

JESUS FAMILY TOMB FACT SHEET

Compiled by Dr. Randall Price

What's Going On?

(1) On March 28, 1980 in the neighborhood of Talpiot, a Jerusalem suburb, construction workers accidentally uncovered a first-century burial cave containing ten ossuaries. An ossuary is a burial box used to store bones. Six of the ten ossuaries had names on them: "Jesus, son of Joseph; Maria; Mariamene; Matthew; Judas, son of Jesus; and Jose, a diminutive of Joseph. The excavators published a report of the find, archaeological magazines and journals wrote articles about it, the cave was closed, the bones were re-buried according to Jewish law, and the ossuaries were stored in a warehouse run by the Israeli Antiquities Authority.

(2) Two years ago, Israeli-born and now Canadian documentary producer Simcha Jacobovici was researching a story about the controversy over the James Ossuary. In the process he came across the Talpiot tomb discovery and decided it had greater significance than the excavators had known. After further research, he co-authored a book *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* by Simcha Jacobovici & Charles Pelligrino. The foreword by James Cameron, the Hollywood producer who directed the films "The Titanic" and "The Terminator." In addition, The Discovery TV Channel aired the "Lost Tomb of Jesus" documentary Sunday night March 4th.

(3) The book and program claim that the Jesus of the Gospels was buried in his family tomb in Talpiot alongside his wife Mary Magdalene (called Mariamene) and their son Judah. Others buried in the tomb include his mother Mary and father Joseph, and family associate, Matthew. The film also suggests that the "James, brother of Jesus" ossuary, which surfaced in 2002 may also have come from this tomb.

Their Evidence:

(1) Statistical probability of finding in a first-century tomb in Jerusalem so many names of people mentioned in the Gospels in one location – 600-1,000:1.

(2) The filmmakers retrieved samples from the "Jesus" and "Mariamene" ossuaries for DNA analysis. "The human remains were analyzed by Carney Matheson, a scientist at the Paleo-DNA Laboratory at Lakehead University in Ontario, Canada. Mitochondrial DNA examination determined the individual in the Jesus ossuary and the person in the ossuary linked to Mary Magdalene were not related. Since tombs normally contain either blood relations or spouses, Jacobovici and his team suggest it is possible Jesus and Mary Magdalene were a couple" and that "Judah may have been their son."

(3) The filmmakers claim that the 10th ossuary, said to have disappeared from the collections of the Israel Antiquities Authority, may be the so-called "James, Brother of Jesus" ossuary. If so, there can be no denying that this is in fact the tomb of Jesus.

What's at Risk? (1) The Gospel Witness: Even though this evidence is false, millions of unbelievers may still be deceived into thinking Christianity is a farce and that they were justified in not believing the gospel. In addition, uniformed Christians could also become disillusioned and leave the faith becoming skeptics or worse (since they will have abandoned their moral base). (2) Orthodox Christianity (which includes Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism): The conclusion of the book *The Jesus Family Tomb* and the television production "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" is that there was no bodily resurrection. They state that they are not theologians, but don't see why believers can't simply believe that Jesus rose (and ascended) "spiritually." Neo-orthodoxy may be compatible with this notion of a "Christ of faith," but this is incompatible with the Jesus of history and historic Christianity. This is because Christianity came from a Biblical Judaism that believed in physical resurrection, and because the New Testament authors state unequivocally that Jesus rose and ascended bodily, declaring that if this were not a fact then the Christian faith was invalid (1 Corinthians 15:17).

What is the Evidence Against This Claim?

(1) One of the Israeli archaeologists who excavated the site (Amos Kloner) and the anthropologist (Joe Zias) who examined the ossuary remains in 1980, have stated categorically that this tomb has nothing to do with Jesus of Nazareth and that the claims the authors and producers are making are nonsense.

(2) The name "Jesus" ("Joshua") was one of the most popular names among Jews of the first-century. James Charlesworth of Princeton Theological Seminary says he has a first-century letter "written by someone named Jesus, addressed to someone else named Jesus and witnessed by a third party named Jesus." The New Testament also mentions a "Bar-Jesus" (Acts 13:6). In fact, all of the names on the ossuaries make the top ten list of popular first-century names. Based on account of 2,625 males with these names in the first century and/on discovered **ossuaries** we find: Joseph 218/**45**, Judah (Judas) 164/**44**, Jesus 99/**22**, Matthew 62/**17**. Of 328 occurrences for women we find: Mary/Mariamne 70/**42** (21% of Jewish women were called Mariamne/Mary), Martha 20/**17**. This reveals that the chance of the people in the ossuaries being the same individuals mentioned in Gospels is extremely slight.

(3) The statistical analysis commissioned by the authors and producers is untrustworthy. Statistical analysis is only as good as the numbers that were provided to the statistician. He did not run numbers he did not have. In the follow-up critique program hosted by Ted Koppel (aired on The Discovery Channel on March 4th), the statistician admitted that to get the high numbers given in the book and on the program, one would have to accept the assumptions made about the identifications and relationships (familial) of the individuals in the tomb have to be put into the numbers pot. However, if only the individual names "Jesus," "Mary," and "Joseph" were used the outcome would not be significant.

(4) According to the gospels, Matthew was *not* a family member, and a "Judas son of Jesus" is nowhere mentioned in the New Testament or extra-biblical writings. In fact, there is no historical evidence that Jesus was married or had a child. Therefore, this can't be Jesus' *family* tomb if Matthew is there, and can't be the *Jesus* of the Gospels if son named Judas there!

(5) The ossuaries are inscribed in different languages: Aramaic, Hebrew, and Greek (“Jesus,” and “Judah” are inscribed in Aramaic, “Joseph,” “Maria,” and “Matthew” are in Hebrew, and “Marianmene e Mara” in Greek). If the tomb is of Jesus' family, why are the inscriptions in different languages? If “Marianmene e Mara” is really “Mary Magdelene” and she is Jesus' wife, why isn't her ossuary also in Hebrew? There is no evidence she was a Hellenistic Jew (Jesus wasn't). This evidence suggests that different individuals, perhaps of different backgrounds, were buried in the tomb.

		
Aramaic	Hebrew	Greek

(6) The DNA evidence is suspect. Over the past five years my excavation team and I have collected more than 50 bone deposits from Qumran. Despite the large number of bones (including teeth), the excellent state of the bones, and our careful method of extraction and preservation in view of DNA analysis, our genetics expert, Dr. Gila Kahila (who performed the DNA analysis of the Dead Sea scroll fragments from Cave 4 at Qumran) has had little success in getting any DNA samples. The bones of the ten ossuaries from the Talpiot tomb were given a proper Jewish burial back in 1980, and any scant remains that may have been found in this new investigation have probably been contaminated with the DNA of the excavators and others. All one needs to do is *breathe* on a bone sample to contaminate it. The two ossuaries from which their samples were taken had been cleaned of their bones, handled many times, and had been in open storage for 25 years! Even if they had a good DNA sample, there is no DNA evidence that this is the historical Jesus of Nazareth. We would also need an independent control sample from some member of Jesus' family to confirm that these were members of Jesus' family. We do not have that at all. Moreover, because only two boxes were tested and they show no relationship we do not have enough information to even conclude this *was* a family tomb. In addition mitochondrial DNA does not reveal genetic coding or XY chromosome make up anyway. They would need nuclear DNA for that in any case. The only evidence is that the DNA of the Mariamne and Jesus in the tomb do not match. This evidence does not prove she is a wife. It simply says that this Jesus and this Mary are not biologically related. If it is a family tomb, then she could just as easily have been the wife of any one of the other males in the tomb. In other words, the DNA could prove the exact opposite of what is being claimed.

(7) The earliest followers of Jesus never called him "Jesus, son of Joseph." According to the New Testament, “Jesus” was the *legal* son of Joseph, but not his biological son. From a study of names in first-century Israel, it is known that there were regional designations for ossuary inscriptions. If an individual was from Judea they would have been designated by their fathers name: “Jesus ben (son of) Joseph;” if from the Galilee (Jesus home), then by the name of the town: “Jesus of Nazareth” (as Jesus is consistently called in the New Testament). It was this title, written as a legal designation by the Romans, that appeared in the inscription attached to Jesus cross at His crucifixion (Matthew 27:37; Mark 15:26; Luke 23:38; John 19:19).

(8) It is highly unlikely that Joseph, who died earlier in Galilee, was buried in Jerusalem, since the historical record connects him only to his adult hometown of Nazareth or to his ancestral home of Bethlehem. Moreover, the traditional tomb of Mary (the mother of Jesus) is in Ephesus, where Christian tradition says she lived with John after he was released from his exile on the

island of Patmos.

(9) The ornamentation on the ossuaries in the Talpiot tomb indicate they would have belonged to a rich family, which does not match the historical record for Jesus' family. According to Gospels, Jesus was buried in a rich man's tomb (Mark 15:43), but it did not belong to his family, but to Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. However, the ossuary for Jesus is of inferior quality, the name merely scratched on the limestone surface like graffiti. If the family could afford a rich man's tomb and had an entire year prepare to an ossuary (the time it takes for the flesh to decay from the bones) why would they choose a graffiti-like script to name their dead hero. Surely they would have honored Jesus more than this? By contrast, the ossuary for Mary is ornate and the name is beautifully chiseled. Was Mary more important than Jesus in the New Testament? Would Jesus' family have deliberately made His ossuary less ornate? Why? Even though Jesus displayed humility during His life, why would His own family feel He needed to be abnegated in death? Why not also Mary, since she had often humbled herself (cf. Luke 1:38, 48; 2:29)?

(10) The two Mary ossuaries do not mention anyone from "Migdal" (or "Magdala"), which might be expected to distinguish Mary **Magdalene** ("Mary from Migdal/Magdala"), but simply has the name "Mary." The Aramaic term *Mara* in this first-century context does not mean "master," as is claimed, but is an abbreviated form of the name "Martha." Most likely the ossuary contained the remains of two women named "Mary" and "Martha" (*Mariamne* and *Mara*), again common names of the time. Moreover, to get Mariamne to match Mary Magdalene and not a host of any other Mary's, one has to appeal to an apocryphal *Acts of Philip*, a late fourth-century Gnostic (heretical) manuscript. Without this, there is not even a possibility of a connection. The *Acts of Philip* and the *Gospel of Mary Magdalene* also state that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene (the basis for the claim in Dan Brown's *The DaVinci Code*). Again, these are fictional accounts written by a religion that opposed orthodox Christianity and was branded as heretical. Therefore, we do not know Mary/Mariamne = Mary Magdalene, the key point that has to be true for the claim of the authors and producers of "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" to have any merit.

(11) By all ancient accounts, the tomb of Jesus was empty. This conflicts with the idea presented in the book and program that Jesus' body was moved to another tomb, decayed for one year's time, and then His bones put in an ossuary. Hostile Jewish and Roman sources such as Josephus, Suetonius, Pliny and Tacitus all say that it was believed by the early Christians that Jesus was raised from the dead and that they worshipped as a god. Archaeological evidence also confirms this: early Jewish-Christian ossuary inscriptions and graffiti found at the site of Dominus Flevit on the Mt. of Olives (in Jerusalem) reveal that the earliest Christians prayed to Jesus and committed themselves to Him in death. How could this have been done if they knew He had not defeated death? Moreover, if Jesus' family had a tomb had been known, both the Jewish authorities and the Roman government, who wanted to stamp out the Jesus' movement, would have exposed Jesus' bones and ended Christianity in the first-century. On the other hand, if the tomb had been kept a secret, are we really to believe that Jesus' disciples, who knew He didn't rise bodily from the dead and were perpetrating a cover-up and a fraudulent religion, would die for it as martyrs? Suppose even the disciples didn't know? Who, then, removed the body? At

least James, who became the head of the church in Jerusalem and was Jesus' brother would have known about his own family tomb! Yet, the New Testament records that he personally beheld the risen Christ (1 Corinthians 15:7).

(12) The James ossuary could not have come from this tomb. Soil samples taken from inside the James ossuary clearly links it with Kidron Valley area, not Talpiot. This matches the testimony of Oded Golan (the owner of the James Ossuary) who says the ossuary came from Silwan (in the Kidron Valley). According to the fourth-century church historian Eusebius, the body of James, the brother of Jesus, was buried alone near the Temple Mount (where he was executed) and that his tomb was visited in the early centuries. Two years ago Joe Zias discovered the fourth-century Byzantine inscription on the "Tomb of Absalom" in the Kidron Valley (near the Silwan) that said it was then known as the "Tomb of Zacharias," the father of John the Baptist. Church tradition says that James was buried in this same tomb. Moreover, Oded Golan is on trial for forging the words "brother of Jesus" on the James ossuary. According to Joe Zias, who used to inspect antiquities dealers on behalf of the Israeli Antiquities Authority, he saw the James ossuary in an antiquity shop without these added words in the early 1990's. However, during the during the forgery trial of Oded Golan, former FBI agent Gerald Richard testified that a photo of the James ossuary, showing it in Golan's home, was taken in the 1970s, based on tests done by the FBI photo lab. If the ossuary was in Golan's home in the 1970's it could not have been discovered in the Talpiot tomb in 1980. Remember, in order for the case to be made for this being the Family Tomb of Jesus, this James ossuary has to be proven to have originally said "brother of Jesus" and to have come from the Talpiot tomb.

Closing Quote: "In light of all the incredible number of problems with the recent claim that Jesus' grave has been found, the time-honored, multi-faceted evidence for the bodily resurrection of Jesus is more convincing than ever. Even the early opponents of the Christian message acknowledged that Jesus' tomb was empty. And the evidence for Jesus' bodily resurrection appearances has never been refuted." - Dr. Gary Habermas (Research Professor, Liberty University and expert on the resurrection of Jesus and author of *The Case for the Resurrection*).

For further information contact:

Randall Price, Th.M. (Dallas Seminary), Ph.D. (University of Texas)

President: World of the Bible Ministries, Inc.

Website: www.worldofthebible.com

E-mail: wbmrandl@itouch.net

Office: (512) 396-3799