

The Unsung Heroes of the New Testament
Part 1: Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Suzanna
Luke 8:1-3; 24:10; John 20:1-18

A. Mary Magdalene [7 devils, Eyewitness of the Cross, Burial, and 1st Resurrection Eyewitness]

Two Extremes: Accused of being either a prostitute on one hand or the partner of Jesus on the other.
[One view destroys His humanity; the other His Deity]

1. Prostitute [Luke 7:41-50 preceding Luke 8:1-3]

In the 6th Century Pope Gregory the Great equated Luke 7:36-50 with Luke 8:1-3 and in a sermon said:

“She whom Luke calls the sinful woman, whom John calls the anointing Mary, we believe to be the Mary from whom seven devils were ejected according to Mark.” [7 devils interpreted to be immorality, prostitution]

“It seems clear that Mary Magdalene’s reputation was deliberately altered to destroy the character of the Savior. She was indeed the first witness and proclaimer of the good news of Jesus’s Resurrection. She was not a repentant prostitute, nor is there any evidence to suggest that Mary hopelessly pined for Jesus.”

2. Partner [Critics: To Destroy Deity and Work of Christ, Destroy Mary Magdalene]

“Scripture and early Christian texts reveal Mary Magdalene as a woman of means, who funded Jesus’s ministry, one of the few disciples who stood by him even as he was executed, the first witness and announcer of the Resurrection and an important contributor to the early Christian community.”

John Thornton [1720-1790]

“Few followers of the Lamb have ever done more to feed the hungry, clothe the naked, and help all that suffer adversity; and to spread the savor of the knowledge of Christ crucified.” [Henry Venn, friend of John Thornton]

B. Joanna [wife of Herod’s steward (business manager)] – cf. Luke 8:3 & 24:10 [2nd Eyewitness Named]

Life & Death of Herod the Great [Matthew 2:1-12]

1. Killed 1 of 10 wives, 3 of 15 children, Herod executed one of his sons five days before Herod died
2. Confined 1000 Jews to the *Hippodrome in Jericho* with orders to have them killed upon his death to offset the expected rejoicing over his death. [The order was ignored.]

“Herod’s lavish funeral is a tribute to the achievements of his illustrious thirty-six-year reign. His body - dressed in royal robes, crowned, and still holding his scepter - is borne on a solid gold bier. The funeral procession, comprised of family members, bodyguard, and a regiment of the army, winds its way slowly to the Herodium south of Jerusalem. Here in a secret tomb Herod is buried.” [Josephus, Jewish War 1.670-73]

Descendants of Herod the Great

1. Archelaus - Ruler of Judea and Samaria, feared as much as his father (Matt. 2:22)
2. Herod Philip - Tetrarch northeast of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 3:1)
3. **Herod Antipas** (Matt. 14:1, 3, 6; Mark 6:14-2; Luke 3:1, 19; 8:3; 9:7; 13:31; 23:6-15)
 - a. Appointed tetrarch of Galilee and Perea
 - b. Often connected with the life of Christ.
 - c. Nicknamed "that fox" by Jesus Christ (Luke 13:32)
 - e. Had John the Baptist killed (Mark 6:14-29)
 - f. Since Jesus was from the jurisdiction of Antipas in Galilee, Pilate sent Jesus to him but Herod Antipas would not pass sentence and sent Jesus back to Pilate. (Luke 23:6-15)

Virtuous [Industrious] Women of Proverbs 31:16, 18, 22, 24

She considereth a field, and buyeth it; with the fruit [earnings] of her hands she planteth a vineyard.

She perceiveth that her merchandise is good.

She maketh herself coverings of tapestry; her clothing is silk and purple.

She maketh fine linen and selleth it.

As well as being patriarchal, 1st Century Roman society was utterly class-conscious. Class distinctions were observed and reinforced daily. For instance, where someone sat in the theatre was determined by class. And where someone sat at a dinner party, if fortunate enough to be invited, was determined by class and even by relative status, or precedence, within one's class. (*cf. James 2:1-9 – God is no respecter of persons.*)

In the highly stratified Roman world, women came from every class. Some women, including Christian women, were free-born Roman citizens and were independently wealthy householders. Some even came from families of the senatorial or equestrian ranks, the two upper classes of Roman society, or from equally high-status families in the provinces. The wealth of individuals and families in the upper classes was vast.

The number of high-status people was small compared with the rest of the population, possibly only one percent. Yet, from the very beginning, the church attracted high-status women. By the second and third centuries, the number of young noblewomen converting to Christianity would create a real problem—noblemen were not converting in nearly the same numbers. **As a result, a number of women of noble rank could not find Christian husbands of the same rank. It was illegal for high-status Roman women to marry outside their rank.** If they did, they could forfeit their noble status, their power, and even their wealth. Yet, once Christ became their Savior and Lord, many wealthy women were willing to make that sacrifice. Around A.D. 200, church leaders such as Tertullian and Callistus addressed this growing "status" problem. **Yet some Church leaders wanted noble Christian women to maintain their rank because the women could then use their wealth and influence to benefit the church.**

Acts 16:14 – [At Philippi] "And a certain woman named Lydia, **a seller of purple**, of the City of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us; whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul."

Acts 17:4 – [At Thessalonica] "And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and **of the chief women [women of the first families] not a few.**"

Acts 17:12 – [At Berea] "Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable [prominent] women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few."

It was no small thing for a Greco-Roman woman to convert to Christianity, as wives were expected to worship the gods of their husbands. Despite the difficulties, many “honourable Greek women” became believers in the Macedonian city of Berea also (Acts 17:12). The Greek word for “honourable” (εὐσχημόνων - euschēmonōn) in Acts 17:12 does not simply mean “respectable,” in that the women had good manners and high morals; it means “of honorable position in society”, “wealthy, “influential”, or even “noble.”

The early church was attractive to women, including women of high status, “because within the Christian subculture women enjoyed far higher status than did women in the Greco-Roman world at large, yet primarily these 1st century women found in Christ the answer to all of life’s problems.” - Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (New York: Harper One, 1996)

“The average age of first-time Roman brides was fourteen and the average of first-time husbands was twenty-four (though husbands could be considerably older). Thus it was not unusual for a wife to outlive her husband, provided she survived childbirth. These women hosted and cared for congregations in their own homes and significantly supported the ministry of the first century church.” [*House church = women* (Luke 6, Acts 17, Romans 16)]

“By 200 AD, the role of women [as benefactors] in Christian churches was quite unmistakable.” Like the apostle Paul (Rom. 16:1-2), some of the great men of early Christianity, such as Clement of Alexandria (b. 150), Origen (b. 184/5), and Jerome (b. 347) were supported by wealthy female colleagues.” [Rodney Stark]

Lady Huntingdon [1707-1791]

PHEBE

Romans 16:1-3a – “I commend unto you **Phebe** our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea; That ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you; for she hath been a **succourer** [aid, benefactor] of many, and of myself also. Greet **Priscilla** and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus.”

C. Suzanna [The Unknown Supporter of Christ’s Ministry]

D. “And many others” - Luke 8:3 [Anonymous women: “many others” (ἕτεροι) “of their” (αὐταῖς) (F)]

65% of Church Giving is done by Women; increases to 89% for Boomer Women and Widows

David Ramsay: “Almost never have I regretted being Generous.”

- 1. Budget 2. No debt 3. Live on less than you make. 4. Save some money. 5. Be outrageously generous.**