

# “Why Do You Seek the Living among the Dead?” The Frenzied False Alarm of the Talpiot Tomb

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## I. Background

On March 28, 1980, a construction crew in the Talpiot area of Jerusalem uncovered an ancient tomb. The tomb, soon excavated by the Israeli Antiquities Authority, was found to contain 10 ossuaries (bone boxes) from no later than the first century AD. Six of the ten had markings on them, identifying the people, or at least some of the people, whose bones were in the boxes. The names reported are as follows:

Yose  
Maria  
Yeshua bar (son of) Yosep  
Yehouda bar (son of) Yeshua  
Matai  
Mariamenon, Mara (this is the only inscription in Greek)

All of these names are either found in the NT or resemble names found in the NT, names of people somehow associated with Jesus. The names, however, were also quite common in the second-temple period, so, after cataloguing the ossuaries, the Israeli Antiquities Authority reburied all the bones, and placed the boxes in storage.

There they sat for many years – except for one, that was allegedly stolen. This one is the famous “James” ossuary, which reads “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.” Earlier this spring a film aired on the Discovery Channel, a film produced by James Cameron of *Titanic* fame, and directed by Simcha Jacobici. It argues that this tomb was the tomb of Jesus’ family, the ossuary with his name on it contained his bones, the one with Mariamenon’s name on it contained the bones of Jesus’ wife, Mary Magdalene, and the one with Yehouda bar Yeshua was that of Jesus’ and Mary’s son, Jude.

It is reported that over 4 million viewers watched the “documentary” and that Simcha Jacobici and Charles Pellegrino’s book, *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence that Could Change History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), soared to number 6 on the New York Times bestseller list.<sup>1</sup>

## II. “Theological Considerations”

You will be pleased to know that the Discovery Channel website on this film comes complete with a page entitled “Theological Considerations.” On it the theologians at Discoverychannel.com have assured us of two things. First,

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<sup>1</sup>Reported on the University of the Holy Land web-site: <http://www.uhl.ac/blog/#post-9>.

“Even if Jesus’ body was moved from one tomb to another, however, that does not mean that he could not have been resurrected from the second tomb. Belief in the resurrection is based not on which tomb he was buried in, but on alleged sightings of Jesus that occurred after his burial and documented in the Gospels.”

Okay, but if he was resurrected from any tomb, how could his bones have been collected a year after his burial and put in a bone box with his name on it? The theologians at Discoverychannel.com do not address this mystery.

They give us another assurance.

“If Jesus’ mortal remains have been found, this would contradict the idea of a physical ascension but not the idea of a spiritual ascension. The latter is consistent with Christian theology.”

After that theological pronouncement, who needs Scott Swain, let alone the WCF? I’m sure we are glad to have the assurance from the Discoverychannel.com theologians that a merely spiritual ascension of Jesus is consistent with Christian theology, especially after Jesus said to his disciples after his resurrection, “See my hands and my feet, that it is I myself; handle me, and see; for a spirit has not flesh and bones as you see that I have.” (Lk. 24.39)

### **III. “Full of Dead Men’s Bones” (Mt. 23.27). Problems with the Bone Boxes**

In a recent online article, however, Stephen Pfann of the University of the Holy Land in Jerusalem observes that, “With the exception of the actual filmmakers and authors themselves, just about every one of the experts who appeared in the documentary has published an attack on the claims of the film or, even more telling, a disclaimer on what they either said or were purported to have said in the film.”<sup>2</sup> Pfann has catalogued many of the disclaimers, or denials, in an article posted at [http://www.uhl.ac/Lost\\_Tomb/CracksInTheFoundation.html](http://www.uhl.ac/Lost_Tomb/CracksInTheFoundation.html).

Of course it is doubtful that the disclaimers and criticism have reached the great majority of the 4 million viewers and the untold numbers who purchased the book. In the following, I seek to make some of these known to those who have not had time or interest to follow the developing story, and to offer a positive approach to establishing historically that the film and book are based on a false premise.

#### *A. The Names*

The strength of the case of the JTTs (Jesus Tomb Theorists) seems to be the probability they put forth about so many names connected with Jesus of Nazareth occurring in one tomb. Their expert is quoted as putting it conservatively at 600 to one that this tomb is that of Jesus and his family. These sound very impressive.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

But it is here that many have attacked the credibility of the JTTs.<sup>3</sup> Many have observed that these names were among the most common names in Palestine at the time, and that their presence in this tomb simply doesn't amount to much. The statistician that they used, Andrey Feuerverger, has himself sought to qualify his words in important ways. He admits that his calculations assume a few things which many believe cannot be assumed. For instance, that Mariamene e Mara "is a singularly highly appropriate appellation for Mary Magdalene," that "Yose/Yosa is a highly appropriate appellation for the brother of Jesus who is referred to as Joses in Mark 6:3" and that "Yose/Yosa is not the same person as the father Yosef who is referred to on the ossuary of Yeshua."

But as Christopher Rollston says, "the fact of the matter is that the Yosef of the patronymic and the Yoseh of the ossuary could be the same person. After all, these ossuaries were inscribed at two different times ... 'Yosef' is the more formal form, and 'Yosi' is less formal (and more endearing). Without a patronymic, it is simply not sage to make any assumptions."<sup>4</sup>

One statistician has claimed that there were probably at any given time 200 men in Jerusalem of the period whose names were Jesus and who had fathers named Joseph, and that over the entire Herodian period, perhaps 500. He calculates that there were probably 229 people named "'Jesus son of Joseph' with a close relative named 'Joseph' and a close relative 'Mary.'"<sup>5</sup>

From Joe Zias's website (Zias is a well-published archaeologist and a former director of the Israel Antiquities Authority in Jerusalem):<sup>6</sup>

The important thing to remember here is that individuals outside of Judea, buried in Judea were named according to their place of origin, whereas in Judea this was not necessary.<sup>7</sup> Had the names been Jesus of Nazareth, Mary of Nazareth, Joseph of Nazareth etc I would have been totally convinced that this may be the family tomb, but as none of the names have place of origin, they are all Judeans.

L. Y. Rahmani, who catalogued all the ossuaries of the state of Israel, says the same thing: "In Jerusalem's tombs, the deceased's place of origin was noted when someone from outside Jerusalem was interred in a local tomb."

As Jodi Magness says, "If the Talpiyot tomb is indeed the tomb of Jesus and his family, we would expect at least some of the ossuary inscriptions to reflect their Galilean origins,

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<sup>3</sup> Joe Zias (<http://www.joezias.com/tomb.html>) has this to say: "There has been an enormous amount of discussion on the web dealing with the probabilities of this being the family, which I suggest the viewer read, all of which totally dismiss the statistics as of no value whatsoever. For a more detailed explanation on how they rigged the statistics see the following:

<http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/03/correct-interpretation-of-dr-andrey.html>

<http://ntgateway.com/weblog/2007/03/statistical-case-for-identity-of-jesus.html>"

<sup>4</sup> Christopher Rollston, "Prosopography and the Talpiyot Yeshua Family Tomb: Pensees of a Palaeographer," on the SBL website, <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=649>.

<sup>5</sup> This is from Jay, a statistician who wrote on Ben Witherington's blog, at

<http://benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/jesus-tomb-titanic-talpiot-tomb-theory.html>.

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.joezias.com/tomb.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Cited by Jodi Magness, "Has the Tomb of Jesus Been Discovered," at <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=640>.

by reading, for example, Jesus [son of Joseph] of Nazareth (or Jesus the Nazarene), Mary of Magdala, and so on. However, the inscriptions provide no indication that this is the tomb of a Galilean family and instead point to a Judean family.”<sup>8</sup>

### *B. Jesus son of Joseph*

Several scholars have pointed out that burial around Jerusalem at this time, then after a year the collecting of the deceased’s bones and reinterment in an ossuary was something reserved for the wealthy. This does not fit what we know of Jesus’ family. Of course, one could argue that this was done at the expense of a donor like Joseph of Arimathea. But then why the other members of Jesus’ supposed family? Remember, the bones of 35 people were found in this “family tomb.”

The name Yeshua was a very common one at the time. There are said to be 98 tombs containing the name and 21 ossuaries.<sup>9</sup> James Tabor claims that this is the only ossuary which contains such an inscription. But Amos Kloner, the chief archaeologist of the Jerusalem district who excavated the tomb in 1980 is quoted as saying: “It makes a great story for a TV film. But it’s completely impossible. It’s nonsense.” He continued ““Jesus son of Joseph’ has been found on three or four ossuaries. These are common names.”<sup>10</sup>

Further, though it is true that Jesus had a supposed father named Joseph, Ben Witherington on his blog, remarks that as far as we can tell, Jesus’ earliest followers never called him “Jesus, son of Joseph.” Naturally, for according to the Gospels, Joseph was only his legal, not his biological father. It would be strange for him to be identified as “son of Joseph,” rather than, let’s say, “Jesus of Nazareth,” as Zias points out, or perhaps, “Jesus the Messiah.”

### *C. Mariamenon/Mary Magdalene*

What the storytellers have said about the so-called Mary Magdalene bone box, and of course the alleged relationship between Mary Magdalene and Jesus, are among the wackiest things they have said. This is alleged to be the key box, the Ringo box, if you will. That is, if you found a grouping of George, Paul, John, you would think nothing of it, but if then you found a Ringo – that would point to the Beatles! The Mariamenon ossuary is said to be the Ringo, the unusual name which makes the case all but airtight.

The bone box is alleged to read “Mariamenou, Mara,” translated “Of Mariamenon, the Master”. The word “Mariamenon” in Greek is a name similar to Miriam/Mariam in Aramaic. The word “Mara” is alleged by the JTT’s to be an Aramaic word known in later sources to mean teacher or master. So, we would have a Greek form of a name, written in Greek letters, and then an Aramaic term, “mara,” also written in Greek letters.

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<sup>8</sup> Ibid.

<sup>9</sup> Information attributed to Ben Witherington at <http://www.christiannewswire.com/index.php?module=releases&task=view&releaseID=2336>.

<sup>10</sup> David Horowitz, *The Jerusalem Post*, February 27, 2007, cited from the University of the Holy Land website, [http://www.uhl.ac/Lost\\_Tomb/CracksInTheFoundation.html](http://www.uhl.ac/Lost_Tomb/CracksInTheFoundation.html).

Why not write the word for master or teacher also in Greek? In fact, both parts of this reading are almost certainly mistaken. But first, how do they get from “Mary of Magdala” of the Gospels to “Mariamenon, the Master,” the supposed reading of the ossuary? This one will make your hair curl.

The JTTs seek support from the fourth-century apocryphal *Acts of Philip*, an Encratite (an ascetic sect), fantasy document complete with talking animals. In it the apostle Philip is accompanied by Bartholomew and by Philip’s sister Mariamne, supposed to be another name for Mary Magdalene. This is how the name of Mary of Magdala, whose name is always presented in the NT as Maria or Mariam (in Greek), is connected to Maramenon, thought originally to have been the name on the ossuary.

But the sister of Philip in the *AP* is never said to be Mary Magdalene, she is simply the sister of Philip! No NT or any other early source ever draws such a connection between Mary of Magdala and Philip the apostle, and Philip the apostle is never said to have been from Magdala (he is instead from Bethsaida). The Mariamne of the *AP* is not said to have been married to anybody, let alone to Jesus. Francois Bovon, who now teaches at Harvard, points to the ending of this work as indicating that its Mariamne, supposedly Mary Magdalene, after a career of preaching, returned finally to Palestine to be buried. The text actually says that she was to return to Palestine for her body to be placed in the Jordan River. The Jordan River was not where the ossuary in question was found, however, but some 15-20 miles away in a “family tomb” outside Jerusalem!

It is interesting now to read the posting of Bovon himself on the SBL website. It includes the following material:

“First, I have now seen the program and am not convinced of its main thesis. When I was questioned by Simcha Jacobovici and his team the questions were directed toward the *Acts of Philip* and the role of Mariamne in this text. I was not informed of the whole program and the orientation of the script.

Second, having watched the film, in listening to it, I hear two voices, a kind of *double discours*. On one hand there is the wish to open a scholarly discussion; on the other there is the wish to push a personal agenda. I must say that the reconstructions of Jesus' marriage with Mary Magdalene and the birth of a child belong for me to science fiction...

... I do not believe that Mariamne is the real name of Mary of Magdalene. Mariamne is, besides Maria or Mariam, a possible Greek equivalent, attested by Josephus, Origen, and the *Acts of Philip*, for the Semitic Myriam.

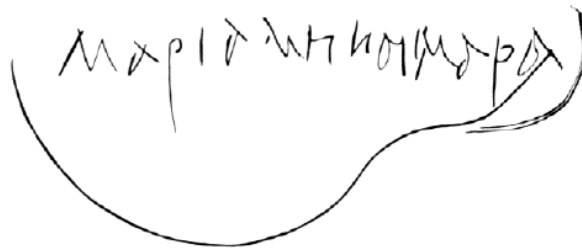
... This portrayal of Mariamne [in *AP*] fits very well with the portrayal of Mary of Magdala in the Manichean Psalms, the Gospel of Mary, and Pistis Sophia. My interest is not historical, but on the level of literary traditions.”

In other words, Bovon clarifies that the Mariamne of *AP* is never said to be Mary Magdalene, though her role in that apocryphon would fit, he thinks, and is perhaps modeled on the role of Mary Magdalene in three other late, heterodox sources.

This all shows the lengths the JTTs were prepared to go to try to establish their wacky theory.

But what about the reading Mariamenon in the first place? A recent article posted by Stephen J. Pfann on the SBL website demonstrates conclusively, to my mind, that the inscription really reads in Greek not “of Mariamenon the Master,” but “Mariame kai Mara,” Mariam and Mar(th)a. (All of the illustrations below are taken from his article at <http://www.sbl-site.org/PDF/Pfann.pdf>.)

**Rahmani Ossuary 701**



“MARIAMENOU MARA”; Rahmani 701.

Reading it as Mariamenou requires that the “N” was written backwards. Pfann says there are no other ossuaries found near Jerusalem “in which it has been suggested that an ‘N’ has been written in this way.”<sup>11</sup> The next letters are not –NOY but –KAI, as seen in the highlighted version below.



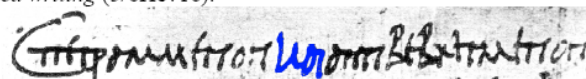
He then gives three more pictures of writing samples which seem to demonstrate this. The first shows a parallel for the formation of a kappa, showing that the letter in question in the Mariamenon inscription is a kappa, not a nu:

<sup>11</sup> Stephen J. Pfann, “Mary Magdalene is Now Missing: A Corrected Reading of Rahmanin Ossuary 701,” at <http://www.sbl-site.org/PDF/Pfann.pdf>.



"KALON KERAMION" Masada *tp* 858

Then he gives two examples of the cursive alpha iota which completes the KAI:



Pfann says that the first of the resulting names, “Mariame,” is “the normal Greek form of the Hebrew name ‘Mariam.’ ‘Mariame’ appears seven times in the Rahmani Ossuary Catalogue.”<sup>12</sup> It is worth noting again that in the NT, the name for Mary of Magdala is given in Greek as either *Μαρία* (in 10 places) or *Μαρίαμ* (in two places (John 20.18 and Mt. 27), neither of which quite matches *Μαρίαμη*.

Mara is a well-known shortened form of the name Martha,<sup>13</sup> attested on other ossuaries. There is absolutely no reason to suppose that the Greek name Mariamenon was followed here by an Aramaic word for teacher or master, written in Greek letters. Pfann shows that the two names were written in different hands, meaning that the box originally contained the bones of someone named Mariame and later the bones of a women named Mara were added. These were both extremely common names, especially that of Mariame. It is estimated that about one out of four women of the time was named Mariam (in some form of that name). Pfann points out that an ossuary discovered in a burial site on the Mt. of Olives bears the names “Martha and Maria” in Aramaic.

The DNA evidence used by the filmmakers is basically a joke. There were supposedly traces of DNA in only two of the 6 ossuaries, those of Yeshua bar Yosep and of Mariamenon. The analysis showed that these two samples of DNA were not related by having the same mother. Therefore the JTTs concluded that the results were consistent with the one being Jesus of Nazareth, the other being his wife, Mary of Magdala, with hardly any considerations given for alternatives. But there is no way of knowing whether the DNA from Mary’s box is that of Mary, or of Mara, or of any number of other people whose bones might have once been in the box. We no longer know how many people’s bones were contained in each box, but a scholarly report issued in 1996 by Amos Kloner determined that there were a total of 17 people whose bones were contained in the 10 ossuaries in the tomb, and another 18 whose bones were in the tomb but not in ossuaries.<sup>14</sup> (The bone box of the high priest Caiaphas held the bones of six

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., among other sources.

<sup>14</sup> Amos Kloner, “A Tomb with Inscribed Ossuaries in East Talpiyot, Jerusalem,” *Atiqot* 29 (1996), 15-22, at 21-22, cited in Christopher Rollston, “Prosopography and the Talpiyot Yeshua Family Tomb: Pensees of a Palaeographer,” on the SBL website, <http://www.sbl-site.org/Article.aspx?ArticleId=649>.

individuals.)<sup>15</sup> There is even no way of knowing whether the DNA in the Mariame and Mara bone box is not the DNA of the person or persons who put one or another of the sets of bones in the box in antiquity. There is no way to whether it is not the DNA of someone who handled the box and its bones since 1980.<sup>16</sup> The same goes with the Yeshua box. And even if the DNAs are those of Mariame and Yeshua, these two may have been related in any number of ways besides being husband and wife (aunt and nephew; uncle and niece; cousin and cousin, in-laws, etc., even brother and sisters from the same father but different mothers).

In fact, Pfann says that typically a husband's and a wife's bones would have ended up in the same bone box. Byron McCane observes that with regard to the Jerusalem ossuaries, "it is common to find the bones of a husband and wife gathered together in an ossuary inscribed with the husband's name, but rarely with the wife's name."<sup>17</sup> Likely, if this Yeshua bar Yosep had a wife, her bones were placed in his box, and most likely both Mariame and Mara were single, and at least closely related. Rabbi Judah in the rabbinic tractate *Semahot* 12:6, 12:9 is reported to have taught that those who could share a bed in life could share an ossuary in death.<sup>18</sup>

There are so many holes in the story connected with Mary Magdalene that it is patently shameful. It's not a "Ringo," but maybe a "Randy," or "Rick," or maybe "Sanjaya."

#### D. The James Ossuary

The advocates claim that the recently celebrated, analyzed, and for some debunked, James ossuary not only is authentic but that it too came from this same tomb, was stolen from the Israel Antiquities Authority, and then turned up on the antiquities market. The addition of a "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus," if genuine, and if originally found in the same tomb, would practically seal the deal for this being the Jesus family tomb.

Unfortunately for the theorists, the owner (Oded Golan) says it came from Silwan, another part of Jerusalem right by the temple mount, not from Talpiot. There is also evidence that it was discovered some years earlier than the others in question, when the "Jesus family tomb" still lay unearthed and unknown. According to Joe Zias, "Oded Golan the owner of the ossuary in question, who is on trial for forging objects, produced a photograph of the ossuary with a time stamp 1976, four years before the Talpiot tomb was accidentally discovered!"<sup>19</sup>

<sup>15</sup> McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 59, n. 24.

<sup>16</sup> Here are some of the remarks of Joe Zias, "The film tries to give the false impression that they were sampling human tissue which had decomposed in the ossuary whereas it had been long gone before the skeletal material was ever placed there. Final analysis- high probability that the DNA is of anybody who came into contact with the ossuary the past 30 off years, including mine. To say that as one test showed male and one showed female and then jumping to the conclusion that they were married is totally absurd as most of the adult woman in the tomb would have married in, but married to whom?"

(<http://www.joezias.com/tomb.html>).

<sup>17</sup> <sup>17</sup> Byron R. McCane, *Roll Back the Stone: Death and Burial in the World of Jesus* (Harrisburg/London/New York: Trinity Press International, 2003), 53.

<sup>18</sup> McCane, *Roll Back the Stone*, 59, n. 24.

<sup>19</sup> <http://www.joezias.com/tomb.html>.

As to the James ossuary being the missing ossuary from the Talpiot tomb, Zias again has some important facts:

the missing ossuary was never missing, never stolen from the IAA, nor stolen from the Talpiot tomb. Plain ossuaries which bore no inscription, nor any ornaments were automatically placed in an inner courtyard in the Rockefeller Museum during my tenure at curator (1972-1997). Due to a lack of storage space this was standard operating procedure, the ossuary was given a registration number, measured and simply stored in the inner courtyard with perhaps an additional 50-100 plain ossuaries. This was personally explained to Tabor by me so as to avoid any problems of a conspiracy theory in which the plain ossuary would figure. Unfortunately, it did not fit their agenda so they artificially created a story in which a plain white ossuary, suddenly morphed into a ossuary with two rosettes on the front, traces of red paint, bearing the inscription on the back 'James son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.'<sup>20</sup>

Also, the burial place of James was well known in the early Church and was referred to in the second century by the Christian writer Hegesippus, who was Palestinian in origin and knew the environs of Jerusalem. He says James's body was interred next to the Temple and that his sepulcher was still there in the middle second century (Eusebius, *HE* 3.23). This is not the Talpiot tomb.

Without the James ossuary, the case suffers another hard blow.

#### **IV. "To this we are witnesses" (Acts 3.15). Historical attestation of the Resurrection**

So far, we have seen how the case made for the Talpiyot tomb being a tomb in which the bones of Jesus and several members of his family were buried, is full of gaping holes. These holes in themselves are enough to sink the theory, without ever invoking the NT. But the JTTs do invoke the NT when it is to their liking to do so. Their approach could be summed up like this: "whatever in the NT seems to support our theory is historically valid; whatever does not is historically false".

But one cannot evade the witness of the NT so blithely. Every historian has to recognize the NT documents as historical, at least in the sense that they record the beliefs and observations of those who wrote them at that time. The skeptic and unbeliever of course will not want to accept these books as God's authoritative word, or as historically reliable, particularly statements pertaining to the supernatural, including the eyewitness accounts of the resurrection in the Gospels. It is indisputable that the four Gospels attest to the bodily resurrection of Jesus, but it is objected that these were not written until decades after the fact, the earliest one probably 4 decades after the fact.

##### *A. Paul*

But even non-Christian historians agree that the NT letter to the Galatians is a genuine letter of Paul of Tarsus, a missionary of Christianity. Paul wrote this letter probably in AD 48 or 49, perhaps as late as 54, that is, within two decades or so of Jesus' crucifixion. This is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Christian document we have. In its very first

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

verse, Paul mentions the resurrection of Jesus as a historical event, accomplished by God. Again, the historian may not accept at this point that Jesus did actually rise from the dead, but will have to agree that Paul believed it. Paul takes it for granted that his readers believed this too. It is historically undeniable, then, that Christians at least by the middle or late forties held a common, strong belief in the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. But this is just the beginning. Paul in this letter recounts events in his own life which go back to the time of his conversion some 15 to 17 years earlier (about AD 32 or 33; Gal. 1.15-16). Historians agree that Paul was converted to Christianity within about 3 years of Jesus' death. Thus we have a historical record of one who believed in Jesus' resurrection within three years of the event. This is all the more significant given who Paul was.

Paul tells us in Galatians that for some time before his conversion to Christianity he had been a zealous advocate for his ancestral Jewish faith (1.14). Elsewhere he reveals that he used to be a Pharisee (Phil. 3.5). His zeal for what he regarded as his ancestral traditions set him against the Christian movement in Jerusalem and he became a vicious persecutor of the church and, by his own testimony, sought to destroy it (Gal. 1.13, 23). The book of Acts confirms this and gives more details of his persecuting activity, for anyone who is interested. Now, if there is anybody who would have known that the body of Jesus had been buried somewhere in Jerusalem, it would have been this zealous enemy of Christianity, the Church's chief persecutor! Matthew records what is surely a historical fact, that Jewish authorities right after the resurrection were charging that Jesus' disciples had stolen his body from his tomb (Mt. 28.11-13). No doubt, Paul (Saul) too tried to use such a charge against Christianity in those early days. If Jesus' body were in Jerusalem somewhere, Paul would certainly have known about it, especially if it had been placed in a public "family tomb" (a family tomb in Jerusalem for a family which was from Galilee!). Yet he came to be perhaps the greatest apologist for the resurrection in the early church.

#### *B. James, the Lord's Brother*

Keep in mind that the body, after lying for a year in a rock tomb, had to be exhumed, its bones collected, and then put in a bone box. Who would have done this? Only his family members, or close friends. But it is precisely Jesus' family members and close friends who proclaimed his resurrection. The "James" ossuary has been mentioned. If there was a "family tomb," it would have been James's family tomb, too. Nobody would have ever put Jesus' alleged remains, and the remains of other of James's family members, in a tomb without James knowing about it! And yet, this very James proclaimed Jesus' resurrection! Paul, as was said, believed in Jesus' resurrection when he was converted about 3 years after Jesus' crucifixion. Paul informs us in 1 Corinthians that James the Lord's brother, also claimed to have seen the risen Jesus, and this encounter occurred at some time even earlier than Paul's (1 Cor. 15.7). So, we have historical evidence that James the brother of Jesus, who was personally known to Paul from at least about A.D. 36, only 6 years after Jesus' crucifixion (Gal. 1.19), claimed that he himself had seen the risen Jesus within three years of the crucifixion. Almost certainly this took place within 40 days of Jesus' crucifixion, the time of Jesus' ascension as mentioned in Acts, but at any rate it was very early on. It is then inconceivable that James, who would have been involved with his family in the mourning and reburial of Jesus' bones in a well-known

burial area, one year after his crucifixion, could at virtually the same time be preaching Jesus' resurrection from the dead.

Paul's same letter to the Corinthians, written in the mi-50's, attests to Peter and the other disciples, along with 500 others, seeing the resurrected Jesus. But James's witness is particularly powerful, as he was of the household of Jesus and would have known about any supposed "burial" and "reburial" of Jesus' bones.

## **V. Conclusion**

Despite all their sensationalistic claims and their frankly shameful methods, the Talpiot tomb advocates have miserably failed to refute the eyewitness accounts of the NT. This is the clear consensus of scholars who have weighed in on the debate. But in the end, the skeptic needs to face not just the failure of a historical attack, and not simply the historical claims of the NT, but also the NT's proclamation of the significance of Christ's resurrection. Even an empty tomb, a real resurrection could, for some, fall into the category of unexplained phenomena, of Ripley's "Believe it or Not." When Paul wrote in Romans 10.9 that "if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved," he had in mind, of course, the Christian understanding of the meaning of Jesus' resurrection, that it was God's vindication of Jesus, it was his triumph over sin, death, and hell for the believer, so that, in union with him, we too have already begun to participate in that triumph and will one day rise with him, body and soul, to life everlasting. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life. Whoever believes in me, though he die, yet shall he live, and everyone who lives and believes in me shall never die." Then he said to Martha, "Do you believe this?" When confronted with this question, Martha responded, "Yes, Lord; I believe that you are the Christ, the Son of God, who is coming into the world." This is the response we should pray for in others when they come to see that the Talpiot tomb is not the place in which to look for Jesus. As the angel said to Mary (Lk. 24.5), "Why do you seek the living among the dead?"