

M



**THE WOMEN WHO
FOLLOWED JESUS: PART 1**

JACQUELINE LLOYD

It is probably fair to say that most people today imagine that Jesus only had twelve male disciples.¹ Yet the Gospels speak of Jesus having *many* disciples. The twelve were a select group, designated apostles, and drawn from this larger company of disciples.² Many women also followed Jesus, traveling with him throughout the towns and villages of Galilee. In this article I will discuss who these women were, what can be known about them, whether or not they were genuine disciples, and what it meant to travel with Jesus in first-century Palestine.

Luke writes that many women journeyed (*diōdeuō*) with Jesus and the twelve, and names three of them in particular: Mary Magdalene, Joanna and Suzanna (Luke 8:1–3). Mary Magdalene and Joanna remain with Jesus for the remainder of Luke’s narrative and are present at Jesus’ crucifixion and burial along with Mary the mother of James.³ Matthew also records the presence of women who followed (*akoloutheō*) Jesus from Galilee to Jerusalem (Matt 27:55–56). He notes, in particular, Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Mary the mother of Zebedee’s sons James and John.⁴ A comparable account, and probably a source for Luke and Matthew, is Mark 15:40–41.⁵ Mark names three women who followed (*akoloutheō*) Jesus in Galilee: Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James the younger and Joses, and Salome. Thus each of the Synoptic Gospels records the presence of women who either followed (*akoloutheō*) Jesus or journeyed (*diōdeuō*) with him in Galilee.

A number of factors support the historical value of these references. The location of Jesus in Galilee and the claim that he called disciples are considered to be among the “almost indisputable facts” of history.⁶ The additional claim that Jesus had women followers has rarely been doubted. Even the Jesus Seminar who are cautious in assigning historical probability to much of the Jesus tradition, are “relatively certain that Jesus had women in his

traveling retinue” and that Mary Magdalene was one of them.⁷ The presence of women among Jesus’ disciples satisfies the criterion of dissimilarity since “unchaperoned women sharing the preaching tours of a celibate male teacher is discontinuous with... the Judaism of the time.”⁸ It is also a motif “firmly fixed in the tradition,”⁹ and its historical value is supported by its appearance in multiple sources.¹⁰ Finally, it meets the criterion of embarrassment, since it would not have served Luke’s redactional purposes to invent such a “potentially shocking picture” of women travelling with an itinerant rabbi in first century Palestine.¹¹

WHAT CAN BE KNOWN ABOUT THESE WOMEN?

The Synoptic Gospels record that the bulk of Jesus’ ministry occurred in Galilee and around the shores of the Sea of Galilee. It was also in this context that the women were said to have followed him.¹² Thus, the women followers of Jesus were most likely Galilean. In every instance where a disciple of Jesus is identified with a place of origin, the named town or village is located either in Galilee, or in the case of Bethsaida, just across the border at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.¹³ It is no surprise therefore that the appellation “Magdalene” links Mary with the town of Magdala, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee.¹⁴

These women were also undoubtedly Jewish. Archaeological excavations of towns and villages across lower Galilee in the early Roman period reveal a material culture that was predominantly

1 This is the first part of a two-part article. Part two will appear in a later edition of *Stimulus*.

2 For references to the twelve and a wider group of disciples see Matt 12:49; Mark 3:13–15; Luke 6:13, 17; 9:1–2; 10:1; 19:37; John 4:1–2.

3 Luke 23:49, 55; 24:10.

4 The mother of James and John also features in Matt 20:20–21.

5 Martin Hengel, “Maria Magdalena und die Frauen als Zeugen,” in *Abraham unser Vater: Juden und Christen im Gespräch über die Bibel; Festschrift für Otto Michel zum 60. Geburtstag*, eds. Otto Betz, Martin Hengel and Peter Schmidt; AGSU 5. (Leiden/Cologne: E. J. Brill, 1963), 247.

6 E. P. Sanders, *Jesus and Judaism* (London: SCM, 1985), 11. Cf. Robert W. Funk and the Jesus Seminar, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper Collins, 1998), 171, 293, 529; John P. Meier, *A Marginal Jew: Rethinking the Historical Jesus* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 3: 41–47; and N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God* (London: SPCK, 1996), 168–69.

7 Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 292–93, 476.

8 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 76.

9 I. H. Marshall, *The Gospel of Luke* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Paternoster, 1978), 315; cf. Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 1996), 221–24.

10 The sources include: Mark; L; John; *Gospel of Thomas*, 20, 61, and 114. Cf. Hengel, “Maria Magdalena,” 247. Even the so-called *Secret Mark*, which Crossan believes was a source for canonical Mark, includes the presence of women around the historical Jesus. See John Dominic Crossan, *The Historical Jesus: The Life of a Mediterranean Jewish Peasant* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), 415.

11 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 76. Cf. Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 317; and Ben Witherington III, *Women and the Genesis of Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 110.

12 Luke 8:1–3; Mark 15:40–41; Matt 27:55–56.

13 John 1:44; 12:21; 21:2; Mark 1:16–21, 29; 2:13–14; Luke 4:38; 5:1, 8–11; Matt 4:21–22; 9:9. For the location of Bethsaida, see Rami Arav, “Bethsaida – A Response to Steven Notley,” *Near Eastern Archaeology* 74.2 (2011): 92–100.

14 J. F. Strange, “Galilee,” *Dictionary of New Testament Background* (Downers Grove, Ill; Leicester: IVP, 2000), 393.

Jewish.¹⁵ The names of these women also identify them as Jewish. Mary, or more properly Miriam, seems to have been the most popular name for Jewish women in Palestine during the time of Jesus. Seventy occurrences of the name have emerged from c. 330 BCE to 200 CE. Of these, six can be located in the Gospels and Acts, seven in Josephus, nine among the texts of the Judaean desert, and forty-two from ossuary inscriptions.¹⁶ This popularity made it necessary to distinguish one Mary from another.¹⁷ It is probably for this reason that a number of Marys in the Gospels are identified by their relationship with husbands or sons,¹⁸ and Mary Magdalene with her home town.

The name Salome seems to have rated second in popularity for Jewish women at this time. In fact, Tal Ilan notes that the three most popular names combined, Mary, Salome and Shelamzion, account “for 46.5%... of all the Palestinian women whose names are known.”¹⁹ Joanna, being the feminine equivalent of John, ranked fifth in popularity. The name Suzanna, meaning “lily,” is also known and appears twice in the works of Josephus.²⁰ Thus the women followers of Jesus were undoubtedly Jewish and Galilean. But what is known about their socio-economic status?

Numerous scholars have argued that Jesus’ disciples came predominantly from the peasant class due to heavy taxation in Herodian Galilee which resulted in many Galileans falling into indebtedness and penury.²¹ Others have argued that in spite of increasing taxes, the majority of Galileans were still

able to carry out their lives much as they had done for generations. Morten Hørning Jensen, for example, notes that excavations of Yodefaf, Cana, Capernaum and Gamla show no signs of economic decline in the early first century,²² and in the words of F. G. Downing, “God and the land are (still) trusted.”²³ In fact, some scholars argue that the reign of Herod Antipas was good for Galilee, providing greater opportunity for trade which benefited town and village.²⁴ In reality, both literary and archaeological sources of the period show considerable socio-economic diversity in Galilee in the early half of the first-century CE.

The Gospels portray people of varying means ranging from the wealthy,²⁵ to the very poor.²⁶ Among Jesus’ own disciples there was Levi the former toll collector (Mark 2:14) and Joanna the wife of Chuza (Luke 8:3), who must have fared well under Herodian rule.²⁷ There were also sympathetic supporters of Jesus who had wealth.²⁸ However the majority of

Jewish Galileans seem to have been people of modest means, such as farmers, fisherman and tradesmen, who nonetheless owned their own homes,²⁹ and had sufficient means to take time off work to attend religious festivals and to enjoy the occasional celebration.³⁰ In addition, among the characters of Jesus’ parables wealthy landowners appear at one extreme, and day-

THE MAJORITY OF JEWISH GALILEANS SEEM TO HAVE BEEN PEOPLE OF MODEST MEANS, SUCH AS FARMERS, FISHERMAN AND TRADESMEN, WHO NONETHELESS OWNED THEIR OWN HOMES, AND HAD SUFFICIENT MEANS TO TAKE TIME OFF WORK TO ATTEND RELIGIOUS FESTIVALS AND TO ENJOY THE OCCASIONAL CELEBRATION

15 For a detailed discussion see Mark A. Chancey, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002). Cf. Sean Freyne, “Galilee, Jesus and the Contribution of Archaeology”, *ET* 119 no. 12 (2008): 576–77; and Jonathan L. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus: A Re-examination of the Evidence* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Trinity, 2000), 23–61.

16 Richard Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses: The Gospels as Eyewitness Testimony* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Eerdmans, 2006), 89.

17 Eckhard Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission: Jesus and the Twelve* (Downers Grove, Ill/Leicester: InterVarsity Press/Apollos, 2004), 1: 286–87.

18 See e.g. Matt 20:20–23; John 19:25.

19 Tal Ilan, *Jewish Women in Greco-Roman Palestine* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1995), 55.

20 Bauckham, *Jesus and the Eyewitnesses*, 89.

21 Crossan, *Historical Jesus*, 415. K. C. Hanson and D. E. Oakman, *Palestine in the Time of Jesus: Social Structures and Social Conflicts* (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress, 1998); R. A. Horsley, *Archaeology, History and Society: The Social Context of Jesus and the Rabbis* (Harrisburg, Pa: Trinity, 1996).

22 Morten Hørning Jensen, “Herod Antipas in Galilee: Friend or Foe of the Historical Jesus,” *JSHJ* 5 (2007): 24–25.

23 F. G. Downing, “In Quest of First-Century CE Galilee,” *CBQ* 66 (2004): 95.

24 Mordechai Aviam, “First Century Jewish Galilee: An Archaeological Perspective,” in *Religion and Society in Roman Palestine: Old Questions, New Approaches*, ed. Douglas R. Edwards (New York and London: Routledge, 2004), 21; Douglas R. Edwards, “The Socio-Economic and Cultural Ethos of Lower Galilee in the First Century: Implications for the Nascent Jesus Movement,” in *The Galilee of Late Antiquity*, ed. Lee I. Levine (New York/Jerusalem: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1992), 56–58.

25 See e.g. Matt 19:22; Luke 18:23; 19:2.

26 See e.g. Mark 10:46; 21:2.

27 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 194.

28 See e.g. Luke 15:43; John 19:38–9.

29 Mark 1:29; Acts 12:12. Even Jesus’ rebuke of scribes who had “devoured widow’s houses” suggests that most Galileans still owned their own homes and believed that widows were entitled to retain ownership of theirs (Luke 20:47). Mark 1:20 indicates that some people, like Zebedee and his sons James and John, managed their own businesses.

30 Luke 2:41; John 2:1–2; Jos. *Ant* 20.118.

labourers and beggars at the other, with ordinary farmers and fishermen in the middle.³¹

Archaeological findings from the first century CE also reflect this economic diversity. Jewish dwellings in Sepphoris, just five kilometres from Nazareth, reveal a significant degree of wealth. Many private homes had red-tiled roofs and white plastered walls which were strong enough to support an upper story. Inside were found storage rooms, internal cisterns, *mikva'ot*,³² mosaic floors and frescoed walls, and expensive household goods such as glassware and cosmetic items.³³ Thus Josephus is certainly correct when he describes the residents of Sepphoris as “rich and wealthy.”³⁴ Similar wealth is also evident in Tiberias.³⁵ By contrast, the village of Capernaum reveals simple dwellings surrounding enclosed courtyards, with dirt packed floors and thatched roofs. Yet while the artifacts uncovered reveal “no signs of wealth,”³⁶ these private homes are filled with signs of thriving activity.³⁷ Cana on the other hand seems to have been “steadily expanding” in the early half of the first century, and showing signs of increasing wealth.³⁸ We should expect therefore to find similar economic diversity among the women followers of Jesus.

Mary Magdalene is identified with Magdala, a town located between Tiberias and Capernaum (Luke 8:2). Josephus knew this town as Taricheae, a name related to *tarichos* meaning “dried or smoked fish.”³⁹ Later rabbinic writers identified the place as Migdāl Nūnayya’ meaning “fish tower.”⁴⁰ Magdala was a town of some standing. Its salted fish met not

31 Matt 13:45, 47; 20:1, 3; 21:33; Luke 12:16; 13:6; 15:4; 16:1–2, 19; 18:35; 20:9; Mark 1:19–20; 4:3.

32 *Mikva'ot* are stepped pools for the purpose of ritual washing.

33 Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 126–28. Cf. Z. Zuck, “Sepphoris,” in *The New Encyclopedia of Archaeological Excavations in the Holy Land (NEAEHL)*, ed. Ephraim Stern (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Carta), 1: 1327.

34 Jos. *War* 2.574.

35 Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 49.

36 *Ibid.*, 159–60.

37 Mark 1:29; cf. Luke 10:38. Artifacts include cooking pots, ovens, loom weights and fish hooks. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 159–60.

38 Jensen, “Herod Antipas,” 24.

39 Jos. *Life*, 404. See Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke I–IX*, AB (New York: Doubleday, 1970), 697; Marshall, *Gospel of Luke*, 316.

40 *b.Pesahim* 46a. See Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 697; John Nolland, *Luke 1–9.20*, WBC (Dallas, Tex.: Word, 1989), 366; Strange, “Galilee,” 393.

only local needs but was also produced for export.⁴¹ It was also a centre of civic administration for Herod Antipas, a fact reflected in the remains of its public buildings.⁴² The city could boast a paved road, a hippodrome, harbour facilities, and a small but elegant public building which has been identified as a synagogue.⁴³ Even its private homes were replete with baths.⁴⁴ These factors suggest a measure of wealth for the residents of Magdala, and probably also for Mary Magdalene, given that Luke identifies Mary as one of the women who provided for Jesus and the twelve out of her own possessions (*huparchonta*, Luke 8:2–3).

Mary’s marital status is unknown. Given that no mention is made of a husband in any of the Gospels, it is unlikely that Mary was married when she became a follower of Jesus. She was probably therefore either divorced or widowed. Less likely is the possibility that Mary had never married, perhaps due to her serious illness (Luke 8:2).⁴⁵

Although Mary clearly had the freedom and means to travel with Jesus and make her resources available to him, no amount of wealth, it seems, was sufficient to meet her medical needs prior to meeting Jesus, despite the fact that according to Josephus, Taricheae offered better

medical care than Capernaum.⁴⁶

It is important at this point to correct the misconception that Mary’s illness was due in part to a prior sinful lifestyle.⁴⁷ The identification of Mary Magdalene as a reformed sinner probably became part of Western tradition when a sermon preached by Pope Gregory I conflated the accounts of Mary Magdalene with Mary of Bethany and the woman

41 Strabo, 16.2.45.

42 Strange, “Galilee,” 393, 395; Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 233–34.

43 This building has a mosaic floor and frescoed walls. Eric M. Meyers and Mark A. Chancey, *Alexander to Constantine: Archaeology of the Land of the Bible* (New Haven, Conn./London: Yale University Press, 2012), 3: 211.

44 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 234.

45 Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 119. For a discussion on the severity of Mary’s condition, see, Nolland, *Luke 1–9.20*, 366; and Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 698. According to Meier, there are good grounds for accepting the historical value of this report. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 2: 657–59. Cf. Funk, *Acts of Jesus*, 292.

46 Jos. *Life*, 403–4.

47 This misconception is a Western phenomenon and is almost unknown in Eastern Christendom.

of Luke 7:36–50.⁴⁸ In recent times the notion was popularised by Andrew Lloyd Webber’s musical “Jesus Christ Superstar,” in which Mary Magdalene sang the lyrics, “I’ve had so many men before...”⁴⁹ Yet as N. T. Wright correctly observes, “the reputation which Mary of Magdala has acquired... owes nothing to the synoptic or Johannine gospel texts.”⁵⁰ Luke does not identify Mary with the repentant sinner of Luke 7:36–50 and no Gospel account identifies her as the woman who anointed Jesus. In fact, Matthew, Mark and John place the anointing of Jesus at Bethany in Judaea, and John identifies the woman as Mary of Bethany, not Mary of Magdala.⁵¹ In Eastern Christianity Mary Magdalene is remembered as “*isapostolos*” (i.e. apostle to the apostles),⁵² and the three women, Mary Magdalene, Mary of Bethany, and the woman of Luke 7:36–50, each have their own feast days.⁵³

Alongside Mary, Luke names Joanna the wife of Chuza, who was a manager of Herod’s household (Luke 8:3).⁵⁴ Given that Herod Antipas moved his capital from Sepphoris to Tiberias c. 18–20 CE,⁵⁵ Joanna probably hailed from Tiberias,⁵⁶ which was located just five kilometres south of Magdala.⁵⁷ Here Herod built his palace and kept his “royal treasure houses and archives.”⁵⁸ Joanna’s association with Chuza suggests that she was also a woman of means.⁵⁹ This is supported by Luke’s statement that Joanna, along with Mary Magdalene, drew from her own possessions (*huparchonta*) to minister to Jesus and the twelve

48 Gregory’s sermon *Homiliae* 23 appears in *Patrologia Latina* 76, 1238–46. The Latin father Jerome also assumed a link between Mary’s demon possession and a prior sinful lifestyle (*Ep.* 59, 4).

49 Tim Rice and Andrew Lloyd Webber, “I don’t Know how to Love Him.” Decca/MCA/Decca Broadway, September 1970.

50 N. T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, 267.

51 Mark 14:3; Matt 26:6–7; John 11:2; 12:1, 3.

52 W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Gospel According to Saint Matthew* (London/New York: T&T Clark, 1997), 3: 637; Galen C. Knutson, “The Feast of Saint Mary Magdalene,” *Worship* 71/3 (1997), 213; Funk, *The Acts of Jesus*, 478.

53 Knutson, “The Feast of Mary Magdalene,” 213.

54 Chuza may have been a convert to Judaism, given the name appears in Nabatean and Syrian inscriptions as Aramaic *Kūzā’*. For Herod’s practice of employing Nabateans see Jos. *Ant* 18.194. See also Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 135–43, 151–61; Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 698; Nolland, *Luke* 1–9.20, 366.

55 Jos. *Life*, 37. See Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 698.

56 Bauckham, *Gospel Women*, 137, 141.

57 Cf. Gideon Foerster, “Tiberias,” in *NEAEHL*, 1: 1464.

58 Jos. *Life*, 65–66.

59 Nolland, *Luke* 1–9.20, 366.

(Luke 8:2–3). David Sim argues that Joanna’s marital status would have prevented her from contributing financially to the Jesus movement, because “the right to dispose of her goods lay not with her but with her husband.”⁶⁰ However, this need not be the case. As Judith Lieu writes, women of economic and social standing in society had “greater opportunities for independence.”⁶¹

Little is known of Suzanna, but like Mary Magdalene and Joanna, she seems to have had the freedom to leave home and travel with Jesus, and sufficient means to make her possessions available to him (Luke 8:2–3).

Mary the wife of Zebedee and the mother of James and John,⁶² probably came from Capernaum, since her husband and sons were fishing partners with Peter and Andrew who lived in Capernaum,⁶³ a small village lying a few kilometres north of Magdala. Thus Mary probably did not have the kinds of resources available to Mary Magdalene, Joanna, and Suzanna. This may also have been the case with Salome and many of the other women who followed Jesus, although there is insufficient data to identify them, their towns of origin or their economic status.

IT IS VALID TO QUESTION WHETHER THESE WOMEN WERE IN FACT GENUINE DISCIPLES, GIVEN THAT NONE OF THE EVANGELISTS USE THE DESIGNATION “DISCIPLE” TO DESCRIBE THEM

WERE THESE WOMEN GENUINE DISCIPLES?

It is valid to question whether these women were in fact genuine disciples, given that none of the evangelists use the designation “disciple” (*mathētēs*) to describe them.⁶⁴ *Mathētēs* is in fact a masculine term. The only occurrence of a feminine equivalent appears in Acts where Luke speaks of a disciple (*mathētria*) named Tabitha (Acts 9:36). This begs the question, if Luke could use the feminine form of disciple for Tabitha, why not for the women of Luke 8:1–3?

Meier argues that the problem was probably philological. Although the words “disciple” and “disciples... existed in Hebrew and Aramaic... in masculine forms,”⁶⁵ “there was literally no feminine noun that could be used to describe them.”⁶⁶ Rabbis

60 David C. Sim, “Women Followers of Jesus: The Implications of Luke 8.1–3,” *Heythrop Journal*, 30 (1989): 52.

61 Judith Lieu, *Gospel of Luke* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1997), 61.

62 Matt 20:20–23; 27:56.

63 Luke 5:10; Mark 1:16, 19, 29.

64 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 74, 121 (n. 132).

65 *Ibid.*, 78.

66 *Ibid.*

simply did not have women disciples. Meier suggests, therefore, that Luke may have been the first to coin the term *mathētria* (Acts 9:36), but “did not feel authorised to introduce the feminine form into the relatively fixed gospel tradition.”⁶⁷ He goes on to point out that “new realities emerge on the historical scene before there are new words to describe them.”⁶⁸ Meier is almost certainly correct. Even though the term “disciple” was not applied explicitly to women in the Gospels, these women were disciples in reality.⁶⁹

In a detailed study of the use of *mathētēs* in the Gospels, Meier argues that discipleship in the Jesus movement included the following traits or criteria: Jesus took the initiative in calling disciples; the disciples physically left home to journey with him; and the act of following Jesus entailed certain risks.⁷⁰ Carla Ricci, in her study of the women followers of Jesus, also observes certain “elements” that make up what it means to be a disciple of Jesus.⁷¹ These include calling, travelling, separation from family circle and previous activities, service, being recipients of special teaching, receiving a call to proclaim, witnessing, and sharing Jesus’ life and fate even in suffering.⁷² The points of similarity and overlap between Ricci’s “elements” and Meier’s “criteria” are quite clear.

Ricci’s element of calling equates to Meier’s first criterion, her element of travelling and separation from family circle and previous activities, taken together, fit well with Meier’s second criterion, and her final element of sharing Jesus’ life and fate fits well with Meier’s third criterion of risk. But Ricci adds elements not explicitly noted as criteria by Meier: service, being recipients of special teaching, proclamation, and witness. These will be discussed in more detail in Part II of this article. For now, let’s consider the overlapping criteria used by Ricci and Meier, to see whether or not they are applicable to the women who followed Jesus.

Clearly, the women in Luke 8:1–3 meet Meier’s second criterion. Just like the twelve, the women physically left their homes to follow Jesus. They

67 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 79. He adds that Luke also seems to have widened its application in Acts to include believers who did not “literally” follow Jesus (Acts 6:7; 9:1–2, 10, 26; 10:36).

68 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 79.

69 Ibid, 74–80.

70 Meier, *Marginal Jew*, 3: 47–73.

71 Carla Ricci, *Mary Magdalene and Many Others: Women who followed Jesus*. (Minneapolis, Minn: Fortress, 1994), 179.

72 Ricci, *Mary Magdalene*, 179–92.

also meet the third criterion by remaining with Jesus despite the cost and potential risk.⁷³ Consider, for instance, the personal risk of remaining present with Jesus during his crucifixion, an act supported by multiple sources, and which would have clearly associated them with the Jesus movement.⁷⁴

In relation to the first criterion, Meier writes that “Jesus seizes the initiative in calling people to follow him.”⁷⁵ He explains how the usual procedure of the day was that a would-be student would seek out a rabbi to follow him, but in contrast, “Jesus’ initiative in summoning a person to discipleship is a necessary condition for becoming his disciple.”⁷⁶ Yet when Meier begins to discuss the question of whether the women followers of Jesus were disciples, he modifies this criterion.

Meier argues that the women would not have “undertaken the unusual, not to say scandalous, step of following Jesus... without Jesus’ summons beforehand or *at least his clear assent after the fact.*”⁷⁷ He continues, “Such devoted, long-term following is inexplicable without Jesus’ initiative or *at least his active acceptance of and cooperation with* the women who sought to

follow him.”⁷⁸ This is almost certainly correct. The problem with Meier’s claim is that “clear assent after the fact” or “acceptance of and cooperation with” does not fit with his earlier argument that the first criterion for discipleship is a call to follow always initiated by Jesus. If Meier is correct in this initial assessment, given that there is no explicit evidence for Jesus taking the initiative to call women to follow him the argument for Jesus having women disciples is weakened. However, there are some problems with Meier’s initial argument for the first criterion.

Meier’s detailed survey in relation to his first criterion merely demonstrates that Jesus took the initiative in calling some disciples. He has not demonstrated that Jesus initiated the call to discipleship in every case. In all but one exception (Luke 9:59), an explicit call to follow was remembered and became part of the Jesus tradition because the person concerned was later appointed an apostle,

73 See Meier’s discussion on the cost of following Jesus in terms of saving or losing one’s life, denying oneself, and facing hostility from family. Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 56–73.

74 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 75.

75 Ibid, 50.

76 Ibid, 54.

77 Ibid, 77.

78 Ibid, 78.

as in the case of Simon Peter.⁷⁹ Interestingly, in Luke's account of the call of Simon Peter, Andrew, James and John, the explicit call is made only to Peter, yet the others take the opportunity to follow Jesus anyway (Luke 5:10–11). We should not assume, therefore, that all disciples were called in the same way or became disciples in the same way. It should also be noted that the tradition does not record the call of *all* the apostles, let alone those who did not become apostles. Furthermore, the Gospels do record incidents where it was the would-be disciples who first took the initiative to follow him.⁸⁰ In some cases Jesus responds with encouragement to follow (John 1:38–39). In others he cautions the applicant to consider first the cost involved.⁸¹ In these last examples, neither Luke nor Matthew informs the reader of the applicant's response. We should be careful therefore not to presume that they did or did not then become Jesus' disciples.

It seems then that Meier's first criterion ought to be amended, as he himself has done in relation to the women, to say that, in some cases, Jesus took the initiative to call disciples, while in other cases, the initiative rested with the applicant but Jesus affirmed their decision and welcomed them as disciples. This fits well with Ricci's assessment. Drawing on the work of K. A. Rengstorf, she argues that some disciples may not have received an explicit call, but it is clear that it is Jesus "who decides who is to form part of his following."⁸² Meier is certainly correct to say that given the evidence for women journeying with Jesus and the twelve, they were either given an explicit call by Jesus to follow him or they were "accepted" by him as members of his travelling band and became his disciples. The lack of specific mention for how this transpired is not surprising given that Jesus had many disciples and the Gospel accounts only describe the call of six of them.

Consequently, it is clear that these women meet Meier's three criteria for discipleship, although with slight modification. Further support for the assertion that the women were disciples of Jesus can be found in an incident recorded by Matthew and Luke where Jesus' mother and brothers try to meet with him but are obstructed by the crowd. In Matthew's account the plural *mathētas* is used explicitly to designate

both the men *and* women who followed Jesus.⁸³ Matthew writes that Jesus stretched forth his hand "toward his *disciples (mathētas)* and said, 'here are my *mother and brothers*'" (Matt 12:49).⁸⁴ The meaning is unambiguous. Jesus had male and female disciples. Kenneth Bailey argues that in a Middle Eastern context a man could not refer to a group of men as "my *mother and brothers*." Jesus' use of both masculine and feminine terms to describe his disciples clearly indicates that his disciples "were composed of men *and* women."⁸⁵

FOLLOWING AN ITINERANT RABBI

Being a disciple of an itinerant rabbi like Jesus meant travelling with him.⁸⁶ It was not uncommon for first-century Galilean women to travel.⁸⁷ Luke, for example, records Jesus' parents travelling from Galilee to Jerusalem (Luke 2:41), which, according to Josephus, was a three day journey if one took the direct route through Samaria.⁸⁸ It was often

necessary, however, to travel via the Jordan valley and make the ascent to Jerusalem through the Wadi Qelt, due to bad feeling between Jews and Samaritans.⁸⁹ Thus

Galilean women could travel distances of up to three or more days on foot. Nonetheless, travelling with Jesus during his itinerant ministry would have required particular devotion and stamina.

Although the Gospels only mention by name seven towns and villages of Galilee which Jesus visited during his itinerant ministry,⁹⁰ numerous

83 Meier, *A Marginal Jew*, 3: 74. Cf. Acts 6:1; 9:1–2.

84 Cf. Luke 8:21. The dissimilarity between Jesus' harsh words directed towards his mother and brothers, and Jewish cultural concerns to honour one's parents supports the historical value of this account.

85 Kenneth E. Bailey, *Jesus Through Middle Eastern Eyes: Cultural Studies in the Gospels* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP, 2008), 192.

86 For a discussion on Jesus as a Jewish rabbi, see Michael Brown, "A Rabbi Like No Other" in *The Real Kosher Jesus* (Lake Mary, Fla: Charisma House, 2012), 25–42.

87 Luke 1:39; 2:21–22, 41; *bNed.* 36a; *γMS* 5.2, 56a; *Lam. R.* 3.3; *mKer.* 1.7. Josephus speaks in general of Galileans travelling to Jerusalem, although he does not mention women in particular (*Jos. Ant.* 20.118; *Life*, 269).

88 *Jos. Ant.* 20.118; *Life*, 269. Cf. John 4:3–4.

89 James H. Charlesworth, *The Historical Jesus: An Essential Guide* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2008), 40. Cf. Luke 9:51–53; *Jos. Ant.* 20.118.

90 Nazareth (Matt 2:23; 13:54; Mark 1:9; 6:1; Luke 4:16); Capernaum (Matt 4:13; 8:5; 11:23; 17:24; Mark 1:21; 2:1; 9:33; Luke 4:31; 7:1; 10:15; John 2:12; 6:17; 24, 59); Genesaret (Mark 6:53); Nain (Luke 7:11); Cana (John 4:46); Chorazin and Bethsaida (Matt 11:21; Luke 10:13). Bethsaida was located just over the Galilean border at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee, although John and Pliny the elder locate it in Galilee (John 2:21; *Nat. Hist.* 5.15.71). Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 250; Cf. Lincoln H. Blumell, "Travel and Communication in the NT," *New Interpreter's Bible Dictionary* (Nashville: Abingdon, 2009), 5: 655.

79 Mark 1:16–20; 2:14; Matt 4:4.18–22; 9:9; Luke 5:27–28; John 1:43.

80 Luke 9:57, 61; Matt 8:19, John 1:37.

81 Luke 9:58, 62; Matt 8:20.

82 Ricci, *Mary Magdalene*, 180.

summary statements indicate that Jesus travelled to many if not all the towns and villages of Galilee.⁹¹ And, with the exception of those times when Jesus and his disciples crossed the Sea of Galilee in a boat, Jesus seems to have travelled almost exclusively on foot.⁹² In addition, Mark describes Jesus travelling round the villages of Galilee in a circuit (*kuklō*, Mark 6:6b), and the imperfect of *diodeuō* in Luke 8:1 conveys the idea of continual journeying from place to place.⁹³ This is probably an accurate picture given the number of towns and villages in Galilee in the early Roman period.

Josephus speaks of some 240 cities and villages in Galilee,⁹⁴ and while he tends to exaggerate numbers, even a modest assessment on the basis of archaeological remains of settlements confirms his claim that the towns of Galilee were “thickly distributed.”⁹⁵ According to Schnabel, there were approximately 120 towns and villages in Lower Galilee in the early Roman period, and a further fifty-five in Upper Galilee.⁹⁶

These villages were not far from each other. In fact, the total area of Lower Galilee was only about forty by thirty-five kilometres. So Jesus and his disciples could walk from one village to the next in less than one day. Nonetheless, if Jesus wished to travel to every town and village only once, and stay there for no more than two nights, allowing one day for travel and one day to minister to people, it would take him about a year to complete just one circuit of Galilee. Thus, when seasons allowed, Jesus, the twelve and the women must have been continually on the move.

Moreover, topographically the region was comprised of hills and valleys ranging from heights of more than 650 metres above sea level to two hundred metres below sea level, and parts of Upper Galilee reached heights of around thirteen

hundred metres.⁹⁷ Even the short five kilometre walk from Sepphoris to Nazareth included a descent into the Bet Netopha valley and a steep climb up the Nazareth ridge which lay 540 metres above sea level.⁹⁸ In addition the roads of Galilee during this period were mostly unpathed, uneven, and rocky.⁹⁹ Thus while distances between villages were relatively short, travel was neither easy nor quick. The Synoptic Gospels also speak of Jesus visiting the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon, journeying as far north as Caesarea Philippi, and travelling to the towns and villages of the Decapolis. And the women may well have joined him on these journeys also.¹⁰⁰

Finally, while small numbers of travellers might expect to find hospitality in homes,¹⁰¹ and the Gospels do describe Jesus being offered hospitality on numerous occasions,¹⁰² hospitality was not guaranteed.¹⁰³ Even the kinship connections between Jesus’ disciples would not have been sufficient to guarantee accommodation for such a large group

of travellers on every occasion.¹⁰⁴ Moreover, while the Q saying, “the Son of man has no place to lay his head” contains a degree of hyperbole, it at least warns a would-be disciple of the rigours of itinerancy and the uncertainty of finding a decent place to sleep.¹⁰⁵

Thus one of the costs of being a disciple of Jesus would be that the women

IF JESUS WISHED TO TRAVEL TO EVERY TOWN AND VILLAGE ONLY ONCE, AND STAY THERE FOR NO MORE THAN TWO NIGHTS, ALLOWING ONE DAY FOR TRAVEL AND ONE DAY TO MINISTER TO PEOPLE, IT WOULD TAKE HIM ABOUT A YEAR TO COMPLETE JUST ONE CIRCUIT OF GALILEE

being a disciple of Jesus would be that the women

97 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 180; Strange, “Galilee”, 391.

98 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 229, 234; Tzaferis, “Nazareth,” *NEAEHL*, 3: 1103.

99 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 634; Blumell, “Travel and Communication,” 655.

100 Tyre and Sidon (Matt 15:21; Mark 7:24); the Decapolis (Mark 7:31); Caesarea Philippi (Matt 16:13; Mark 8:27). Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 247.

101 See, e.g. Jesus’ instructions to the twelve in Luke 10:5–8. Cf. Marshall, *Luke*, 317. There may also have been lodging houses in Galilee (*t. Demai* 4.32; *m. Demai* 3.5), but there is no explicit evidence for these in the first century CE. See Ilan, *Jewish Women*, 188, and cf. Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 636. There is evidence for a synagogue providing Jewish travellers with accommodation in Jerusalem which probably dates to the first century CE (*CIJ*, 1404), but it is unknown whether this practice existed in Galilee. C. K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background Selected Documents*, rev. ed. (London: SPCK, 1987), 54.

102 Mark 1:30; 2:15; 14:3; Luke 7:36; 10:38; 14:1; 19:6; John 2:12; 12:1–2.

103 Luke 2:4, 7; 9:51–53; 10:10–11.

104 In fact Sim, “Women Followers of Jesus,” 52 argues that finding hospitality was probably “the exception rather than the rule.” Dunn, *Jesus Remembered*, 535 disagrees claiming that one benefit of Jesus having such a “substantial entourage” is that it would provide a large “network of family relations and contacts in the villages visited.”

105 Luke 9:58; Matt 8:20.

91 Matt 9:35; 11:1; Mark 1:38; 6:6b, 56; Luke 4:43; 8:1–3; 9:6.

92 On only one occasion is Jesus said to have travelled on an animal and the importance of the occasion and the fact that he had to borrow the animal suggests that this was the exception rather than the rule (Mark 11:7; Luke 19:35–36; John 12:14). For references to Jesus travelling by boat see for example Matt 14.13; Mark 4:36; 5:21; 6:45; Luke 8:22.

93 Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 697; Marshall, *Luke*, 316.

94 Jos. *Life*, 235; *War* 2.576, 583.

95 Jos. *War*, 3.42–43.

96 Schnabel, *Early Christian Mission*, 1: 180. Cf. Reed, *Archaeology and the Galilean Jesus*, 70; Fergus Miller, *The Roman Near East: 31BC–AD337* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 347.

found themselves on occasion spending nights out in the open air and sleeping on the hard ground. It should be noted, therefore, that these women disciples of Jesus demonstrate not only a devotion to Jesus, but a certain strength, determination and stamina.

CONCLUSION

The Synoptic Gospels indicate that Jesus had a substantial group of disciples and that among these were many women. Prominent among this group was Mary Magdalene, Joanna, Suzanna, Mary the mother of James and John, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Salome. While these ordinary Galilean women came from various social and economic backgrounds, they held one thing in common: their devotion to Jesus. Presumably, for this reason and for their belief in his mission, they left the comforts of home to endure the rigours of itinerant ministry. They became disciples of Jesus and travelled with him throughout the towns and villages of Galilee, and remained with him as he journeyed to Jerusalem and the cross.

In a subsequent issue of *Stimulus*, Part II of this study will discuss further what it meant for a first-century Jewish woman to be a disciple of Jesus, and the contribution the women made to the Jesus movement.

JACQUELINE LLOYD is a Senior Lecturer in Biblical Studies the School of Theology, Mission, and Ministry, at Laidlaw College, Auckland. She is particularly interested in the intersection between the New Testament and its historical context. Her current research interests include the historical Jesus and archaeology, and she recently completed a third season of excavation at Bethsaida, at the northern end of the Sea of Galilee.