

HAVE JESUS' BONES BEEN FOUND?

An excerpt of an article by Dr. Craig L. Blomberg:

What will they think of next? Dan Brown writes a novel that fictitiously garbles Christian history and millions of people believe it is based on fact. The end-of-the-second-century Gospel of Judas is unearthed and the normally scholarly National Geographic Society produces a documentary so biased that even skeptics like Bart Ehrman have to debunk it.

Now various news sources and websites, accompanying a Discovery Channel documentary, tout the possibility of scholars having discovered Jesus' family tomb. Ossuaries (small bone boxes) in a Jerusalem tomb allegedly contain the Hebrew names for Joseph, Mary, Matthew, Jesus, Mary Magdalene, and Judah son of Jesus, with space for perhaps one more mini-coffin. DNA tests now demonstrate that the second Mary does not share any DNA with the remains found in the Jesus ossuary. Given the frequency of burying extended families together, it makes sense to think of this person as a wife of one of the other men, and given the location of her ossuary next to the one of Jesus, perhaps she was his wife.

One writer declares, "We've disproved the resurrection." Another boasts, "At last, the first indisputable evidence that Jesus of Nazareth actually lived." A third announces, "See, Jesus was married to Mary and they had a son named Judah."

These claims are wishful thinking when we consider nine observations that emerge as one reads the stories carefully. **(1)** There is doubt about what some of the letters in the names' inscriptions really say, particularly the name supposedly corresponding to Jesus. **(2)** The tomb (in the Talpiot neighbourhood) is nowhere near the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem, a highly likely candidate for the original site of Jesus' death. Given ancient Jewish burial practices, the likelihood of Jesus having been buried anywhere other than close to where he was crucified is small. **(3)** Dan Brown's fiction notwithstanding, there is not a shred of historical evidence to suggest that Jesus was married and much that says he was single. **(4)** The second Mary's name isn't Magdalene; it is actually three Greek words that could be translated Mary the Master. That is not a known title or form of address for the Magdalene anywhere else in antiquity.

(5) Normally when the information from tombs doesn't match existing literary information about ancient people, the assumption is made that we haven't found their tombs. For the sake of argument, let's say that this tomb does contain the remains of a Joshua (the actual Hebrew) and a Miriam who had a son named Judah. That information alone virtually disproves that this tomb had anything to do with the "Holy Family," since the Bible and serious Christian tradition unanimously agrees Jesus was unmarried and celibate.

(6) Speaking of reading carefully, these ossuaries were first discovered in 1980. And the information was made public then; there was no cover-up. So if there was any likelihood that these ossuaries had anything to do with Jesus of Nazareth, one would expect to find all kinds of hoopla in the scholarly literature and popular news releases from that day. In fact there was none. People in 1980 realized that the evidence didn't add up.

But now we have two new pieces of scientific data, we are told. Besides the "Jesus" and "Mary" DNA being tested and found unrelated, some encrusted debris from the ossuaries appears to match that found on the famous James ossuary that came to light just a few years ago and that was at first highly touted as belonging to "James, son of Joseph, the brother of Jesus." That is, until it was pointed out that the inscription adding "brother of Jesus" appeared to be in a different form of handwriting and to have come from a later date. So if the James ossuary did come from this "Jesus family tomb," that would probably be one more reason (7) for not believing it had anything to do with the famous characters by those names.

For the coup de grace, however, the sensationalizers trot out statisticians who compute some tiny likelihood of all these names being found together in one place and having them all correspond to the biblical names associated with Jesus' family. Of course, nothing is said about (8) the missing brothers and sisters of Jesus from this tomb. Nor does (9) any plausible explanation emerge for why one (and only one) disciple, Matthew, unrelated to this family, would show up in their tomb.

For the rest of this article and a collection of similar articles by both Christians and skeptics see www.dennyburk.com/?p=628