatisfaction politically with Rome. Unfortunately nothing of Magdala remains today.

There is absolutely no evidence from scripture that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. In fact her seemingly prosperous and comfortable standing would indicate that she did not need to prostitute herself to get money. Probably early church leaders tried to identify her with the sinner in Luke 7, who would more likely have been a prostitute. There is little likelihood that Mary Magdalene was this woman since this woman was from Nain. Vatican scholars and others in 1969 and others revised their positions and determined that all of this was as case of mistaken identity.

We do know from scripture that the Lord cast 7 demons out of her. Herbert Lockyer writes, "Seven is a mystic number suggesting 'completeness,' implying that when evil spirits dominated Mary the suffering was extremely severe." He suggests that this malady could have been violent epilepsy

making her a “revolting object to look at with her disheveled hair, glaring eyes, and sunken cheeks.” He insist that this temporary insanity did not affect her morals, only her mind. “But the moment Jesus’ compassionate eyes saw the wild-eyed and cringing woman of Magdala, He saw in her the ministering angel who would be a blessing to His own heart and to others.”

Having been set free, Mary Magdalene grateful followed Jesus and his entourage as he travelled from place to place and served Jesus and His disciples. We have no record of the disciples or Jesus asking for money, so we can assume that people of means, like Mary Magdalene, gladly shared their finances with One who had been so gracious to her.

While some of His most intimate friends deserted Jesus on His last, sad journey from the Garden of Gethsemane to the Cross, Mary Magdalene followed all the way. John reports in John 19 that Mary, the mother of Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Mary, the wife of Clopas, and he were there at the Cross when Jesus died.

Lochyer says these stood as near the cross as they could to comfort Jesus in His final hours. He says, “Mary listened with a broken heart to His bitter cries and watched through those dread hours until at last the Roman soldier thrust his spear into the Savior’s side and declared Him dead.”

There is a picture in a famous French art gallery a painting of the night of the crucifixion. “The world is wrapped in shadow; the stars are dead; and yet in the darkness is seen a kneeling form. It is Mary Magdalene with loving lips and hands pressing against the bleeding feet of Christ.” Yes, Mary was there when they crucified her Lord.

Again to quote Lockyer: "Last at the cross, where Jesus died as the Lamb of God, Mary Magdalene was also the first at the garden tomb to witness the most important event in world history and the pivotal truth of Christianity, namely the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. What a great honor God conferred upon the faithful Mary Magdalene in permitting her to be the first witness of that Resurrection! She was at the tomb early on the first Easter morning, and as the light of earliest day filtered across Jerusalem, she peered into the cave. Seeing it empty, she wept. Finding the grave empty, Mary rushed to Peter and John, and most excitedly said, 'They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulcher, and we know not where they have laid Him.' These disciples returned with Mary Magdalene to the tomb and found that what she had told them was true, then departed 'to their own homes.' But not Mary! She stood at the door of the sepulcher weeping, and as she wept two angels appeared, one at the head and the other at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Seeing her distressed and afraid, they tenderly asked, 'Woman, why weepest thou?' Trembling she replied, "Because they have taken away my Lord, and I know not where they have laid him….Turning away she saw a figure, and thinking it was the gardener answered in reply to the questions: 'Woman, why weepest thou? Whom seeketh thou?', Sir, if thou have borne Him hence, tell me where thou hast laid him hence, tell me where thou hast laid Him, and I will take Him away.' Then one word from the Voice she now recognized uttered her name, 'Mary!' That old familiar tone gripped her heart, and instantly she cried, 'Rabboni!'"

Thus, Mary Magdalene become the first to go and announce the greatest good news ever proclaimed, “He’s alive!” This wonderful story tells both what Jesus can do for a woman and what a woman can do for Him!

It is never conclusive to use extra-Bible sources to portray Bible characters, but we can assume that Mary Magdalene was with the 120 in the Upper Room on Mt. Zion at Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit was poured out in Acts 2. We cannot positively prove what happened afterwards to Mary Magdalene. Some writings from the 1st Century Christians found in Egypt in 1945 indicate that Mary Magdalene was both a prophetess and an Apostle in the 1st Century Church. One of the requirements of an Apostle, I believe, is to see the risen Christ. Mary Magdalene was the first to see Him.

We have little concrete evidence of what happened to the disciples after the Bible record was finished and later canonized, but we do have some strong evidence from extra-Biblical sources indicating how most of them were martyred. I don’t find any source that says Mary Magdalene was martyred, but there are ancient writings that indicate that she preached for 14 years in her homeland and then went to France. Early legends say her tomb is in France. She found favor with the French rulers by praying for the royal heirs who could not conceive a son. They produced a male heir. Afterwards she supposedly retired to a wilderness area of France for 30 years and lived as an unknown. Of course none of these stories can be corroborated. The Holy Scriptures are the only true foundation on which we can stand.

Matthew 27:55-56: *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 27:59-61: *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 28:1: *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.*

Mark 15:40: *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.*

Mark 15:47: *And Mary Magdalene and Mary the most of Joses observed where He was laid.*

Mark 16:1: *Now when the Sabbath was past, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome bought spices, that they might come and anoint Him.*

Mark 16:9: *Now when He rose early on the first day of the week, He appeared first to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven demons.*

Luke 8:1-3: *Now it came to pass, afterward, that He went through every city and village, preaching and bringing the glad tidings of the kingdom of God. And the twelve were with Him and certain women who had been healed of evil spirits and infirmities-Mary called Magdalene, out of whom had come seven demons, and Joanna, the wife of Chuza, Herod's steward, and Susanna, and many others, who provided for Him from their substance.*

Luke 24:8-10: *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.*

John 19:25: *Now there stood by the cross of Jesus His mother, and His mother's sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene.*

John 20:1: *Now on 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.*

John 20:11-18: *But Mary* [Magdalene] *stood outside 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 one at the feet, where the body of Jesus had lain. Then they said to her, "Women, 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 to your God.'"*** *Mary Magdalene came and told the disciples that she had seen the Lord, and that He had spoken these things to her.*