

RAIDERS OF THE EMPTY TOMB

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Recently, I was asked a question,

I read *The Jesus Family Tomb* and a new documentary is coming out in March 2007 (*The Lost Tomb of Jesus*). Did Jesus really resurrect from the dead?

The answer to this and similar questions is significant for one's faith. Without the resurrection there is no faith to contend for (1 Cor. 15:14; 2 Tim. 2:8).

James Cameron, the man who brought us *The Titanic* and *The Terminator* is back with another documentary, *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*. A book, *The Jesus Family Tomb*, by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino offers more of the same science fiction type material to the reader. This time, the ship they attempt to sink is Christianity. This time, the ship will continue to float!

While this topic is sure to be discussed for some time to come – all the facts are not yet in – here are a few brief points to ponder.

What Lies Lie in Cameron's Tomb?

Let us look at the actual findings. According to *Time Magazine*,

Let's go back 27 years, when Israeli construction workers were gouging out the foundations for a new building in the industrial park in the Talpiyot, a Jerusalem suburb, of Jerusalem. The earth gave way, revealing a 2,000 year old cave with 10 stone caskets. Archologists were summoned, and the stone caskets carted away for examination. It took 20 years for experts to decipher the names on the ten tombs. They were: Jesua, son of Joseph, Mary, Mary, Mathew, Jofa and Judah, son of Jesua.¹

¹ *Jesus: Tales From the Crypt*. Time Magazine/Blog, February 23, 2007. http://time-blog.com/middle_east/2007/02/jesus_tales_from_the_crypt.html [Last accessed, February 27, 2007].

It is asserted that through DNA, archeology, and other research that this ossuary is the very tomb of the biblical Jesus. They assert since Jesus was herein found that he must not have truly resurrected! What are the names that Jacobovici found so powerful? Jesus, son of Joseph; Maria; Mariamene;² Matthew; Judas, son of Jesus; and Jose, a diminutive of Joseph.³

As a former homicide detective, the first element of the Cameron/Jacobovici myth that can be exposed is their use of DNA evidence. For DNA to be "credible evidence" there must in fact be a "known example" to compare it to. Since, in all of history there is not a credible "known DNA example" of Jesus,⁴ one must ask Cameron, "Where's the beef?" There isn't any genuine evidence! If a known example existed the argument would be closed – resurrection! Of course, as we shall see below, Cameron attempts to use DNA⁵ evidence in another way, since this full-proof way is not available to him.

Newsweek reports, that Cameron asserts, that the

DNA tests show that the human remains acquired from the Jesus box and the Mariamene box are not related, at least not matrilineally, leaving open the possibility that the two humans whose bones were once in those boxes were married.

However, Cameron once again has no verifiable evidence for his interpretation of these alleged findings. Unrelated individuals being buried in the same graves were common in that era. Moreover, burial sites were used by multiple generations of Jews to bury their dead. There is no warrant to assume that because there are two different DNA strands that a man and woman are married. My mother-in-law and I have two separate strands of DNA and we are not

² The name *Mariamne* was never used for Mary Magdelene in this context. It was a well known name, however: she was the third wife of Herod the Great. As for the Acts of Philip being mentioned, the name Marianme is in that 14th century work, but she isn't Mary Magdelene. Instead, she is described as dying in the Hordan River and turning into a glass box or a cloud of fire. Marie Peterson, Liberian, *The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary*.

³ *Raiders of the Lost Tomb*. *Newsweek*, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/17328478/site/newsweek/page/2/> [Last accessed, February 27, 2007]. Please note this paper follows the outline of this article.

⁴ The Bible demands one take this belief upon faith, *not* scientific proof (Rom. 10:9-10; 14:23; 2 Cor. 13:5; Gal. 2:16; 3:7; Eph. 3:17; Heb. 11:6, etc.).

⁵ For more on DNA Forensics please visit: *The Human Genome Program* at http://www.ornl.gov/sci/techresources/Human_Genome/elsi/forensics.shtml.

married! Could this not be the wife of one of the children, or a friend, or ...? The possibilities are endless.⁶

Moreover, Cameron dances with the *Da Vinci Code*, but their waltz is a loss. Why does Cameron push the *Da Vinci Code* links⁷ for a Jesus married to Magdalene? His presupposition is based upon a book that has been proven beyond all doubt not to be historically accurate!

Even others with varying credentials disagree with Cameron's findings. *Bar-Ilan University* Professor Amos Kloner, a Jerusalem archeologist who officially oversaw the work at the tomb in 1980, has published detailed findings on its contents and dismissed the claims. Newsweek reports,

The official report written by the archeologist Amos Kloner found nothing remarkable in the discovery. The cave, it said, was probably in use by three or four generations of Jews from the beginning of the Common Era. It was disturbed in antiquity, and vandalized. The names on the boxes were common in the first

⁶ The DNA tests run were *mitochondrial* DNA (mtDNA) tests, which cannot exclude the possibility of paternal relationship. "Mitochondrial DNA is maternally inherited without recombination and, thus, is not unique to an individual" "mtDNA analysis is limited when compared to nuclear DNA analysis in that it cannot discriminate between individuals of the same maternal lineage" "Most of the sequences in the forensic mtDNA database occur a single time (approximately 60 percent), and the total number of mtDNA sequences in the entire human population is not known. Reliable frequency estimates for most mtDNA sequences are therefore not possible" "small databases are not effective tools for estimating frequencies of rare events" ... thus, ... "the FBI Laboratory does not provide frequency estimates of mtDNA types in laboratory reports because of the restrictions mentioned previously involving the database size." The *Suffolk County Crime Laboratory* in New York [testing patina taken from the Talpiot Tomb and chemical residue obtained from the "James" ossuary] and *Paleo-DNA Laboratory* in Canada [testing the Jesus ossuary and the Magdalene ossuary] are not FBI approved testing facilities [seven laboratories which are the *FBI Laboratory*, *Laboratory Corporation of America* (LabCorp) in Research Triangle Park, North Carolina; *Mitotyping Technologies in State College*, Pennsylvania; the *Bode Technology Group* (BTG) in Springfield, Virginia; the *Armed Forces DNA Identification Laboratory* (AFDIL) in Rockville, Maryland; *BioSynthesis, Inc.* in Lewisville, Texas; and *Reliagene* in New Orleans, Louisiana]. *Mitochondrial DNA Analysis at the FBI Laboratory*. FBI, U.S. Department of Justice. <http://www.fbi.gov/hq/lab/fsc/backissu/july1999/dnaf1.htm>. [Last accessed, March 1, 2007].

⁷ see article entitled, *Brown's Inquest, The Da Vinci Code, Fact or Fiction?* by Joseph R. Nally.

century (25 percent of women in Jerusalem, for example, were called Miriam or a derivative). ...

To this day, Kloner says the burial cave is not extraordinary. "It's a typical Jewish burial cave of a large size," he says. "The names on the ossuaries are very common names or derivatives of names." The echo of the names of the members of the Holy Family, he says, "is just a coincidence."⁸

The names, Jesus, Mary, and Joseph were common names in that era. James Charlesworth of *Princeton Theological Seminary* (who established the *Princeton Theological Seminary Dead Sea Scrolls Project*) has possession of a first-century letter written by someone named Jesus, addressed to someone else named Jesus and witnessed by a third party named Jesus.⁹ Three different Jesus' in one letter? Yes, three in one letter! How common of a name is the name of Jesus in that era?

Cameron continues his defense of his faulty presuppositions and declares the mineral crust accumulated over centuries (patina) matches that of the James' box (James the brother of Jesus). Cameron and Charles Pellegrino use a newly invented technique (*essentially invented for the purposes of this project*) called "patina fingerprinting"¹⁰ to document their find.

As reported, Cameron *assumes*, "that the James ossuary originally lay in the Talpiot cave, thus answering questions about the James box's provenance. It also increases the probability that the tomb belongs to the Holy Family."¹¹ However, Amos Kloner, is also connected with the finding of the "James, the brother of Jesus" ossuary a few years ago, and in his report on that finding, made this comment,

The family of Jesus and James had no burial cave in first century Jerusalem and it is known that about a generation elapsed between the death of Jesus and that of James. It is not known from the details of their lives that the family moved from Nazareth to Jerusalem. It is thus not likely that in the space of thirty years the burial of a large family related to Jesus and his brother James developed in Jerusalem, that made it necessary to write the deceased's name on the ossuary in order to distinguish him from others. According to the above proposal, that such an ossuary

⁸ *Newsweek*.

⁹ James Charlesworth. Author of *Jesus and Archeology, Jesus and the Dead Sea Scrolls, Jesus Within Judaism, Jesus Jewishness*, etc.

¹⁰ One wonders if Cameron's evidence is so weak that he has to use positive evidentiary terms like "DNA" and "fingerprinting" to bolster his findings.

¹¹ *Newsweek*.

would derive from a large group, it is unlikely that the present ossuary of Ya'acov son of Yosef originates in the burial cave of the above family. The rationalization that early Christians were buried in Jerusalem according to their own rites still lacks proof or evidence. The possibility of a sectarian burial exists, but it doesn't seem likely that an ossuary would be inscribed in this special way, that normally would belong to a family burial.¹²

Newsweek adds,

Despite its uncertain provenance, Jacobovici—and a number of scholars—hailed the James box as real, the first definitive link of an artifact to Jesus of Nazareth. The Discovery movie was followed by a storm of publicity—until the IAA stepped in, declared the James inscription to be fake and Golan to be a forger. Golan's forgery trial in Israel is ongoing; he denies the charges.

Remember Jacobovici is the author of *The Jesus Family Tomb*. Thus, we have the Jame's Box, fraud, scandal, and the *Discovery Channel* and we now have Jesus' Box, ?, ?, and the *Discovery Channel*.

Statistics is another issue in the documentary, but one may prove anything using this appeal without weighing "all" the facts. As James White states,

Sure, you can come up with a list of names that have been found in various forms from history, from monuments, documents, ossuaries, and chiseled in stone on ossuaries, sepulchres, walls of homes, etc. But this hardly gives you a database that is overly relevant. Why? Well, outside of graffiti, poor folks don't show up in historical documents and chiseled in stone nearly as often as the rich do. Jesus was not rich. His followers were not either. Remember the famine in Jerusalem requiring Paul to collect an offering for their assistance? Same time period, and things didn't get much better in Jerusalem before its destruction in AD 70. The whole idea that Jesus would ever be buried in Jerusalem years later along with a family runs counter to every single fact we have from every other source known to us, which highlights the speculative nature of the argumentation of the film. In any case, the statistician would be giving us nothing but an educated guess and that without sufficient evidence in the social strata to which Jesus belonged to be even slightly relevant. Given that the number of entire families that have been unearthed is but a tiny percentage of

¹² Prof. Amos Kloner and Ronny Reich. *The "James son of Joseph" Ossuary*. http://www.bibleinterp.com/articles/Kloner_Reich_report.htm [Last accessed, February 27, 2007].

the actual number of people who lived, it would be like concluding that a family with a father named Earl and a mother named Sarah and a boy named Michael could only have existed once in a particular part of the country, never twice. It is the kind of argumentation that while mildly interesting, is really only produced by those who are weaving a tapestry of wild possibilities, hoping you will be so mesmerized you won't notice you are having your pockets picked. In any case, my suspicions were correct, and this is how the "statistics experts" will be used in the film.¹³

Since Cameron's thesis seemingly breaks down in several places his statistics must necessarily be erroneous.

One may ask if these fortune seekers purchased the rights to Pink Floyd's song "*Money*" and sung its lyrics during their so-called televised investigations. Religion, especially anti-religion,¹⁴ sells. Cameron and others are attempting to disprove a book of faith with their documentaries and works of science fiction. Cameron's titanic has sunk – "now" more than once! The director of the *Terminator* has been terminated. The Christian faith will survive this latest banter of lies.

Jesus is no longer in the tomb – he resurrected!

The Resurrection

What about the resurrection? Is there proof of the resurrection? After his resurrection, Jesus Christ appeared to more than 500 brethren (not including woman and children) at once (1 Cor. 15:6). Many observers of Christ's ministry were hostile toward the Jesus the Gospels describe (many still are). These "enemies of the Cross of Christ" (Phil. 3:18) had both means, motive, and opportunity to stop any falsehoods concerning Jesus. But, the truth rang free despite their lies (Matt. 28:1f). If a fabrication was a foot by Christ's disciples, then: (1) Why was not the resurrection more fully described? If I were to desire to fabricate something – to make it undeniable – I would most certainly fabricate every element of the situation fully and completely so it could be more fully believed. (2) Why were the first witnesses women, whose testimony in that era meant nothing? In our courts today state attorneys (district attorneys) and defense lawyers use the "best" witnesses – the "credible" witnesses – so they

¹³ James White, *Alpha and Omega Ministries*, The Lost Tomb of Jesus. <http://www.aomin.org/index.php?itemid=1790> [last accessed on February 28, 2007].

¹⁴ There has been a battle between the seed of the woman (those of Christ) and the seed of the serpent (those of the spirit of the anti-Christ) since the beginning (Gen. 3:15) that may be traced throughout Scripture and history. This war will continue until the Second Coming (2 Thess. 1:6f). God wins.

may make the "best" case. (3) Why did the apostles go from being mere cowards (John 20:19) to supernatural witnesses (Matt. 28:18-20), being willing even to die (Phil. 2:25f; 2 Tim. 4:6f) for the message of the resurrected Christ (1 Thess. 4:14)? Individuals do not desire to die for a lie! Something changed all these men (and woman) at once – the resurrection.

In all four gospels we see that Christ prophesied his own resurrection (Matt. 20:19; Mark 9:9; 14:28; Luke 18:33; John 2:19-22). Peter, on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:24f), argued the necessity of Christ's resurrection from the prediction in Psalm 16:8-11. At least twelve different appearances of our risen Lord are recorded in the New Testament,

1. To Mary Magdalene at the tomb (John 20:11-18; cf. Mark 16:9-11).
2. To certain women, "the other Mary," Salome, Joanna, and others, as they returned from the sepulcher (Matt.28:1-11; Luke 24:10).
3. To Simon Peter on the day of the resurrection (Luke 24:34; 1 Cor. 15:5).
4. To the two disciples on the way to Emmaus on the day of the resurrection (Luke 24:13-35; cf. Mark 16:12-13).
5. To the ten disciples (Thomas being absent and Judas the reprobate being deceased) and others "with them," at Jerusalem on the evening of the resurrection day (John 20:19-24).
6. To the disciples again (Thomas being present) at Jerusalem (Mark 16:14-18; Luke 24:33-40; John 20:26-28; 1 Cor. 15:5).
7. To the disciples when fishing at the Sea of Tiberias – Galilee (John 21:1-23).
8. To the eleven, and above 500 brethren at once, at an appointed place in Galilee (1 Cor. 15:6; cf. Matt. 28:16-20).
9. To James, (1 Cor. 15:7).
10. To the apostles immediately before the ascension. They accompanied him from Jerusalem to Mount Olivet, and there they saw him ascend "till a cloud received him out of their sight" (Mark 16:19; Luke 24:50-52; Acts 1:4-10; He conversed with them face to face, they touched him (Matt. 28:9; Luke 24:39; John 20:27), and he ate bread with them (Luke 24:42-43; John 21:12-13).

11. Christ's manifestation of himself to Saul and Ananias after his ascension (Acts 9:3-9, 17; cf. 1 Cor. 9:1; 15:8).

12. It is implied in the words of Luke (Acts 1:3f) that there may have been other appearances of which we have no record. "He appeared to them over a period of forty days and spoke about the kingdom of God."

Some adversaries charge the Bible's documentaries of Christ's resurrection are myth, not historical. However, historical research is on the side of the early church's belief in Jesus' resurrection. Not only do the Scriptures themselves attest to Christ's resurrection (as seen above), but early creeds such as the *Old Roman Creed* and the *Apostle's Creed* do as well. The oldest creeds were simple baptismal vows. By about 220 A.D., baptismal applicants were to avow a more complex set of beliefs as seen in Hippolytus questions, "Who was crucified in the days of Pontius Pilate, and died, and rose the third day living from the dead and ascended into the heavens and sat down at the right hand of the Father, and will come to judge the living and the dead? ... Do you believe in the Holy Spirit in the Holy Church, and the resurrection of the flesh?"¹⁵ Moreover, *The Treatise on the Resurrection*,¹⁶ a part of the *The Nag Hammadi Library* (Gnostic Library) was written somewhere between 170-200 A.D. If history argued about the resurrection a doctrine existed!¹⁷ The resurrection was (and still is) an important issue. Early church history supports the truth of an early emphasis on the resurrection.

The resurrection is spoken of as the act of all three persons of the Trinity: (1) of God the Father (Psa. 16:10; Acts 2:24; 3:15; Rom. 8:11; Eph. 1:20; Col. 2:12; Heb. 13:20), (2) of Christ himself (John 2:19; 10:18), and (3) of the Holy Spirit (1 Peter 3:18). Thus, to deny the resurrection is to deny God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. It is to state that all three members of the godhead are liars!

Cameron, Jacobovici, Pellegrino vs. God, choose you this day whom you shall serve?

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¹⁵ David Neff. *The Jewishness of the Nicene Creed*. Christianity Today. <http://ctlibrary.com/34676> [Last Accessed, February 27, 2007].

¹⁶ *Early Christian Writings*. <http://www.earlychristianwritings.com/treatiseres.html> [Last accessed, February 28, 2007].

¹⁷ Both true ones and false ones.

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