The Tomb of Jesus . . . and Mary, and son Joseph?  

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You may have seen advertisements for an upcoming documentary regarding the discovery of a 1st century tomb in Jerusalem which has been "identified" as the family tomb of Jesus and his wife, Mary Magdalene, and their son, Joseph.

To a recent inquiry about this, I responded,

I am very skeptical about this. The write-up I saw indicated that this discovery has "proven" that Jesus and Mary Magdalene had a son.

First, this puts the film producer in Dan Brown's [The DaVinci Code] camp of mythologizing the Christian faith in contrast to the factual evidence.

Secondly, I think the report is being presented via the Discovery Channel, which has already discredited its objectivity in favor of pushing the skeptics' agenda in terms of biological macro-evolution and regarding Intelligent Design as pseudo-science, as well as arguing for the liberal agenda in Global Warming, origins of man, etc.

Thirdly, Jesus and Mary were very common names in the culture of that day, just like the names Jesus and Mary are in today's Hispanic culture. There were probably quite a few men named Jesus married to women named Mary. Similarly, the recent discovery of another 1st century sarcophagus inscribed with "Jesus, son of Joseph," pronounced by an eager archaeologist as the coffin of Jesus Christ --but there were innumerable Josephs with sons named Jesus.

And lastly, I doubt if the DNA will be evidential enough to be anywhere near conclusive.

If I get to see this documentary, I'll do so objectively because my goal is to follow the evidence wherever it leads, but I expect film producer James Cameron is jumping to [unwarranted] conclusions, and his claim will be rejected by all scholars (including liberal) this side of the fringe left.

Now today there appears another article in which responsible archaeologists are distancing themselves from the claims of the "documentary" and the book associated with it.  

http://www.extremetech.com/article2/0,1558,2098630,00.asp?kc=ETRSS02129TX1K00000532

Remember, as you read claims by those who are opposed to your faith, you are not reading to gain knowledge of truth. You are reading to understand their point of view. Since they are pushing a contrary agenda, what evidence do they have to support their case? How credible is their evidence?

For example, in the article cited above, the film makers claim that there is [only] a 1 in 600 chance that the names found on the [tomb's] inscriptions were NOT the family of Jesus. This sounds authoritative and so people tend to just accept it, but really, how valid is this estimate? What is the basis for determining this probability? Personally, all things considered to this point, I suspect 1 in 600 are just figures pulled out of the air.

DNA sounds like the definitive evidence. But think about it -- while the DNA may indicate that the remains originated from people who inhabited that region of the earth, or even belonged to a
certain family tree, one has to have a sample of Jesus' actual DNA to identify the remains as those of Jesus or his descendants. So far as I know, even the Roman Catholic Church's collection of such relics has no relic of Jesus. So DNA testing of the remains cannot prove anything germane to this claim.

People watch these "documentaries" and read propaganda such as *The DaVinci Code* and swallow the claims uncritically, and because they have accepted the claims as new information, they think they are thinking for themselves, whereas in fact, all they are doing is accepting a different argument *simply on the basis that the author has asked them to believe him on the basis of his authoritative sounding assertions*, instead of believing the faith which has been well established on the basis of both hard and soft evidence, and whose arguments are logical and consistent as opposed to those of the "new" teaching.

This is not a new phenomenon. False teachers teaching these same lies and distortions of the truth afflicted the new believers of the early church. So what you read in *The DaVinci Code* or see in this new "documentary" is really nothing new. These false and easily disproven claims have shown up from time to time for centuries, each time being presented as a new discovery or a new revelation, and each time leading people away from Christ and their salvation while promising them greater insight, mystical experience or freeing them from the "shackles" of morality, ignoring the fact expressed by Benjamin Franklin in *Poor Richard*, "Sin is not hurtful because it is forbidden, but it is forbidden because it is hurtful."

Consider the scriptures' anticipation of such troubled people and skeptics:

"The time will come when people won't put up with true teaching. Instead, they will try to satisfy their own longings. They will gather a large number of teachers around them. The teachers will say what the people want to hear. The people will turn their ears away from the truth. They will turn to stories that aren't completely true." (2 Timothy 4.3-4 NIRV)

"We told you about the time our Lord Jesus Christ came with power. But we didn't make up stories when we told you about it. With our own eyes we saw him in all his majesty. God the Father gave him honor and glory. The voice of the Majestic Glory came to him. It said, "This is my Son, and I love him. I am very pleased with him." We ourselves heard the voice that came from heaven. We were with him on the sacred mountain.

"The word of the prophets is made more certain. We have that word. You must pay attention to it. It is like a light shining in a dark place. It will shine until the day Jesus comes. Then the Morning Star will rise in your hearts.

"Above all, here is what you must understand. No prophecy in Scripture ever came from a prophet's own understanding. It never came simply because a prophet wanted it to. Instead, the Holy Spirit guided the prophets as they spoke. So prophecy comes from God." (2 Peter 1.16-21 NIRV)

"We have preached that Christ has been raised from the dead. So how can some of you say that no one rises from the dead? If no one rises from the dead, then not even Christ has been raised. And if Christ has not been raised, what we preach doesn't mean anything. Your faith doesn't mean anything either. More than that, we would be lying about God. We have given witness that God raised Christ from the dead. But he did not raise him if the dead are not raised." (1 Corinthians 15.12-15 NIRV)

"Because you believed the good news, you are saved. But you must hold firmly to the message I preached to you. If you don't, you have believed it for nothing. What I
received I passed on to you. And it is the most important of all. Here is what it is. Christ died for our sins, just as Scripture said he would. He was buried. He was raised from the dead on the third day, just as Scripture said he would be. He appeared to Peter. Then he appeared to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than 500 believers at the same time. Most of them are still living."  (1 Corinthians 15.2-6 NIRV)

"Make sure no one captures you. They will try to capture you by using false reasoning that has no meaning. Their ideas depend on human teachings. They also depend on the basic things the people of this world believe. They don't depend on Christ. God's whole nature is living in Christ in human form. Because you belong to Christ, you have everything you need. He is the ruler over every power and authority.

"Some people enjoy pretending they aren't proud . . . But don't let people like that hold you back from winning the prize. They tell you every little thing about [the visions] they have seen. Their minds are not guided by the Holy Spirit. So they are proud of their useless ideas. They aren't connected to the Head."  (Colossians 2.8-10, 18-19a  NIRV)

But of the true believers in Christ, the Apostle Paul writes . . .

"I want their hearts to be made cheerful and strong. I want them to be joined together in love. Then their understanding will be rich and complete. They will know the mystery of God. That mystery is Christ. All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in him.

"But I don't want anyone to fool you with fast talk that only sounds good. So even though I am away from you in body, I am with you in spirit. I am glad to see that you are doing everything in good order. And I am happy that your faith in Christ is so strong. You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living in him. Have your roots in him. Build yourselves up in him. Grow strong in what you believe, just as you were taught. Be more thankful than ever before."  (Colossians 2.2-7  NIRV)

So may no-one be allowed to disturb your faith in the Lord! It is founded upon a firm foundation that cannot be shaken. It is proving itself to you day by day as you live life from within it. And share the witness of how the Lord is working in your life to save you with those who are searching in all the wrong places for something that will give their lives meaning, stability and fulfillment. They are ripe for being conned by these spiritual advisors of false religious claims, lies masquerading as truth, misguided hopes, and the altars of unbelief and depression.

Remember, "You received Christ Jesus as Lord. So keep on living in him. Have your roots in him. Build yourselves up in him. Grow strong in what you believe, just as you were taught. Be more thankful than ever before."

Amen!

Rod Hemphill

This document is provided by Christian Counseling & Educational Services and can be downloaded at www.ccesonline.com/tomb.htm.
A critique of The DaVinci Code is available at www.ccesonline.com/churchresources.htm.