

The Gender Desk Writes
Mary Magdalene was not a prostitute!

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Tradition continues to call Mary Magdalene a prostitute. The Concise Oxford Dictionary gives "reformed prostitute" as the meaning of Magdalene and preachers continue to tell us the gospels tell us so! The musical Jesus Christ Superstar and Mel Gibson's movie do too. However, nowhere does the Bible state that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. The Bible tells us that she was cured of possession of evil spirits. Where did this misunderstanding begin and why is it so important to set the record straight?

Mary Magdalene is mentioned more frequently in the Gospels than any woman other than Mary, Jesus' mother and more than most of the disciples. She was a devoted follower of Jesus who accompanied the Lord and His disciples and provided funds for them as they ministered (Luke 8:3). Mary was at the crucifixion when the rest of the disciples except John had fled (John 19:25). She was the one the Lord appeared to at the tomb and whom He appointed as history's first witness to his resurrection (John 20:1-18) at a time when the teachings of the rabbi's were that not even the witness of a hundred women could refute that of one man.

The confusion comes primarily from a series of homilies of Pope Gregory the Great (540-604) but one reason for the misunderstanding is that she is often thought to be the same woman as the one in Luke 7. The New Bible Dictionary, Edited by I. Howard Marshall, A.R. Millard, J.I. Packer *et al*/states " If Luke had known that the Mary of chapter 8 (verse 2) was the same person as the sinner of chapter 7 (verse 36) would he not probably have made the connection explicit?"

Another reason is that some automatically assume that being cured of possession of evil spirits means sexual promiscuity. Why do we not label the *men* cured of possession of evil spirits in Mark 9:17, Luke 8:27, Luke 11:14 immoral or sexual deviants?

Frank S. Mead sums it up in his book "Who's Who in the Bible": "We have had Mary Magdalene in the pillory for 1900 years, flinging mud; we should have been pilloried. This Mary was never a harlot; there is no evidence anywhere for that."

Mary Magdalene was one of the most faithful and honoured disciples of the Lord. We are denied an excellent role model if we do not set the record straight.

References: IVP Women's Bible Commentary; Ruth A. Tucker and Walter Liefeld, *Daughters of the Church*; Carolyn Custis James, *Lost Women of the Bible*.