

# 714 Where Is Jesus?

## Phil Sanders

### God's Answers to Life's Questions

Recently the Discovery Channel presented a documentary claiming they had found the family tomb of Jesus. Did they really? If Jesus' bones were in that tomb, Jesus didn't really resurrect or ascend to heaven. Today we're asking the question, "Where is Jesus?" You may have seen the broadcast on Discovery Channel of "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," describing a tomb found in Jerusalem. The documentary claims that the Talpiot tomb, opened in 1980, contained several ossuaries containing the bones of Jesus and his family. The film calls into question the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus, suggests that Jesus was married to Mary Magdalene, and that Jesus had a son named Judah. To back up their claims the filmmaker appealed to DNA evidence and statistical analysis. Is that really Jesus Christ?

Since the Discovery channel released the documentary, "The Lost Tomb of Jesus," considerable speculation and debate have escalated on all sides. If indeed the bones of Jesus of Nazareth are in the Talpiot tomb, if he married Mary Magdalene, and if he has a son named Judah, then there is little reason to believe that Jesus is Lord and the Son of God. At the heart of this debate is whether the testimony of the four gospels is trustworthy. We might quickly remind ourselves that if the bones of Jesus were buried in a family plot at Talpiot, the early church certainly did not know it. If Jesus did not arise from the dead, many early Christians suffered imprisonment, torture, and death out of a false confidence.

Paul argued, "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain. We are even found to be misrepresenting God, because we testified about God that he raised Christ, whom he did not raise if it is true that the dead are not raised. For if the dead are not raised, not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ have perished. If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all people most to be pitied" (1 Cor. 15:14-19). One cannot imagine a crueler hoax than to move the body of Jesus from Joseph of Arimathea's grave to a secret family plot and spread the rumor that he had arisen from the dead. One must wonder how the disciples and family of Jesus kept the secret so long and so well as to fool every generation until now! That's what Simcha Jacobovici's documentary suggests, but that is not what the Bible teaches.

Never mind the family of Jesus opened the tomb a year or so later to put the bones of Jesus in an ossuary. According to Jewish rites, bodies would be left for a year or so to decompose in the "kokhim" before relatives came back to gather the bones and store them in ossuaries. The Talpiot tomb is about two miles south of the location of the church of the Holy Sepulcher and the Garden tomb. The disciples, if they stole the body, would have had to move it to the new tomb. How did they get it past the soldiers who were guarding that tomb? Never mind they had to go to a craftsman to make the ossuary and had Jesus' name put on it. Never mind they opened the tomb several other times and could see the clearly marked name of Jesus on the ossuary. Surely James knew where the family burial plot was. In all of this we are told they kept the secret about Jesus' body! How could they have kept the matter secret even from Jesus' brothers James and Jude, who wrote books of the New Testament and died for their faith? Both Eusebius and Josephus say the Jews hurled

James from the pinnacle of the temple (*Church History*, II, 23 and *Antiquities of the Jews*, XX, ix, 1). If the bones of Jesus were in the family plot and James knew it, he was a cruel deceiver. If James did not know, who did?

If the bones of Jesus were in the "secret" family plot, how could James have remained ignorant of the resurrection deception? If the resurrection is a hoax, how did so many people become so convinced? Why would James himself die for this deception? How could he have asked anyone else to die for a cruel hoax? How could a religious movement that spoke so highly of "truth" and forbade deception become so entrapped by such deception? Never mind that the soldiers of Pilate made the tomb as secure as they knew how (Matt. 27:65), Simcha Jacobovici is sure they moved the body. Never mind that the disciples that stole the body so dishonored him that they left his grave clothes at the old site (John 20:6). Never mind the sighting of the angel who rolled back the stone and sat upon it. Never mind the Sanhedrin paid the frightened soldiers to tell a lie (Matt. 28:11-15). Do we believe some enterprising, twenty-first century filmmakers, whose desire for profit is unquestionable, or the eyewitness testimony of the earliest disciples, who saw no financial profit from their efforts? Do we believe the highly speculative suggestions of some would-be detectives, who are discredited by their own sources? Or do we believe the written, eyewitness testimony of men who gave their lives preaching their faith and who stood the test of peer review? If Jesus arose from the dead, then Jesus is who He claimed to be: the Son of God, Lord and Christ. If Jesus is the Son of God, then His promise to lead his apostles into all the truth in the first century has been fulfilled in the writings of the New Testament.

Professor Amos Kloner, says of this fictionalized tale - this new "documentary," the "Lost Tomb of Jesus" - "It's a beautiful story but without any proof whatsoever." Jacobovici and his partners claim to have found human material on which they performed paleo-DNA testing. Well... pre-publication publicity for the book said: "Tests prove the names are genetically of the same family and statistically, there is a one in 10 million chance this is a family other than the Holy Family." Now, how they do they know this. The truth is that only two of the ten ossuaries were checked for DNA, the ossuaries of Jesus and Mary. They found out that these two were not related by blood, so they assumed these two were married. There was no record in the tomb of their marriage; this was their assumption. But they try to fool everyone into thinking they have proved a marriage, when they have proved only that these two people are not related by blood. I guess they think if they use the term "DNA," that gullible people will believe whatever they claim. The producers also seem to overlook how very popular names like Joseph, Mary, and Jesus were in the first century. Many ossuaries contained these names.

While the documentary claims that it allows for the resurrection, we have to wonder how? Doesn't the presence of bones suggest Jesus didn't really rise from the dead bodily? To say that Jesus resurrected "spiritually" but not "bodily" is a modern idea that has little to do with the expressed faith of the early disciples. They claimed to have touched the body of the resurrected Jesus. In Luke 24:38-40 the resurrected Jesus said to his disciples, "Why are you troubled, and why do doubts arise in your hearts? See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself. Touch me, and see. For a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have." In spite of this, the website

for the "Lost Tomb of Jesus" contains this: "As is sometimes the case, the rhetoric of the Gospels reveals a story beneath the story: it seems quite probable that the disciples did come to remove Jesus' body from this temporary tomb to safeguard it from desecrators and to bring it to a place of honor, a tomb just for Jesus and his family." You see, they believe in a dead Jesus who is in the grave. ([www.jesusfamilytomb.com](http://www.jesusfamilytomb.com))

There are many problems with this documentary. One question many scholars ask is why the family burial plot was in Jerusalem? The ancestral home of Joseph was Bethlehem, and his adult home was Nazareth. The family was still in Nazareth after he was apparently dead and gone. Why in the world would he be buried (alone at this point) in Jerusalem? It's unlikely. Then we must remember that there is no evidence Jesus was ever married. There is no evidence Jesus ever had a son by Mary Magdalene or anyone else. While there are two ossuaries with the name Mary on them in this tomb, there is no evidence this was a Mary from Magdala (a village on the northwest side of the Sea of Galilee). Professor Amos Kloner, one of Israel's prominent archaeologists, and the scholar who supervised the discovery site 27 years ago, in a recent interview with the *Jerusalem Post*, declared emphatically that the current theory "is impossible. It's nonsense." He added: "There is no likelihood that Jesus and his relatives had a family tomb. They were a [poor] Galilee family with no ties in Jerusalem. The Talpiot tomb belonged to a middle-class family from the 1st century AD." "It's very interesting," he said of all of the names of Jesus' family being found on ossuaries in the same cave, "but it's not a convincing proof that it's the family of Jesus." He knows of at least two other ossuaries that bear the name of Jesus, son of Joseph.

All the Roman and Jewish forces needed to do was produce the corpse of Christ, and the Christian movement would have evaporated instantly. Those "bones" could have been (likely would have been) housed as a monument to the failure of a delusional and disruptive religion. Why didn't they find the body in the first century? Could it be, because Jesus really did arise from the dead? Of course it could. One of the producers, when asked about the second burial said that if Jesus could resurrect once, He could do it again. But the Bible says in Romans 6:8-10, "Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. We know that Christ being raised from the dead will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. For the death he died he died to sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God." If Jesus arose from the dead (and He did), then he would never die again. My friend, that is our hope in Christ. If He arose, we believe that we will come forth from the grave as well at the last day.

Now if the bones of Jesus are in that bone box, what about the ascension? The Scriptures say in Mark 16:19, "So then, when the Lord Jesus had spoken to them, He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God." Luke 24:50-52 says, "And He led them out as far as Bethany, and He lifted up His hands and blessed them. While He was blessing them, He parted from them and was carried up into heaven." Luke further records in Acts 1:9-11: And after

He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven." The early disciples believed Jesus ascended from the Mount of Olives near Bethany. They said he went up to heaven to God the Father.

Peter's sermon on the day of Pentecost makes it clear that the early church believed Jesus had resurrected from the dead and ascended. Peter said in Acts 2:31-33, "He [David] foresaw and spoke about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing." They claimed their miracle of speaking in tongues came from Christ, who poured out the Holy Spirit upon them. They taught that Jesus was at the right hand of God on the throne of his kingdom. Peter concludes in Acts 2:36, "Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified." Christians believed that in the beginning, and they believe it today. Jesus is indeed risen and in at the right hand of God. That, my friend, is where Jesus is today.

What is Jesus doing in heaven? What is his purpose there? Romans 8:34 says "Christ Jesus is the one who died—more than that, who was raised—who is at the right hand of God, who indeed is interceding for us." Interceding? Yes, interceding. Jesus is in heaven, pleading our case, mediating on our behalf with the Father. John said in 1 John 2:1-2, "My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. He is the propitiation (atoning sacrifice) for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world. Jesus not only took away our sins by his death on the cross, he is now pleading and mediating for us with the Father. He is standing by our side pleading with the Father for our souls that we might continue to be forgiven. My friend, how could we ever have a better friend than Jesus Christ? I am so thankful I have a representative helper in heaven pleading for my soul. He is not simply interested in my past. He is interested in me everyday and in my eternal home. We can have no better friend. That's why each us needs to be united to Him, to obey the gospel of Christ so that we may be partakers of His grace and cleansed by His blood. We become one with Jesus when we believe in Him, repent of our sins, confess His name before others, and are baptized. In baptism we put on Christ (Gal. 3:27), we die to the old man of sin and become united with Christ (Rom. 6:3-7), and we are washed from our sins (Acts 22:16). Don't let another day go by without giving yourself to the Lord in obedience to His teaching. My friend, become a Christian today!

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