

"Knowledge without integrity is dangerous and dreadful."
—Samuel Johnson

09-Mar-07

James Cameron's Lost Integrity

This past Sunday, March 4, the Discovery Channel aired *Titanic*-producer/director James Cameron's controversial documentary, *The Lost Tomb of [Jesus](#)*. The documentary—gleefully rechristened as a "crockumentary" by its detractors—purports to reveal scientific evidence that archeologists had found the actual tomb of Jesus' family in Jerusalem. Within this particular tomb, which had been discovered and excavated in 1980 by Israeli archaeologist Amos Kloner, ten ossuaries—small limestone caskets for storing bones—were found, and on five of them were hastily inscribed names in Aramaic: Jesus, Matthew, Joseph, and two forms of Mary.

For Cameron, no stranger to blockbusters, this was heady stuff, and his production company, Associated Producers, along with award-winning investigative journalist Simcha Jacobovici, University of North Carolina at Charlotte religious studies chair James Tabor, and British-born archeologist Gibson Shimon, set out to bring this spectacular discovery to the attention of [the world](#). Once the Discovery Channel signed on to the project, it became a major television event. It would present their allegedly scientific findings step by step to an amazed viewing public.

The problem is that, though long on the sensational and hypothetical, they were quite short on scientific facts. The Jerusalem tomb that they claim to be that of the family of Jesus of Nazareth is not—and certainly cannot be proven to be—His sepulcher. In fact, had the family of Jesus owned such a tomb, it would not have been anywhere in Jerusalem but in Nazareth, their hometown.

First, the biblical evidence is squarely contrary to the documentary's claims. After Jesus'

crucifixion, [Joseph of Arimathea](#) begged Pilate for the Savior's body, burying it in *his own* newly dug tomb ([Matthew 27:57-60](#); [Mark 15:42-46](#); [Luke 23:50-53](#); [John 19:38-42](#)). Notice that each of the four Gospels mentions this fact. Jesus, then, was never buried in His family's tomb, but in another family's crypt. Besides, Jesus rose from that grave [after three days](#) and three nights, and the Gospels are equally clear that no bones were left behind ([Matthew 28:6-7](#), [Mark 16:6](#); [Luke 24:3](#), 6, 12, 22-24; [John 20:5-7](#)).

To swallow the story of *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, one must believe that Jesus did not rise from the dead, that His disciples stole the body from under the noses of the guards (a lie spread by the Jewish leadership of the day; see [Matthew 28:11-15](#)), and that His body was reburied later in His family's tomb. This last assumption is especially ludicrous, considering that His body's presence in such an obvious place could have—and would have—been used by enemies of early Christianity to disprove the apostles' claims of Jesus' resurrection. However, for nearly two millennia, the world has had literary evidence of Jesus' bodily resurrection, supported by more than five hundred eyewitnesses, in [I Corinthians 15:3-8](#). There are no bones to make a case about!

Second, the names found in the tomb may seem to be *prima facie* evidence that we are dealing with biblical figures, especially since the one ossuary reads, "Jesus son of Joseph." What could be more conclusive? However, such reasoning is just plain shallow. Jesus was not the son of Joseph, and His family, most of whom soon became Christians, would not have recorded this falsehood. In such a situation, they would have instead proclaimed that He was the Son of [God](#), as He Himself declared ([John 3:18](#); [9:35-37](#); [10:36](#); etc.). In addition, other than the disciple, who was not related to Jesus, there is no known Matthew among Joseph and Mary's clan. Such a brother, grandfather, son, uncle, or cousin must be assumed.

Also, that a "Mary," even in the form of *Mariemene e Mara* ("of Mariemene, known as the Master"), should not be surprising, as nearly a third of the known names of Judean women of the time were also forms of "Mary." It is probable that most, if not all, of the tombs from that time held bones of some Mary. That this one contained the bones of a specific Mary, Mary Magdalene, is statistically implausible, especially since there is no record anywhere that the biblical Mary Magdalene ever held this title. One must bestow credence on the Gnostic gospels—and only specific ones of those—to come anywhere close to such a title. Further, there is simply no evidence that after Jesus' death Mary Magdalene lived in close proximity to Jesus' family or that she died in Jerusalem.

The documentary claimed that their statistician, the University of Toronto's Andrey Feuerverger, calculated the odds of the tomb being that of Jesus' family at 600:1. However, what he told them was actually that there was a one in 600 chance that another family tomb would have the same specific names. In other words, the producers misrepresented their own scholar's findings. Tal

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Ilan, compiler of the *Lexicon of Jewish Names in Late Antiquity*, which was used as the basis for statistical research regarding these names on *The Lost Tomb of Jesus*, contends, "[These names] are in every tomb in Jerusalem. . . . But my research proves exactly the opposite [of the documentary's claims]—these are the most common names that you could expect to find anywhere." Yeshua, for instance, was the name of about one in twenty Jewish men of the day. In essence, then, that these names appear together in one tomb proves nothing.

Third, the DNA findings that were supposedly the most significant of the documentary team's findings have absolutely no meaning. According to the program, a scientist took swabs from the "Jesus" box and the "Mariemene" box, tested them for mitochondrial DNA (which would show maternal genetic similarity or dissimilarity), and the results conclusively showed that this Jesus and this Mary were not related. Their conclusion: These two must have been married! Talk about a leap of faith!

The test means nothing of the sort. All it shows is that the two DNA samples were from people who were not related. It does not show that the unknown donors of the samples were even of different sexes, far less that they were married! Moreover, over the course of a few centuries, several individual's bones could have been stored in the ossuaries; there is no way to match any DNA sample to the names scratched on the boxes. And there is certainly no baseline DNA from the real Jesus or Mary to compare the samples to. The test is meaningless, except to inform us that whoever belonged to the DNA did not have the same matrilineal descent.

With this documentary, James Cameron and his team of researchers have revealed only that they have no integrity, ethical or scientific, and thus that they have no credibility. Jesus warned us that at the time of the end charlatans would be claiming, "Here is the Christ!" or "There [He is]!" ([Matthew 24:23](#)). Take Jesus' own advice: "Do not believe it."

- Richard T. Ritenbaugh

From the Archives: Featured Sermon

[Bible Answers to The Da Vinci Code](#)

by Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Richard Ritenbaugh opines that Dan Brown's *The Da Vinci Code* has made a disproportionate impact in a biblically illiterate world. Brown claims that Jesus was simply a man whom Constantine proclaimed to be God in AD 325. Yet, every book of the New Testament substantiates that the man Christ Jesus is God. Brown also asserts that Mary Magdalene was

Christ's wife, allegedly "the disciple whom Jesus loved." Scripture never hints of any personal intimacy between them. A third assumption is that Jesus was free to marry. As the God of the Old Testament, He had made a marriage covenant with Israel, which she had transgressed. Through His sacrifice, Jesus redeemed Israel so that He could make a New Covenant with her. Finally, Brown says that the "Divine Feminine" was suppressed by a male-dominated Catholic hierarchy, a ridiculous claim since the Bible never contemplates any such notion.

From the Archives: Featured Article

[Resurrection AD 31](#)

by Staff

Matthew 27:52 informs us that more than one resurrection occurred during Passover week in AD 31! This article summarizes the types of resurrections that appear in God's Word, and uses this information to provide answers to the many questions that arise about this astounding miracle.

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