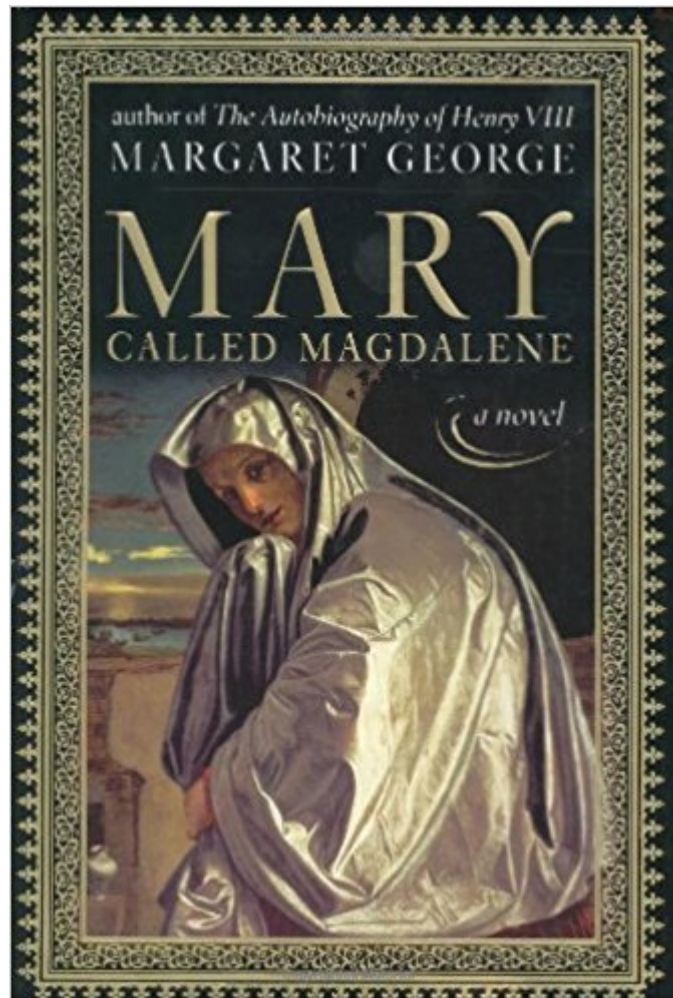




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# Mary, Called Magdalene



## Synopsis

Magdalene are tantalizingly brief, yet she continues to spark controversy, curiosity, and veneration. We know more about her than about many of Christ's male disciples, and her significance is enshrined in her ancient honorific "Apostle to the Apostles." But still, as a woman, she remains in shadow. Was she a prostitute, a female-divinity figure, a church leader, or all of those? Hallmarked by bestselling author Margaret George's dazzling mix of history and creativity, *Mary, Called Magdalene* is George's most ambitious work yet. Brilliantly grounded in both biblical and secular historical research, it depicts Mary of Magdala in the first hundred years of the first millennium—even as it peels away layers of legend. Testaments, letters, and narrative convincingly capture Mary's immediate and moving voice as she becomes part of the circle of disciples and comes to grips with the divine. Bridging the gap for readers of Antonia Fraser and fans of *The Red Tent*, *Mary, Called Magdalene* transcends both history and fiction to become a "diary of a soul."

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Of all the women in the Bible, perhaps no one's presence has been as constantly reinterpreted as that of Mary Magdalene. Was she a prostitute? A prophet? In Margaret George's epic historical novel, *Mary, Called Magdalene* (George's previous subjects include Henry VIII, Mary, Queen of Scots, and Cleopatra), Mary comes alive as one of Jesus' first believers, a woman of infallible visions and a faith that earns her the title "Apostle to the Apostles." With numerous biblical and scholarly texts serving as the core of this intriguing woman's story, George recreates the world of Galilean fishermen and the oppressions of the Jewish people under Roman rule. Cast out from her

family after Jesus expels the demons that have ravaged her mind, Mary follows the man from Nazareth until they receive attention from the skeptical hordes and the Roman magistrates controlling Jerusalem. Mary, from beginning to end of this giant undertaking, is a woman who struggles to reconcile her absence from her young daughter's life with the chance to be part of something important. Through the lens of her ever-inquisitive mind, the story covers the formation of Jesus' ragtag band of disciples and the crucifixion, and ends with Mary's mission as the head of the Christian church in Ephesus, where she died at the age of 90. What makes this a compelling read is that Mary's story connects humanity with faith in a way that's possible to understand, whatever our contemporary beliefs. --Emily Russin

George, whose niche is historical and biographical novels, begins this one ploddingly with suspenseless reportage on Mary Magdalene's pleasant, middle-class childhood in a prosperous fishing village. Scattered references to the idol/demon that will eventually possess Mary are intended as fateful omens, but her slow road to madness gets much less play than her conventional and uninteresting life. The novel improves considerably when Mary finds herself possessed by one demon, and then, helplessly, by six more. Her valiant efforts to first hide her possession and then find a cure are masterfully described. When a prophet named Jesus finally casts out her demons, she celebrates, only to realize that she must make a heartrending choice between following the prophet or going back to her husband, baby and extended family. At this point, George's novel becomes a safe, though readable, retelling of the gospels. Her main deviation from orthodoxy is her insistence that there were 16 disciples 12 men and four women who were equal in Jesus' eyes. Additionally, George emphasizes Mary's prophetic visions and Jesus' celebration of them, and in doing so gives credence to gnostic accounts of mysticism among the disciples. While some may compare this novel with Anita Diamant's *The Red Tent*, it bears a much stronger resemblance to Walter Wangerin's biographical novel about the apostle Paul. Like Wangerin's work, this imagines nothing seriously objectionable to even the most devout Christians. As such, it lacks the transgressive power of *The Red Tent*, but is still a well-researched and thought-provoking book. Copyright 2002 Cahners Business Information, Inc.

Although this is a "fictional biography," it is essentially a retelling of most of the four Gospels and some of the Epistles--all from the point of view of Mary Magdalene. That means some things are left out because she would not have been there, most notably the wedding at Cana and the Transfiguration. Author Margaret George did extraordinary background research to construct a

believable, albeit fictional, tale of Mary Magdalene's birth, girlhood and demon-filled young adult life. The author depicts Mary's relationship with Jesus as one of his disciples. (Although we are accustomed to the 12 men, it is a historical fact that women were also in the group--Mary Magdalene being one of those women.) I learned so much and FELT so much reading this book. The small but bustling town of Magdala, the terror and isolation of the desert, the chill of the River Jordan and the grandeur and chaos of Jerusalem all come alive with sounds, sights and tastes that seemingly pop off the page. (Only a truly great writer can do this!) Granted, the book is long at 900 pages, but it is definitely worth your time. Don't be daunted by the length. This book inspired and awed me--so much so that before I even finished it, I gave it as a gift to three people.

What a wonderful book this is! Margaret George's MARY, CALLED MAGDALENE is about the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and what happened to his disciples after his death. The book is in three parts. Part One, titled DEMONS tells about the childhood and young adulthood of Mary of Magdala, and how she came to be possessed by demons. Part Two, titled DISCIPLE is the story of the three-year ministry of Jesus Christ. Mary comes in right at the beginning of his ministry when he casts out her demons, and stays with him because her family turns her out and she has nowhere else to go. Part Three, titled APOSTLE tells what happened to Mary and the other disciples after the death of Jesus Christ. Margaret George is the kind of writer who can grab your attention and hold it for the entire length of a novel. I thought her characterization of Mary of Magdala, Jesus, Jesus' mother and the other disciples was intelligent, insightful and interesting. This is not just a rehash of parts of the New Testament. It is a refashioning of the tale that helps to explain why Jesus and his followers acted as they did. I could not put this book down. Five stars.

I really enjoyed reading this book. Margaret George is one of my favorite authors. I had a few problems with the plot and characters. I wrote to Ms. George about my issues and she gave me a satisfactory explanation. She reminded me that the book is a work of fiction and that it does not need to be historically correct. And it is not. Given that, it is an excellent novel, with well developed characters and a good, well developed story line.

I do have to agree with one of the other comments that was posted on here in saying that this book, out of all of Ms. George's, was by far the hardest to get into. But I truly did enjoy it. Writing about Biblical times is always difficult, I believe, especially when one tries to make it believable. Ms. George, yet again has tried to take us to another place and time, with her main character being one

that no one really knows much about. Given that fact i am willing to allow speculations to be made and to go with it. But i also have to say that this is not one of my favorites that she has written. I have seen her do a much better job and was slightly disappointed in this one. I liked it, but i was hoping when i purchased it that i would love it as much as i love her others. If this is the first book of Margaret George's that you have read, please look at her others before you say that you don't like her as an author. She has done better. And i think that is the only reason that i am giving a 4 rather than a 3

It was an interesting read getting a perspective of the interpersonal relationships between Jesus and his disciples. I suppose that was the point of the author to imagine the relationships. As a read, however, I felt like it was a narrow perspective and more could have been written to create a broader view of the time period. I would have enjoyed it a bit more, I believe.

As a follower of Jesus Christ I was skeptical about what I would find between the covers of this book. Once I set scepticism aside and focused on it as a work of fiction and not The Bible, I was pleasantly surprised by Ms. George's version of this most intriguing woman. I found her Mary to be a woman not unlike myself and found myself not wanting her story to end. The only disappointment I have is her portrayal of Jesus as unclear as to his own deity. The transfiguration made that clear but then, Mary was not a witness to it. I understand the author's nintent in the omission of such things. Overall, A satisfying read, and an honest glimpse into the tumultuous times and early church.

An engaging and very personal portrait of the possible life and times of M.M., Jesus and the apostles. A look back into ancient times and a reflection forward of the kind of warm, yet reserved relationships Jesus most likely had with those around Him, especially women: and how this can offer all of us a better understanding of that equality between the sexes that Jesus taught but was not the norm then ... or now. It is also an intimate look into the life of a very special woman of her times who was a product of her culture yet one who "extended the place of her tent" under challenging conditions and restrictions leading a full and joyful life because of her unending quest to find her true self.

This is a wonderful novel. If you have little knowledge of the New Testament, you were a learn much here. If you are familiar with the Gospels, you will love it even more. Ms. George brings the entire scene to life.

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