

## Dr. Helen Fry Mary Magdalene Fallen Woman Heroine Part 2

- So we're here for Mary Magdalene, part two. Mary Magdalene is such an important figure in Christian tradition. She had largely been written out of the main, we say canonical texts, so those texts which made it into the Christian scriptures. But she is too important to completely eradicate from history even though really strong attempts were made to subdue and suppress her testimony. And I love this painting by Leonardo da Vinci. Another variation, modern versions of it. But look on Jesus' right there, on the left, as we look at the painting, and I've done two below smaller snapshots of the painting to sort of hone in on Mary Magdalene. She's there, this is a depiction of the Last Supper. Some historians think this could have been Passover. It could have been Pesach. There are all kinds of theories around that. But certainly she is important enough. And, traditionally, the last supper has been portrayed in Christian art without any women. And within a Jewish tradition, of course, there would have been women present. And Leonardo da Vinci hasn't actually completely written out the women. And you can see it is Mary Magdalene sat on his right, almost like his right-hand person. And some feminist theologians believe that she sat on his right because she is potentially his wife. Something which is hugely controversial in the Christian tradition. I love this painting, really love this painting.

Next slide, please. So I'm going to go over just a small amount of what we talked about last time, just two or three slides to give us the backdrop again for any of you who weren't here then to understand the dates and the backdrop and I'll weave some new material into that as we move forward. So the historical Jesus then, I'm absolutely fascinated by the historical figure of Jesus. Not what the Christian church has done to him or variations of the churches have done to him, but what was the original, historical Jesus like, that wandering, prophetic, Jewish rabbi potentially, who's moving and very much part of the tradition, the Pharisees, the Pharisees that later survive as rabbinic Judaism. And, of course, those figures around him, most especially the women. And we will see just how significant the women were.

So Jesus stands, I think most historians would believe, Jewish and Christian scholars, would firmly place him as a teacher, sort of rabbi prophet firmly within the Judaism of his day. And a lot of the Christian churches will say, you know, they will acknowledge yes, the Jewishness of Jesus, but it still can be problematic because they don't go far enough and don't fully recognise some of the debates and discussions that happened within the church just after his death. What are the ramifications of the Jewish Jesus for the church? And I don't think the church has fully, the church is, different brands of Christianity, worked it out. Jesus dates are given officially as 4BCE, that's before the common era. 30CE, CE stands for the common era. And,

previously, Christian scholars, somebody asked me this after the last session, previously scholars have used BC, before Christ AD, and Anno Domini.

So after Jesus periods and with the new emerging about 56 years ago, Jewish-Christian dialogue and relationship and the cooperation between Jewish and Christian scholars, this was changed to be more recognising of Judaism as not being superseded or replaced by Christianity, but that they are parallel traditions emerging. So we call it now the common era or BC before the common era. So was he married to Mary Magdalene? I don't know that we can definitively answer that unless there are new texts which emerge in a cave in Egypt. It does happen as we'll see later. We don't really know. There's nothing in the gospels which are in the New Testament to suggest that she was married to Jesus. The tradition is pretty strong, though, the oral tradition. And Jesus himself would've been highly unlikely for him to have been celebrate until the age of 30. Although celibacy was known amongst the Essenes, not all of them, but some of the Essenes that shut themselves away in the community of the Dead Sea scrolls. So you have pockets of groups, sects which have celibacy, but it was very, very rare in this period. But also the churches in many ways try to suppress the stories of the women surrounding Jesus. And actually they are amongst the most prominent of his supporters. Now, they aren't amongst his disciples, he had 12 disciples, all male. But arguably they were more significant and they are independent women as we can see, which is utterly fascinating in a patriarchal time. So, there were three women who in the gospels are the closest to him. And, of course, they're all called Mary, originally Hebrew, Miriam. But the New Testament is written in Greek. So it uses the Greek version of Miriam, which is Mary. So we have his mother, his sister, and this close companion, Mary Magdalene. And they are all there during his ministry at the key moments and points in his ministry. And most especially during his crucifixion. In fact, in Christian art, they are depicted as the only ones present at his crucifixion, which is extraordinary. And scholars believe that that is historically accurate because potentially they would be the ones that would, and did in the tradition now, attend to his body afterwards. Next slide, please.

So what do we know of Mary Magdalene? Of all the women, she is the closest to Jesus and she is there during all of his ministry when he's teaching and preaching. She is supporting him, as we know from one of the passages in the gospel, she supports him from her independent means. You have a number of wealthy women who support Jesus. Now, I've grown up in a very liberal reform Christian tradition and I have never ever heard anything in any of the sermons which work on these passages with Mary Magdalene. I've never ever heard anyone talk about the fact that these women were supporting Jesus' ministry, what's portrayed as a very male-dominated era. And I think that's been eclipsed primarily by the church fathers who emerged to control the church after Jesus' death. So around a 100 years after Jesus' death. But I'm getting a

little bit ahead of myself, so we'll kind of park that there and come back to that. But what we also know is that Jesus cleansed her or exorcised her of seven demons. And that story is only in the gospel of Mark and Luke. Mark is the oldest of the gospels written first, Luke just about 10, 20 years later. But they have in the core of them really early tradition that comes from the Jesus movement. And what scholars have tried to do is to pare back some of the later editing by those that wrote those gospels to find the core of the tradition to get as close to the historical Jesus and, in so doing, to understand the women around him.

Next slide, please. So cleanse of seven demons. It very much believed and still today in evangelical and fundamentalist forms of Christianity, they do still do exorcisms and believe that if one has the devil or demons inside them, that these can be somehow, they can leave their body through laying hands and prayer. I do myself find it a bit strange and I have seen it happen once and it's very scary. Potentially, it can be argued in scientific terms, in terms of medical conditions. But certainly that is practised today and it was something that was believed in Jesus' day. But Mary, as we saw last time, has been portrayed, I mean completely negatively as the penitent sinner and she is portrayed as a harlot, as a loose woman. But there is absolutely nothing in the gospels or in the New Testament that in any way endorses this view. And again, that's not challenged in the Christian churches because I think if you asked the average Christian, what do you know about Mary Magdalene? Oh, she was the one that was closest to Jesus. She was the sinner who repented and washed Jesus' feet with her hair and some expensive perfume. But where do they get that from, the penitent sinner? It's at least a 100 to a 150 years after Jesus' death, this idea that she was a harlot and a loose woman and it denigrates her status within the church and her tradition. So what I want us to bear in mind is that Mary Magdalene is the longest-serving witness. She witnesses Jesus' ministry. She knows the truth, if you like, of his ministry.

Next slide, please. So she is a legitimate witness in much the same way as the disciples were, but she's a threat after Jesus' death. She's perceived as a threat. And I'll go into this in a little bit more detail in a moment. She's perceived as a threat by the different strands that are emerging. And by the time Christianity goes out into the gentile world, her legacy has been completely suppressed, her version of events. And before the gospels were written down, the disciples would tell stories would pass on Jesus' teachings to oral traditions. And there were said to be followers who followed Mary Magdalene. But she very quickly became portrayed not only as a sinner and a harlot, she's a prostitute, much the same thing, adulterous. And she's depicted with red hair. Extraordinary. And as if to underline her immoral character, I mean she cannot shake this off, this immoral character which lives with her for nigh on 1800 years, just more, 1800 to 1900 years. But there is nothing in the original time of Jesus or

in the gospels in the New Testament, which say she was a prostitute, she was a sinner, she was an adulterous. And she's always in Christian art portrayed against the Virgin Mary. You might want at some point for me to do something on Mary. Very interestingly, I'm not Catholic, might be best done by someone who's from the Catholic tradition. But she epitomises the sort of harlot whom Jesus manages to gain repentance from. But as to if to underline her immoral behaviour, yes, she's got the red hair, but she's often depicted, look with that orangey, kind of red cloak and you see it in some of the garments. Can we just go back one slide, please? And you can see there, she's lying kind of out naked on like a red cloth. And also you can just see on the bottom image, a red cloth kind of a shawl, like a shawl. But she's almost, red hair, look still, but she's almost got like a halo over her.

Next slide, please. As if she has repented. And that dreadful image of her would last, as I said, for nigh on 1900 years. Next slide, please. And I think it's only because of the scholarship and progress made between Jewish and Christian scholars in dialogue that things and perceptions are beginning to change. And so, it's legitimate to ask is that portrayal of 1900 years really the Mary Magdalene of the New Testament? She's mentioned in all four gospels. Okay, so Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. John being the latest written about 90CE of the common era. None of them, and I do want to underline that, none of them underline her as a prostitute or a sinner. So what's the problem? Well, I'm going to come to that in a moment. I think her testimony and her witness, it was so important in the early church, but it's basically been squashed. She has been politically outmoved. It's a coup basically of the biggest kind. And she's become confused with a number of other Marys in Christian traditions. So, quite often, Christians will kind of muddle them up a bit as she becomes confused with Mary, the sister of Martha. There's two sisters, Mary and Martha, who are quite close to Jesus. There's the unnamed sinner in Luke's gospel chapter seven. And because it's unnamed, traditionally, the church fathers have sort of pinned the unnamed sinner on Mary Magdalene. But there's no evidence that the unnamed sinner is Mary Magdalene. And both these Mary, sister of Martha, Mary Magdalene, but also the unnamed sinner, they all wash Jesus' feet with their hair. So you can't get this confusion.

Next slide, please. So she's hailed, we know from Magdala, a fishing town where there were fishing markets. It's possible she could have worked amongst the fishing markets. There was a fair amount of prostitution in that area that's known historically. But as I say, there's no evidence that Mary Magdalene herself was anything part of the scene of prostitution. But she is living and working or operating in the Galilee, an area where Jesus was carrying out his prophetic teaching. So she becomes a follower. And next slide, please. Critically, she is a woman of independent means. We don't know how she gained her wealth. It doesn't say anywhere. There's no evidence that

she was married or a widow, although potentially she may have been married to Jesus. We have no way of totally verifying that.

But look at this interesting passage in the gospel of Luke, which was so important that Luke didn't write it out of the tradition. And I'll explain this in a moment. So, "After this, Jesus travelled about "from one town and village to another. "The 12 were with him." That's the 12 disciples, they're all male. "And also some women who had been cured "of evil spirits and diseases." So this is the evil spirits, the exorcism of demons, that kind of thing. And the various diseases. I mean, Jesus was said to heal the blind and that kind of thing. So Mary in brackets called Magdalene, "From whom seven demons had come out." I meaning been exorcised. "And many others. "These women were helping to support them." Them is Jesus and his disciples. "Out of their own means." Jesus was effectively penniless. His mission could not have succeeded without these women. And I guess they turn into a threat in the early Christian Church. But in Jesus' time, they were accepted. Jesus accepts that his ministry, and so do those male 12 disciples, that it's the women, those wealthy women or the women of independent means who actually enable them to go about to do their mission. Now, what is their mission? You may remember me talking previously about the belief at this time when they're living under Roman occupation, that the end is near, that they are going to be liberated. Liberated by some potentially kind of otherworldly, supernatural is probably the best word, cataclysmic event with this fight between good and evil. And Jesus believed that the kingdom of God was coming, whatever that was. And it does seem that it would be a physical kingdom for him. I think scholars actually would, the majority of scholars believed that he believed, Jesus believed that his ministry, his preaching to the poor, to the widows, to the homeless, that this will bring in a new era of justice, that God would inaugurate this new era of justice and there was no time to waste. They really believed it was imminent. And that's the urgency such that Jesus says you have to give up everything. Give up your family, give up your life. Follow me, it's so urgent. We've got to work to herald in the kingdom of God. And that would mean the overthrowing of the Roman authorities.

Now, of course, we now know that didn't happen. And both Judaism, Christianity both had to adjust to that, to the fact that the end times didn't happen. And there were a number of sects or groups within Judaism, the Essenes, there were those at Masada, for example, there were the Sadducees were in with the Romans, but the Pharisees also believed that they would enjoy liberation. So there was this feeling, this belief that the end was near. So everything has to be viewed in those terms that the end is nigh, whatever that is. And the new era is being heralded in. And at the heart of this, that urgent message, that calling that Jesus has within Judaism, he functions completely and totally within Judaism. It's not about him, his status. It is about the message which he believes he has, this mandate from God to usher in this kingdom of justice, of liberation. And the women are at the

heart of it, they are the backbone. And that you don't hear about in Christian upbringing. I certainly didn't, you don't hear it in the sermons. And it would be good, I think, if people could understand particularly within the churches, just how significant these women were and they're working within the Judaism of their day. Next slide, please. She is Mary Magdalene, crucial. As a follower of Jesus, yes, she's there at the crucifixion.

I've mentioned that and you'll have heard me say before, but I want to underline again, she's the first witness to the resurrection. Whatever the resurrection is, and they believed it was a physical resurrection that they physically saw Jesus had risen again, it may have been a kind of vision, whatever it is, they certainly believed it was a physical resurrection. Not everybody within the early Christian tradition, not all the disciples actually witnessed it. So you wouldn't have had all of Jesus' followers necessarily witnessing this. But those that did, whatever it was they saw or they experienced, and people after bereavement do experience their loved ones sometimes. I know the concert pianist, Herrick Cohen, once talked about how she came into her sitting room and saw her long-term lover of over 40 years, Arnold Bax, Master of the King's Music he was, stood by the piano. Well, he died. He died in 1953. But she saw him and believed it was him. It was him, she said, in one of her writings. So whatever they had experienced after this traumatic crucifixion, Mary Magdalene is the first one to the tomb. She's the first one to discover it's empty. And if those male writers of the gospels could have written her out of this scene, they would have. So after Jesus' death and his resurrection, they have to make sense of this. The end hasn't arrived. They're starting to make sense of this. And Mary Magdalene has a group of her own followers who are passing on, they have a mandate they believe to pass on Jesus' teachings, his parables. He often spoke in stories, in parables, in potentially, I think Christian scholars believe it's a sort of La Hagada really. And so these followers, whether they're Jesus' immediate disciples, the 12, or whether it's the women, they are all passing on and kind of have their own groups and followers and they're trying to make sense of what's happened. Now, Mary Magdalene eventually ends up in Ephesus. And Ephesus, of course, was one of the centres of gentile Christianity and where the Apostle Paul would, one of the places he ministered from, now Apostle Paul, never mentions Mary Magdalene in any of his writings or, in fact, any of the writings which are attributed to him, to Paul, but were probably written by one of his followers a bit later. So not all the letters attributed to Paul in the New Testament were necessarily written by Paul, but they were certainly by some of his followers.

So within that, they call it the Paul line tradition. Within that tradition, Mary Magdalene is completely silent. But within that early Christianity, you have an attempt, they're still within Judaism, but you have an attempt in the first 30 years after Jesus' death to define their identity. And what they discover, and this is relevant to the

suppression of Mary Magdalene's history, is you find a number of traditions start to attract Gentiles. And, of course, the synagogues have and still do, attract Gentiles. And it was something which the early Christians still working within Judaism had to grapple with their identity. So they found a number of Gentiles, and this is just before Paul's ministry, they founded a number of Gentiles who wanted to be part of this. But, of course, there were all kinds of traditions and laws if you like, around eating, table fellowship. And, ultimately, it's that identity and table fellowship which split early Christian groups. Some were more lenient than others. It's a bit like within early Christianity having slightly different interpretations of whether Gentiles could have table fellowship, whether Gentiles had to be circumcised first to be Jewish Christians. And Jewish Christians, of those still within Judaism that just believe that Jesus was resurrected. That in some sense he had risen again. It doesn't take them at this point out of Judaism. And Mary Magdalene is part of that. She's part of the church around Jerusalem that is also very closely connected and led by Jesus' brother. Now, the difficulty is with those Gentiles, and also the fact that other Jewish groups around them weren't accepting the message of the early Christians that Jesus had risen again. It wasn't their experience, it wasn't relevant. And you gradually get a sort of splitting. And with more and more Gentiles wanting to become part of this, one who's just called Stephen, we don't know exactly who he was, started in Greek and Roman world to accept Gentiles. And now you have a crisis of identity and it's the Hellenes, the Gentiles, that start to become Christians that see the real split in Christianity that begins the gradual partings of the ways.

So what I'd like to get across is that early Christianity was diverse. There were groups of Jewish Christians that believed something about Jesus, not divinity, not that he was God and that kind of thing, but something about his ministry and resurrection that somehow he transformed. And so, they followed his teachings. It still meant they went to the temple. They carried out Jewish festivals. They were rooted within Judaism. But you've now got at the edges, the admission of Gentiles. It becomes tricky. And when you get the Apostle Paul, who has his sort of visionary experience, he never met the historical Jesus. And again, I think people tend to forget that in the Christian world that Paul never met the real Jesus. All he saw was that vision on the road to Damascus, some kind of apparition. He didn't even see the resurrected Jesus in the same way that Mary Magdalene had. But whatever his experience was, he had originally been persecuting some of the Jewish Christians. He now turns and he starts to preach messages about Jesus. But he discovers that in the Jewish world, it's largely they're not taking on board his message. I don't have a problem with that. He did have a problem with that. And he found that Gentiles were beginning to become part, in large numbers, of his following. So what he does, he starts to explain his beliefs, the kind of emerging Christianity in Hellenistic terms, in the language that

Greco-Roman world will understand. So you get all kinds of imagery coming in of dying and rising again and that kind of thing linked in with some of the deities, although it's monotheistic, but it's using the language to try and explain to the followers. And that really starts to take Christianity away and it's on the path to becoming a new religion. And really the point that severs it, I believe, is the destruction of the temple in 70CE and now all kinds of reinterpretation, not only for those diverse Christian groups but also for Judaism. How can they survive the destruction of the temple because Paul still went to the temple. So you have this gradual change and, in that backdrop, you have Mary Magdalene and her followers and the thread of the importance amongst all this diversity that's emerging in early Christianity. Some of it's still within Judaism and perfectly accepted in Judaism. Some of it beginning to come out and not acceptable within Judaism.

The Mary Magdalene tradition is too important in oral tradition for them to completely ignore it. Now, the first gospel wasn't written until around, well, I estimate around 40, 50. I mean, absolute earliest, 50. So we're talking about 20 years, 20 to 30 years, probably more like 60. So around 30 years after Jesus's death do the gospels start to be written. Matthew's gospel is after the destruction of the temple in 70. Luke is somewhere in between about 65 and John's gospel is around 90, 80, but most scholars would say it's around 90CE. That's a heck of a distance from the historical events of Jesus. But the most important thing to say is that when they're writing down the oral traditions and, obviously, as they get passed on, the communities are slightly adjusting some of the stories to fit their own narrative. That's clear. If you compare the same stories in different gospels, there are differences. But the tradition of Mary Magdalene could not be written out. It's far too important. It could not be suppressed. I mean, one wonders what would've happened if Mary Magdalene had been allowed to continue to lead 'cause her version has effectively died out.

What would've happened if her tradition had been allowed to continue and to become part, what if it became the Orthodox Christianity? It didn't, it was suppressed. But I think if they ever find, and there is a manuscript, we'll look at in a moment, it's almost certainly not written by Mary Magdalene, but if they could find a manuscript that was written by her or her followers that are roughly around 40CE would be incredible because it would almost certainly have those very early traditions and give us a really close understanding of the historical Jesus. She's got all the answers. Who was the historical Jesus? We need to ask Mary Magdalene. Next slide, please. So I hope that's been really helpful to give that very brief of what I've talked about in previous lectures. Understanding that first-century Christianity was not uniform, but that's how it's taught. That's how it's taught in churches as well. It's what comes through our hymns and our liturgy. But it was struggling for survival against a vibrant Judaism that it



saw as a threat. And we know that that led to all kinds of developments in anti-Jewish teaching and leading, ultimately, to anti-Semitism. But there were other groups beginning to emerge by around a 100CE and what the churches, particularly in Greco-Roman world, were they got completely obsessed with orthodoxy, with trying to come up with what was the truth. And there was one form of Christianity, the Marcion tradition, the church fathers actually declared it a heresy, thankfully. But Marcion said, well, Judaism has been superseded by the New Testament, by Jesus Christ. We don't need the Old Testament. And he advocated not having the Hebrew Bible as part of the New Testament. But the church fathers actually sat on that and said, no, no, no. This is not the way Orthodox is developing. But apart from that, there were other threats to Christianity. And one of those threats were what were called the Gnostics and the Gnostics started to develop towards the end of the first century. And they, mainly, originally, it's a kind of, well, I don't know if I can really make a parallel say, it's sort of like cabala, it's a kind of mystical. But the Gnostics believed they had a secret knowledge that only their group had.

Of course, this was a threat to the developing orthodoxy of the church fathers. They perceived that as much a threat as they did the Mary Magdalene tradition. But it's interesting because there's a gospel in the Gnostic writings that will be of interest to our subject today. So you get a whole series of texts that start to be written down by the end of the first century and just beyond and into the second century. And, at some point, the church fathers have to decide which of them are going to be part of the Christian canon, which of them are going to be scripture. And those that are not scripture, those that don't make it into the Christian Bible, were known as apocryphal text. And believe it or not, the Book of Revelation, which is the very last book of the New Testament, is just so bizarre in its imagery. It's a kind of apocalyptic battle. And as one of my lecturers said at university, the key to understanding the revelation has been thrown away. I mean, we just cannot understand it today except to say that the church fathers very nearly didn't include it in the New Testament. But they also didn't include the Gnostic writings. This group that emerged that believed it had the truth, the correct interpretation. And one of their writings, I'm going to come to you shortly, was called Pistis Sophia. And this was discovered in 1773. Its origins are totally unknown. It was sold to the British library actually. I've not seen it. I don't know if it's ever been on display in the British library, but it was sold by a doctor, this fragment, this manuscript. And then, of course, something I've mentioned before, the Nag Hammadi library that was discovered, incredibly exciting, as exciting as the discovery of the Dead Sea scrolls. Although, it hasn't had the same amount of attention, found in jars hidden in Southern Egypt. It's an incredible cash of manuscripts, fragments, if you like, like you can see on the screen there. And the Gnostic writings and all those writings found at Nag Hammadi were never included in the Christian canon in the New Testament, that it was decided that they would be suppressed. Next

slide, please. So Pistis Sophia, I've got a fragment there, a picture of a fragment. It was written in Greek. It's thought to have been around third or fourth century within a group, this group of Gnostics that actually got quite a following and was perceived as a genuine threat to emerging Christianity. So it was ultimately purchased for the British Museum. I think now in the British Library, as I said earlier, source unknown.

Next slide, please. So what is it? Well, it is this sort of long dialogue and it is, as I've put there, a rather esoteric text. It's a bit in many ways like the Book of Revelation, the keys have been thrown away. We don't really understand the developing ideas and some of the imagery. But, essentially, it's a number of questions which are posed by the disciples to Jesus. 64 questions in total. 39 of them are from Mary Magdalene. And it's extraordinary, however much the church has tried to suppress Mary Magdalene, to suppress her by labelling her as a sinner, a harlot, a prostitute, an outcast of society, she appeared in all kinds of interesting texts and traditions. There is a thread of her tradition and she is, through her questioning, imparting some kind of knowledge of a female goddess, Sophia. But this text, unsurprisingly, of course, was banned as heretical by the church fathers in the fourth century. It was deemed a real threat. Next slide, please. So I've got an extract for you because I just think this is fascinating 'cause one of the things that's written in this text, I've just given you a little snippet here. Jesus says to Mary, "You are more blessed than all women on earth." So you have this strand that's come through these first two to 300 years that she is the closest to Jesus. She becomes the apostle of the apostles, doesn't she? And Simon Peter, he's the one on whom the Roman church is built, on whom I build my church, the rock on whom I build my church. So that's where the Roman Catholic tradition comes from. Believed there is a direct ancestry back through their popes to Simon Peter himself. Simon Peter replies in this text, "My master, we cannot endure this woman "who gets in our way and does not let any of us speak, "although she talks all the time." Mary replies, "I'm afraid of Peter because he threatens me "and hates our gender." I mean, extraordinary. So Mary Magdalene is really struggling, her tradition. She's long dead by now, of course, but her tradition is really struggling to survive in what's becoming a dominant male orthodoxy.

Next slide, please. So what about the Nag Hammadi Library? Next slide, please. This, for me, is utterly fascinating. It's found in a region of southern Egypt in not dissimilar scenes to the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls. So you have amongst some, not just these four gospels, these are ones that mention Mary Magdalene, but they're not solely the ones. So there are a whole raft of these that are found, Gospel of Thomas, potentially from the Disciple Thomas, his tradition that again has been suppressed by the church fathers. Gospel of Philip, Acts of Peter, Gospel of Mary. And it's my understanding that the Gospel of Mary almost did make it into the New Testament. I mean,

what if it had? And the Gospel of Thomas too. The Gospel of Thomas has a lot of early Jesus teachings that appear in Matthew, sorry, Mark and Luke. So scholars believe that although there are changes, the Gospel of Thomas has very early traditions that can tell us something about the historical Jesus. But none of them, ultimately, made it into the New Testament. But they're important for us today because, in reading them, in trying to disentangle the developing ideas in them, they have a kernel of the early oral tradition that sheds light on early Christianity. I think if I was able to have a time capsule to go back, I think this is the period of history that I'd want to go back to, to know what really happened in the time of Jesus. And I think I'd want to shadow Mary Magdalene. Wouldn't you want to shadow Mary Magdalene? But Mary Magdalene, she appears several times in these gospels. So these texts show us yet again that her tradition is so strong in early Christianity that they cannot totally ignore it. Next slide, please. And what was discovered, this is just extraordinary, isn't it, 13 leather-bound papyrus codices. They're in a jar like the Dead Sea Scrolls were and one of them has a partial translation. Next slide, please. Of Plato's Republic. I thought you'd love this, which is why I've given you a slide of the fragment of Plato's Republic. All kinds of interesting material has been found amongst this.

Next slide, please. So, as I said, the Nag Hammadi Library is by and large the library of the Gnostics. That group that emerged originally within Jewish Christianity in the first century was largely operational around Galilee, Samaria, but non-rabbinical. So not of the rabbinical tradition, not of the Pharisaic tradition. So they're kind of operating outside of that. But they do attract followers, as I've said, and they become a threat to developing orthodoxy. Next slide, please. So they are claiming, and this, of course, the church fathers don't like, they're claiming to have the real truth, their interpretation of the historical teachings of Jesus, which are written down in the Gospel of Philip, the Gospel of Thomas, Gospel of Mary, and a whole raft of others. They are saying this is the scriptures, this should be the canon. And the church fathers very quickly suppressed that. But, sadly, it does convey aspects of anti-Jewish tradition. It's a shame. I would love to have found that these texts, early parts of these texts actually didn't have those anti-Jewish elements to them. But they are like the rest of early Christianity defining itself against a dominant and popular Judaism. And that struggle makes it over into the Gnostic texts as well. And in some places, as I've put there, there are passages where there is a really violent rejection of the Jewish God in contrast even more violent and difficult than some of the texts within the New Testament. But you see the early church, the church fathers rejected mysticism. This is not Christian Orthodoxy.

Next slide, please. But within that, there are, as a number of references to Mary Magdalene that I'm going to come to shortly. But I love this quote from Israeli philosopher, Gersham Scholem, who said

Gnosticism was, or as he saw it, as "The greatest case of metaphysical anti-Semitism." I think he's probably right. Next slide, please. And it does seem that those early strands, those strands, very, very early strands of Christianity, which were still within Judaism that were not anti-Jewish, were ultimately suppressed. Can we recover those? That's the thing. Can the church recover those and enable that to impact on Christian teaching? That's, I think, is one of the challenges we face. But did you know amongst the Gnostic traditions and things like Hammadi is the lost Gospel of Judas and the fragments you can see there purport to come from the Judas tradition and his version of all tradition as the fragments are very small. None of these gospels are complete. No complete gospels have been found. There are varying amounts of fragments for each one. So scholars are working on very, very tiny and difficult pieces to try and put together. Much like with the Dead Sea Scrolls, they aren't all totally complete. But within the Gnostic tradition, the Gospel of Judas, of course, claims that it has the real truth and the correct interpretation.

Next slide, please. And in the Gospel of Philip, which is part of this Gnostic tradition, this is where the idea that Jesus loved Mary Magdalene more than all of his other disciples, gave rise to the idea of Mary Magdalene as the apostle of the apostles. He actually names Mary Magdalene as Jesus's closest companion and partner. And it's a word which may could also indicate that she was his wife, companion, partner. Raises again was she married to him? And in one scene, she's the one that Jesus kisses on the mouth. So it's the one and only time we have that sort of sexual, physical contact in any of the gospels. And the claim that she was a prostitute, it's probably quite shocking too to learn that it came in 591. So we're talking about 550 years after the death of Jesus. So until then, it was formally claimed that she was a prostitute and that was part of formal Christian tradition. So she's been kissed on the mouth.

Next slide. Because it's a Gnostic text, scholars understand this as not a physical kiss. And again, it's all about interpretation. How can we know this far on for sure. But the imagery is suggestive that the kiss is a sort of breadth of knowledge that Jesus is imparted to Mary Magdalene. And I suppose the imagery behind that, again, is underscoring the significance and importance of Mary Magdalene within the Christian tradition because it is believed that this Gnostic text has sort of developed from out of an earlier Mary Magdalene tradition, oral tradition. And, in a sense, it has preserved that fact that, in fact, she understands and has the true teachings of Jesus. Of course, they've developed it, but it's that constant thread through many of the Christian texts, whether they're orthodox or unorthodox texts, Mary Magdalene, they just cannot totally erase her from history. And that is utterly fascinating.

Next slide, please. The Gospel of Mary, which caused so much excitement, is thought to have been written around the second century

CE. So around a 150 or so years after Jesus' death. So not that late compared to some of the Gnostic writings and this Gospel of Mary is thought to have had or has within it, very, very early oral traditions that go back to the Apostle Mary Magdalene. She's not a disciple, but she is a follower, apostle of the apostles. And that within it, there are elements of historical aspects of the Jesus tradition. It does, of course, depict her as a special disciple. She is more important over the male disciples. She has a deeper understanding of Jesus' teachings. But also it provides us with an insight into the importance of women in the early church. There were other women in the early church, even in Paul's church. Phoebe was one of them who was incredibly close to the church leaders and possibly even leaders within their own right. And the idea that Mary Magdalene is the special disciple, maybe that has held on to real historical tradition.

Next slide, please. I'm going to fast forward, if you wouldn't mind, the Gospel of Jesus. I think you can go back, I've said a few things about this before. Gospel of Jesus' wife, which scholars now believe is probably not authentic, which actually alludes to the fact that Mary Magdalene was Jesus' wife, a word which he potentially uses to his other disciples. But if we could fast forward a couple more, but maybe you can borrow, if you haven't seen what I've said about this fragment, you could have a look at my earlier lecture. Next slide, please. We'll go on, next slide, please. Okay, next slide, please. Okay, is it a forgery? Yes, potentially, carbon dating. There is some controversy. Professor King who's in America, I've forgotten which university now, off the top of my head, I want to say Harvard, but I'm not sure, the ink is consistent with earlier use of ink and is not as late as the eighth century as carbon dating would suggest, that's her view. By and large, it's now thought to have been a forgery.

Next slide, please. But nevertheless, forgery or not, it covers that same strand of theme that there are women around Jesus who were mothers and wives who were followers, if you like disciples, even if they aren't the closest of the 12 disciples. And it underlines, I think more than anything, that women were more prominent in the Jesus movement, in Jesus' ministry than has been given credit. And that this fragment and others do deserve another look. So I'm coming to my last couple of slides. Next slide, please. To round up shortly. You know, it's interesting, isn't it? I mean, Mary Magdalene has been made a saint in the Catholic church and in others. She has been upgraded even to have a feast day of her own, which is the 22nd of July. I thought you'd be interested in this because when Philip II expelled Jews from Paris in the 1180s, the synagogue was taken over and it was consecrated as a church. And it was dedicated to Mary Magdalene. Could have been dedicated to any of the saints, any of the male saints, but it was actually dedicated to Mary Magdalene.

Next slide, please. Ultimately, Mary Magdalene, she did die in Ephesus, which is now, of course, in Turkey. It is an area where Paul,

as I've said, the Apostle Paul had his ministry, his voice, his branch of Christianity came to be the dominant one. It was the one that expanded the fastest with the intake of so many Gentiles. And really, his teachings begin to take it beyond anything which the Mary Magdalene tradition would be expounding. But finally, and it takes almost 900, sorry, 1900 years, almost 2000 years, it's Pope Paul VI, who finally in 1969 removes Mary Magdalene as the title of sinful woman from Church canon. Next slide, please. But throughout history, she's there. She's there through Christian art. I could have chosen any number of paintings or sculptures, but I've chosen this one. I love this one. I'm not quite sure why, but it's incredibly striking. It's incredibly beautiful. She's self-assured. She looks like a leader. She has that calm, commanding presence, this by Carlo Marochetti in 1843. Absolutely beautiful marble carving of Mary Magdalene called The Magdalene.

Next slide, please. And I want to come to my concluding comments for today because for 2000 years, Mary Magdalene, who the church thought had dealt with the threat, she was clearly perceived as a threat, continued to dog the church. I mean, she was really always at the heart of it, could not be erased from the tradition. She appears in some of the most important artworks and sculptures. And when she was the subject of the film a few years ago, it might have even been a decade ago now, a very human portrayal of Jesus suggested that Mary Magdalene is his wife, caused huge controversy. So even today, after 2000 years of all of Jesus' disciples, of followers, it's Mary Magdalene who remains the most controversial figure. Some might want to argue it's still Judas Iscariot, potentially, but I would say that Mary Magdalene cannot be erased from history. And I think that's marvellous that she still has a voice. And if one day one of the archaeologists could dig up her original writings, I don't know if that exists, but that will be wonderful. But she is still an incredibly powerful figure that continues to disturb the various forms of Christianity. So I hope you've enjoyed what I've presented today and left you with a sense that this woman was so important and, in fact, Jesus' own ministry would not have been successful. He probably couldn't have done his ministry without her. Thank you.

– [Judi] Thank you so much, Helen. What would you like to do about questions or comments today? Are we going to do a part three?

– Yeah, potentially a part three because I think it might be helpful for people to digest what I've said and sometimes it means I end up repeating for other people what they've understood, but others haven't. So maybe I can just pick up the themes and do another part sometime. I think that's helpful.

– [Judi] Yeah, that would be wonderful. I know that Wendy would love a part three and I think there's been a couple of other comments as well from people wanting another session.

- Okay, that's great. Yeah.
- [Judi] Great, so I'll send you a copy of everything.
- Fantastic.
- Thank you so much and thank you to everybody who joined us this evening. Thanks everybody. Bye-Bye.
- Bye.