

In Heaven or on Earth?

Note: Sub-title / Some claim they have discovered the bones of Jesus Christ. Is there any validity to his claim or is this just another Hollywood moment?

Phil Sanders

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. If, however, what Simcha Jacobovici has suggested is merely sensationalism and the Lord arose from the dead, Jesus Christ is who He claimed to be.

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 the gravesite of Joseph of Arimathea 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 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. 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 Jesus’ brother James knew where the family burial plot was. In all of this we are told they kept the secret about Jesus’ body!

How could the family 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 in 66 AD (*Church History*, II, 23.18 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 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.