

# THE ALLEGED JESUS TOMB

*By Denver Cheddie*

A recent documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, aired on the Discovery Channel (March 4, 2007) claims that archeologists have discovered a burial cave in Jerusalem which contains the bones of Jesus, his wife and his son. It appears to be a family burial cave with an inscription of six names, including Jesus son of Joseph, 2 Mary's, and Judah son of Jesus. The main players at the heart of this documentary are Emmy-winning filmmaker Simcha Jacobovici, and Oscar-winning director James Cameron.

Needless to say, that if the above claim were true – that that is in fact the bodily remains of Jesus of Nazareth – then that would have dire consequences for biblical Christianity. Christianity stands on the bodily resurrection of Christ. There are numerous scriptures that clearly suggest that Jesus' resurrection was a physical one. He appeared in bodily form to his disciples, and even encouraged them to touch him to see that he was flesh and not just spirit (Luke 24:39; John 20:27). The physical resurrection of Christ is the basis of our hope that we will one day be physically resurrected as well (1 Corinthians 15). If Christ is not risen, then we are of all men most miserable (1 Cor. 15:19).

## Consensus among Archeological Community

Opponents of the above mentioned documentary claim that the name Jesus was not an uncommon name in biblical times. It was the same Hebrew word as Joshua. In fact, the King James Version incorrectly translates Joshua as Jesus at one point (Hebrews 4:8). The name Jesus was found in 71 burial cave inscriptions around the same region. 4 of those bear the name Jesus son of Joseph <sup>[i]</sup>. It was not at all uncommon for people around that time to give their children bible names. For example, do you know who the father of Joseph (Mary's husband) is? Matthew 1:16 gives us the answer. It is Jacob. Interestingly, there was also a Joseph son of Jacob in the Old Testament. It was not at all uncommon for names to be repeated like this.

So why was this burial cave so special? The film makers claim that the mention of so many related bible names appearing in the same burial tomb is more than just a coincidence. In fact, they claim, that there is a 1 in 600 probability of it being coincidence <sup>[ii]</sup>. There was a Jesus son of Joseph, 2 Mary's, and a reference to the son of Jesus – especially coming after the Da Vinci Code. How could all of this be coincidence? It may be just as valid to question how all of this could be anything other than fraud. How convenient that there would be 2 Mary's in there?

Professor Amos Kloner, the archeologist who oversaw the tomb's discovery in 1980, dismisses any possibility of that being the tomb of Jesus of Nazareth. He claims that the tomb in question belonged to a middle class

family, which Jesus' was not <sup>[iii]</sup>. He also claims that Jesus, being a Galilean, would hardly likely have a tomb in Jerusalem. Note that Kloner is not a Christian, neither is he sympathetic with Christianity. Read this direct quote from Kloner regarding the tomb's inscription:

It is easy to see how the writer wanted to attract the attention of modern day viewers by using forms that are as similar as possible to current script. Their placement and design are 'monumental' and stand out. The vast majority of such ossuary inscriptions were carelessly written and schematic. <sup>[iv]</sup>

If I'm reading this quote correctly, he seems to be suggesting that the style of the inscription is not consistent with that of Jesus' era, but more modern in style. He seems to be implying that it is a fraud without directly saying so. I don't see how else that statement could be read. And this is coming from the archeologist who oversaw the tomb's discovery. Kloner also says of the documentary,

It makes a great story for a TV film. But it's completely impossible. It's nonsense. There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. They were a Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem. The Talpiot tomb belonged to a middle class family from the 1st century CE. <sup>[v]</sup>

It is "amazing how evidence falls into place when you begin with the conclusion—and a hammer", says scholar R. Joseph Hoffmann <sup>[vi]</sup>. He is just one of many secular scholars questioning the authenticity of the film. Kloner

believes that the producers of the documentary are more interested in making money out of it than archeological integrity.

The claim that the burial site has been found is not based on any proof, and is only an attempt to sell ... With all due respect, they are not archeologists. <sup>[vii]</sup>

Joe Zias, who spent 25 years as an archeologist for the Rockefeller University in Jerusalem, comments that, based on his archeological reputation, "Simcha [Jacobovici] has no credibility whatsoever." <sup>[viii]</sup>

## **The Bottom Line**

What I find amazing is that a story like this is supposed to put Christianity on the ropes. But even before most Christians had a chance to hear about it, much less put in a position where they had to face the consequences of the film's findings, the whole story had already been dismantled by the secular archeological community. And what is even more amazing, is that there are many people who will see the film, and without bothering to hear both sides of the story, will jump to negative conclusions about Christianity.

People will believe whatever they want to believe – with or without the evidence. It is the Da Vinci Code revisited. You don't have to be a historian to realize that the claims of the book are false. You just have to listen to both sides of the story. Dan Brown wrote his book making historical claims,

which are dire to biblical Christianity. Then a host of critiques were written, which comprehensively dismantled the claims made in the book. They showed up all its factual and historical errors, and cast serious aspersions on Dan Brown's scholarly ability as a historian. So how did Dan Brown respond to all these critiques? "Hey guys, let's turn the book into a movie!" You don't need to be a historian to realize that Dan Brown simply does not have a case. You just need to hear both sides of the story. The same thing is true of the alleged Jesus tomb.

Christianity stands on the resurrection of Christ. Christ's resurrection was not spiritual or symbolic. It was physical and bodily. He was seen by over 500 eye witnesses. But the greatest proof of his resurrection is in the changed lives of those who TRULY follow Him. I emphasize the word truly, as opposed to those who use Christianity to further their agendas (e.g. Hitler). Christ has positively changed more lives than atheism or science. The best proof of his resurrection is seen in the resurrection life lived by those who are His. And because of his resurrection, we have hope that goes beyond the grave. We have a blessed hope that He will raise us up at the last day. Whatever our circumstances, we are assured that our redeemer lives and shall stand at the latter day upon the earth.

Since its inception, Christianity has suffered violence, in that many have tried to topple it. But the violent have taken it by force, in that people's lives are still being changed and the ever increasing kingdom never ceases to bear fruit. Let us not be weary in well doing, neither distracted from the Way, but let us continue to look to that blessed hope, the glorious appearing of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

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[i] Catholic League, Jesus' Tomb discovery is titanic fraud, Feb 28, 2007

[ii] Jay Tolson, Who is entombed in the 'Jesus tomb'?, Mar 4, 2007

[iii] David Warren, Tomb raiders of the most appalling kind, The Ottawa Citizen, Feb 28, 2007

[iv] EWORLDWIRE, Archaeologist Amos Kloner And Scholars Dispute Lost Tomb Of Jesus Claim, Feb 27, 2007

[v] DAVID HOROVITZ, Kloner: A great story, but nonsense, Jerusalem Post, Feb 27, 2007

[vi] Jay Tolson, Who is entombed in the 'Jesus tomb'?, Mar 4, 2007

[vii] Catholic League, Jesus' Tomb discovery is titanic fraud, Feb 28, 2007

[viii] Catholic League, Jesus' Tomb discovery is titanic fraud, Feb 28, 2007