

# Was Jesus Married? Who Was Mary Magdalene?

by ATRI Staff Writer

...Jesus as a married man makes infinitely more sense than our standard biblical view of Jesus as a bachelor... Because Jesus was a Jew... the social decorum during that time virtually forbid a Jewish man to be unmarried. According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned, and the obligation for a Jewish father was to find a suitable wife for his son. If Jesus were not married, at least one of the Bible's gospels would have mentioned it and offered some explanation for His unnatural state of bachelorhood.<sup>1</sup> —Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 245.

The greatest cover-up in human history. Not only was Jesus Christ married, but He was a father. My dear, Mary Magdalene was the Holy Vessel. She was the chalice that bore the royal bloodline of Jesus Christ. She was the womb that bore the lineage, and the vine from which the sacred fruit sprang forth.<sup>2</sup> —Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code*, p. 249.

## Was Jesus “required” to be married?

First, it must be stated that there is simply no evidence from Scripture that Jesus was married. Dr. Darrell Bock explains:

It has long been believed that Jesus was single. Every detail of Scripture indicates this. When he was in ministry, there is no mention of a wife. When he was tried and crucified, there is no mention of his having a wife. After his death, there is no mention of a wife. Whenever Jesus' family is referred to, it is his brothers and sisters who are mentioned, but never a wife. Nor is there any indication that he was widowed.<sup>3</sup>

So, at best, we are dealing with an argument from silence. But what about the argument that “virtually every Jewish man in Jesus' day did marry, especially those who were considered to be Rabbis”<sup>4</sup>? Well, as Mark Roberts points out, “One major problem with this argument, among several, is that it makes no room

for an exception. Jesus was not required by law—either governmental or religious—to marry. And, though he was in many ways a normal Jewish man..., in other ways he was utterly unusual.”<sup>5</sup>

Unusual indeed. Furthermore, whether or not Jewish custom “required” marriage for rabbis, there are two important reasons why this does not apply to Jesus. Darrell Bock explains:

... two factors make this argument weak. First, Jesus was not technically a rabbi, nor did he portray himself as one. The apostles addressed him as such to say he was their teacher, not because he held any kind of official Jewish office. The Jews asked Jesus “by what authority” he did certain things because he did not hold any kind of formal office within Judaism. He did not have an official position that would have permitted him to do things like act within the temple (Mark 11:28). As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, Jesus had no recognized role within Judaism....

Second, the example of the call to be “eunuchs for the kingdom” appears, in part, to be rooted in Jesus’ own commitment and example not to be married (Matthew 19:10-12). In fact, the rationale for the Roman church’s later view that priests should not be married partially stems from the view that Jesus was not married.

So if we ask what the hard evidence is that Jesus was married, there really is a very short answer. There is none.<sup>6</sup>

On the other hand, many people did see Jesus as a “prophetic figure.” James Holding points out that:

The Jewish atmosphere of Jesus’ day clearly had a tradition of celibacy for those who devoted their lives to God, as exemplified by the unmarried prophets Jeremiah and Elijah and as expressed by New Testament-era groups such as the Essenes and figures such as John the Baptist and Banus the prophet (Josephus, *Life* 2.11). Celibacy and singleness were indeed exceptional, but contrary to Brown, they were not forbidden by any “social decorum.”<sup>7</sup>

Michael Gleghorn agrees and points out that, although “most Jewish men of Jesus’ day did marry... by the first century there were recognized, and even lauded, exceptions to this general rule.” He continues,

The first century Jewish writer, Philo of Alexandria, described the Essenes as those who “repudiate marriage... for no one of the Essenes ever marries a wife.” Interestingly, the Essenes not only escaped condemnation for their celibacy; they were often admired. Philo also wrote, “This now is the enviable system of life of these Essenes, so that not only private individuals but even mighty kings, admiring the men, venerate their sect, and increase... the honors which they confer on them.” Such citations clearly reveal that not all Jews of Jesus’ day considered marriage obligatory. In fact, those who sought to avoid

marriage for religious reasons were often admired rather than condemned.<sup>8</sup>

All in all, the evidence would indicate that Brown's assertion that "According to Jewish custom, celibacy was condemned," simply is not true—or at least not in every single case. Clearly, Jesus was not only exceptional, but, in this case, an exception.

### **Who was Mary Magdalene?**

For those who assume Jesus was married, their top candidate for His wife is Mary Magdalene. What can we find out from the Scriptures about this woman?

The first time we read about Mary Magdalene is in 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. (NKJV)

There is nothing in this passage that could be taken as evidence that Mary was a prostitute, so how did that idea come about? Bible scholar Ben Witherington explains:

It is important to stress where she first appears in the Gospels, because by the Middle Ages there had long been a confusion about who she was. The anonymous sinner woman mentioned in Lk. 7, who anointed Jesus' feet in the house of Simon the Pharisee, was assumed to be Miriam of Magdala. This is a serious mistake, and it really only became possible to make this mistake once manuscripts of the New Testament began to appear with separations of words, sentences, paragraphs, and then chapters and verses. That process first happened in the early Middle Ages.<sup>9</sup>

For once it would appear that Dan Brown got his facts right! According to the biblical record, we have no reason to believe that Mary Magdalene was a prostitute. It was the timing of her first mention in Luke's historical record that caused the confusion:

Here Brown makes a statement that is close to being correct. Mary was not a prostitute, but this was not a deliberate attempt by the church to deceive people, it was most likely a mistake that was overlooked. The first mention of Mary as a prostitute comes from a sermon delivered by Pope Gregory the Great in 591 AD. In all likelihood, the notion of prostitution resulted from confusion concerning passages in the gospel of Luke. Here is how the error likely occurred:

In Luke 7:36, an unnamed sinful woman anointed Jesus at the house of Simon the leper (Luke 7:36-50). The text does not label this woman as

a prostitute, but we can conclude that her sin involves sexual immorality. The next text is Luke 8:1-3, where Mary Magdalene is named. Her exorcism is mentioned but there is no mention of her anointing Jesus. Luke does not connect Mary to the sinful woman from the previous passage. **However, people made the error of assuming Mary Magdalene was the sinful woman in Luke chapter 7.**<sup>10</sup>

The next time we see Mary Magdalene in Scripture is when she is at the cross along with several other women (Matthew 27:55-56; Mark 15:40; John 19:25). As a group, they are seen ministering to Jesus and to the disciples. Mary is not singled out in this group. In fact, as one writer points out, “The gospel writers also point out the connections several of the women had to recognized male characters. If there had there been a connection between Mary and Jesus, it is very likely the writers would have indicated such a relationship.”<sup>11</sup>

Mary is also among those who witnessed the burial of Jesus (Matt. 27:61; Mark 15:40). And finally, on Easter Sunday morning, Mary and several other women go to complete the burial ritual, and so become the first witnesses to the resurrection (Matt. 28:1; Mark 16:1; John 20:11-18).

Mary is a prominent figure in one passage of scripture, John 20:11-18. This is the only place in the New Testament that Jesus and Mary Magdalene were alone together. In this passage she clings to Jesus and He tells her to let go. Public displays of affection between non-related individuals were not common in Jewish culture. However, her reaction is understandable given the excitement of the moment. There is no sexual intimacy implied in this scene and the story concludes with her leaving the scene in great joy and excitement.<sup>12</sup>

Ben Witherington summarizes the New Testament evidence regarding Mary Magdalene:

The New Testament tells us nothing more of the story of Miriam [Mary Magdalene]. Later conjecture about her seems to have little or no historical basis. But we have more than enough to say that she was an important early disciple and witness for Jesus. **And we can say with equal certainty that there is absolutely no early historical evidence that Miriam’s relationship with Jesus was anything other than that of a disciple to her Master teacher.**<sup>13</sup>

### **What is the evidence that Mary Magdalene was Jesus’ wife?**

Regardless of the lack of biblical evidence, there are some who insist that Mary and Jesus were indeed married—and that the evidence can be found in the Gnostic Gospels, so conveniently concealed (and recently rediscovered) at Nag Hammadi!

It should be remembered that these Gnostic Gospels are dated to the 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> century, a good 100-200 years or more after the time of Jesus. Clearly, then, the writers were not apostles or disciples. Nor were the writers of these documents

eyewitnesses or acquaintance of eyewitnesses to the events in Jesus' life.

Nevertheless, Dan Brown explains in *The Da Vinci Code* that, "any gospels that described *earthly* aspects of Jesus' life had to be omitted from the Bible. Unfortunately for the early editors, one particularly troubling earthly theme kept occurring in the gospels. Mary Magdalene... More specifically, her marriage to Jesus Christ."<sup>14</sup>

Mark Roberts has done a study of the several of these non-canonical gospels. He chose to focus on the ones that were named for disciples of Jesus, including the one named for Mary Magdalene. However, he points out that it is important to remember, "these disciples had nothing to do with the actual writing of the extra-biblical gospels."<sup>15</sup>

But what do these Gospels tell us about Mary, and more particularly, what is the evidence they give for her marriage to Jesus?

### ***The Gospel of Thomas***

Mary plays a tiny role in the *Gospel of Thomas*, asking Jesus a question about the disciples: "Whom are your disciples like?"... This is the only place she speaks. She is mentioned at the end of this gospel in a most curious passage, which reads:

Simon Peter said to them, "Let Mary leave us, for women are not worthy of Life." Jesus said, "I myself shall lead her in order to make her male, so that she too may become a living spirit resembling you males. For every woman who will make herself male will enter the Kingdom of Heaven." (section 114)...

So, one who is looking for evidence of a secret marriage between Jesus and Mary will be disappointed by the earliest of the non-canonical gospels. The *Gospel of Thomas*, in its peculiar way, simple underscores what we know of Mary from the biblical gospels.<sup>16</sup>

### ***The Gospel of Peter***

Mary Magdalene appears only on Easter morning, when she and her women friends come to the tomb of Jesus to weep for him. She is described as "a female disciple [Greek *mathetria*] of the Lord" (section 50,). At the tomb, Mary and her friends see an angel who announces the resurrection of Jesus, and they run away frightened (section 56-57).

In the *Gospel of Peter* we find no evidence whatsoever for a marriage between Mary and Jesus. But, once again, Mary is portrayed as a female disciple of Jesus.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The Dialogue of the Savior***

Although Mary is one of the frequent interrogators of the Savior, at one point she makes an observation. The text explains, "This word she spoke as a woman who knew the All" (Section 139, trans. Harold Attridge). In other words, Mary has special knowledge of spiritual reality.

There is no hint in *The Dialogue of the Savior* of a marriage between

Jesus and Mary (or the Savior and Mary).<sup>18</sup>

### ***The Sophia of Jesus Christ***

Twice in this gospel Mary asks questions of Christ, such as “Holy Lord, where did your disciples come from, and where are they going, and (what) should they do here?” (section 114, trans. Douglas M. Parrott). Mary is not singled out further, nor is there a suggestion of a marriage to Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

### ***The Pistis Sophia***

Mary is praised in *The Pistis Sophia* as one “whose heart is more directed to the Kingdom of Heaven than all [her] brothers”.... Jesus says that she is “blessed beyond all women upon the earth, because [she shall be] the pleroma of all Pleromas and the completion of all completions” (section 19). In other words, Mary will have the fullness of knowledge and therefore spiritual life within her. So impressed is Jesus with Mary’s spiritual excellence that he promises not to conceal anything from her, but to reveal everything to her “with certainty and openly” (section 25). She is the blessed one who will “inherit the whole Kingdom of the Light” (section 61).

From *The Pistis Sophia* we see the growing interest in Mary among Gnostic Christians, who valued knowledge (*gnosis* in Greek) above all. She has come to be regarded as a source of hidden revelation because of her intimate relationship with Jesus. Nothing in this gospel suggests a marriage between them, however.<sup>20</sup>

### ***The Gospel of Mary***

*The Gospel of Mary*, written in the second century, goes even further than *The Pistis Sophia* in portraying Mary as a source of secret revelation because of her close relationship to the Savior. At one point Peter asks, “Sister, We know that the Savior loved you more than the rest of women. Tell us the words of the Savior which you remember—which you know but we do not nor have we heard them”....

Ah, at last, here’s fuel for the fire of a secret marriage between Mary and Jesus. She is the recipient of his secret revelations and private speeches. The Savior, who is not called Jesus in *The Gospel of Mary*, even preferred Mary to the other disciples, loving her more than them. Mary’s relationship with Jesus has clearly entered a new dimension we have not seen before.

But there is nothing here to suggest that Jesus and Mary were married. Jesus’ love for Mary leads him to reveal special truth to her, not to take her as his wife. Nothing in *The Gospel of Mary* points to a sexual or spousal relationship between Jesus and Mary.<sup>21</sup>

### ***The Gospel of Philip***

Finally we come to *The Gospel of Philip*, the last of the extra-biblical gospels to mention Mary Magdalene, and the one that excites proponents of her marriage to Jesus more than any other ancient document....

Two passages refer to Mary Magdalene, who plays a tiny role in this gospel.

The first of these passages reads, “There were three who always walked with the Lord: Mary his mother and her sister and Magdalene, the one who was called his companion” (section 59). Much has been insinuated about the word *companion*, which, in the Greek original is *koinonos*. But, contrary to the wishful thinking of some, this word doesn’t mean spouse or sexual consort. It means “partner”, and is used several times in the New Testament with this ordinary meaning (for example, when Paul refers to himself as Philemon’s *koinonos* in the Philemon 1:17).

The second passage in *The Gospel of Philip* that concerns Mary is the most suggestive: “And the companion of the Savior is Mary Magdalene. But Christ loved her more than all the disciples and used to kiss her often on her mouth. The rest of the disciples were offended by it and expressed disapproval. They said to him, ‘Why do you love her more than all of us?’ The Savior answered and said to them, ‘Why do I not love you like her?’ When a blind man and one who sees are both together in darkness, they are no different from one another. Then the light comes, then he who sees will see the light, and he who is blind will remain in darkness” (sections 63-63).

Two important points need to be made about this passage from *The Gospel of Philip*. The first deals with Brown’s emphasis on the meaning of the word “companion”:

Notice that the first line refers to Mary as the *companion* of the Savior. In the novel, Teabing clinches his argument that Jesus and Mary were married by stating, “As any Aramaic scholar will tell you, the word *companion*, in those days, literally meant *spouse*” (246). This sounds like pretty strong evidence. Might Jesus have been married after all?

It’s important to note that this gospel was originally written in Greek. Therefore, what the term “companion” meant in Aramaic is irrelevant. Even in the Coptic translation found at Nag Hammadi, a Greek loan word (i.e. *koinonos*) lies behind the term translated “companion”. Darrell Bock observes that this term *can* mean “wife” or “sister” in a spiritual sense, but it’s “not the typical or common term for ‘wife’” in Greek.<sup>22</sup>

Craig Blomberg agrees, and adds that, “It is also worth pointing out that no Aramaic or Hebrew words for ‘companion’ normally mean spouse!”<sup>23</sup>

The second point deals with the phrase “Christ... used to kiss her often on the mouth”:

First, this portion of the manuscript is damaged. We don’t actually know *where* Christ kissed Mary. Indeed, some believe that “she was kissed on her cheek or forehead since either term fits in the break.”  
Second, even if the text said that Christ kissed Mary on the mouth, it

wouldn't necessarily mean that something sexual is in view. Most scholars agree that Gnostic texts contain a great deal of symbolism. To read such texts literally, therefore, is to *misread* them. Finally, regardless of the author's intention, this gospel wasn't written until the second half of the third century, more than two hundred years after the time of Jesus. Thus, the reference to Jesus' kissing Mary is almost certainly not historically reliable.<sup>24</sup>

Mark Roberts makes one more important point:

Even if we suppose that this passage, which appears in no other document, and which was written two centuries after the biblical gospels, conveys historically accurate information, the passage itself seems to *disprove* Jesus' marriage to Mary. **Surely if Jesus had been married to Mary then his special affection for her wouldn't have been an offense.** And surely Jesus could have satisfied the disciples' question by explaining that Mary was his wife. But he doesn't do this. Instead he explains his special affection for Mary by pointing to her ability to see the light, that is, to have knowledge....<sup>25</sup>

## Conclusion

In light of the above, we must conclude that there is simply no reliable historical evidence to indicate Jesus was married—to Mary Magdalene or anyone else. Nor is there any evidence that He was engaged in any type of extramarital sexual intimacy with Mary Magdalene or anyone else.

Craig Blomberg suggests one place where such a relationship would certainly have been mentioned, had it existed:

Specifically, there is not a shred of historical evidence that Jesus ever married Mary Magdalene (or anyone else) or ever fathered children. As Darrell Bock points out in his recent *Christianity Today* review (January 2004, 62), such information would certainly have been included in 1 Corinthians 9 where Paul appeals to the fact that Peter and various other apostles had wives when they received material help from the churches. In supporting his right to receive such help, Paul would have wanted to appeal to an even more convincing example—Jesus—if it were available.<sup>26</sup>

There's one more factor, one more piece of evidence, that should be mentioned in this regard. Dr. Erwin Lutzer points out in his book, *The Da Vinci Deception*, that someday Jesus *will* be married. He is already engaged to His Bride, the Church. As Christians, we eagerly anticipate the day when we shall be invited to the Marriage Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:7-9). Lutzer says, "Given this larger perspective, Jesus' obvious celibacy was both necessary and proper."<sup>27</sup>

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Dan Brown, *The Da Vinci Code* (New York: Doubleday, 2003), p. 245.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 249.

- <sup>3</sup> Darrell L. Bock, Ph.D., "Was Jesus Married?" <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/wasjesusmarried.html>
- <sup>4</sup> Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm>
- <sup>5</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>6</sup> Bock, "Was Jesus Married?"
- <sup>7</sup> *James Patrick Holding*, A SUMMARY CRITIQUE - THE DA VINCI CODE: Revisiting a Cracked Conspiracy, [www.equip.org](http://www.equip.org)
- <sup>8</sup> Michael Gleghorn, "Decoding the Da Vinci Code," [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)
- <sup>9</sup> Ben Witherington III, "Mary, Mary, Extraordinary," <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/maryandjesus.html>
- <sup>10</sup> "Discerning Fact from Fiction in *The Da Vinci Code*," <http://www.evidenceandanswers.com/>, emphasis added.
- <sup>11</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>12</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>13</sup> Ben Witherington III, "Mary, Mary, Extraordinary," <http://www.leaderu.com/theology/maryandjesus.html>, emphasis added.
- <sup>14</sup> Brown, p. 244.
- <sup>15</sup> Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm>
- <sup>16</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>17</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>18</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>19</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>20</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>22</sup> Michael Gleghorn, "Decoding the Da Vinci Code," [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)
- <sup>23</sup> Craig Blomberg, review of *The Da Vinci Code* in *Denver Journal - An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies*, <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2004/0200/0202.php>
- <sup>24</sup> Michael Gleghorn, "Decoding the Da Vinci Code," [www.probe.org](http://www.probe.org)
- <sup>25</sup> Mark D. Roberts, "Was Jesus Married? A Careful Look at the Real Evidence," <http://www.markdroberts.com/htmfiles/resources/jesusmarried.htm>, emphasis added.
- <sup>26</sup> Craig Blomberg, review of *The Da Vinci Code* in *Denver Journal - An Online Review of Current Biblical and Theological Studies*, <http://www.denverseminary.edu/dj/articles2004/0200/0202.php>
- <sup>27</sup> Erwin W. Lutzer, *The Da Vinci Deception* (Wheaton, IL: Tyndale, 2004), p. 57.

## 12 Da Vinci Was Jesus Married? Who Was Mary Magdalene?