

James' Burial Box



Evidence of Jesus Written in Stone!

An ancient ossuary with the chiseled inscription, “James, Son of Joseph, Brother of Jesus,” has been discovered in Jerusalem! The ancient artifact has struck the scholarly world like the detonation of a thousand megaton bomb! It provides incredible testimony of the veracity of the New Testament Scriptures, as well as documents the existence of James, the brother of Jesus, his father Joseph, and Jesus Christ Himself! Here is the amazing story!

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For decades, skeptics and doubters have assailed the historicity of Jesus Christ. Many claim He never existed, and demanded “proof” that He really lived. They were not satisfied with accounts of Roman historians, such as Tacitus, or the records of the early Church fathers. Some went so far as to claim not only did He never exist, but that He was a make-believe “Saviour” created by so-called “believers” based on the ancient pagan “death of a saviour” legends of various pagan gods. His crucifixion, they claimed, was a myth, patterned after the deaths of numerous pagan gods who “died” and were “resurrected” in the spring.

There is no question that pagan religions had their supposed “saviours” who were ostensibly killed, murdered, and then came back to “life.” Nimrod was killed, and Semiramis, his wife, claimed he was “re-born” as her (illegitimate) son Gilgamesh. Another name of the pagan saviour was Tammuz, who died in the spring. Ezekiel the prophet condemns the worship of Tammuz, the false savior, exclaiming that even at the Temple, “women were sitting there weeping for Tammuz” (Ezek.8:14).

Clearly, Satan the devil knew the plan of God, at least in general terms, and so he fabricated his own deception – his own masterpiece of pagan forgery and fraud – to counterfeit and anticipate the arrival of the TRUE SAVIOUR of the world!

But now the amazing discovery of the burial box of James, the brother of Jesus, PROVES to any right-thinking mind that Jesus was indeed a historic figure, who had a brother named James, and whose father was Joseph – just as the New Testament relates!

Here is the incredible story that has shocked the scholarly world like the explosion of a million megaton hydrogen bomb!

The Burial Box of James

The archaeological discovery is that of a 2,000 year-old limestone ossuary – a box that held the bones of a man. This particular box bears the inscription, in Aramaic, the common language of the first century period, “James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.”

Up to this time in history, references to these three men have only been found in manuscripts.

Andre Lemaire, a paleographer at the Sorbonne University in Paris (Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes), first saw the artifact and its inscription while examining the relics of a private collector in Jerusalem. He dates the burial box, which was empty, to 63 A.D., which, according to early records, would have been just after James was martyred in Jerusalem!

Lemaire stumbled upon the ossuary by chance. He was in Jerusalem on a six-month project to study paleo-inscriptions. While there, a friend introduced him to a private collector. He told Lemaire that he had a few inscriptions and showed him some photographs of an ossuary. The James burial box, which is about 20 inches (50

centimeters) long, was originally acquired by the collector in the antiquities market 15 years ago and has been in his hands ever since that time.

Says Lemaire, “When I read it [the inscription], I immediately wondered if it was the same James who was said to be the brother of Jesus of Nazareth.” He adds, “To the collector, Jesus was known as the son of God, so he had no brother. It never occurred to him that this might be anything other than just another ossuary.”

Declared Lemaire, “I knew right away that it could be something really important.”

It is Genuine – Not a Fake!

Writes Andre Lemaire in “Burial Box of James the Brother of Jesus,” in the *Bible Archaeology Review*, subtitled “Earliest Archaeological Evidence of Jesus Found in Jerusalem,” the fascinating words that have stood the scholarly world on its head:

“Amazing as it may sound, a limestone bone box (called an ‘ossuary’) has surfaced in Israel that may once have contained the bones of James the brother of Jesus. We know this because an extraordinary inscription incised on one side of the ossuary reads in clear Aramaic letters: ‘James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus.’

To make certain of the authenticity of the find, Lemaire had the bone box analyzed by geologists to determine its date. They concluded the box has no modern elements, was worked by no modern tools, and does seem to be authentic. Says Lemaire:

“The inscription and the ossuary were examined in the laboratory of the Geological Survey of Israel. Both were studied with a binocular microscope to identify the stone and to observe the patina. Six samples of the chalk (soft limestone), six samples of the patina and two samples of the attached soil were studied with a SEM (Scanning Electron Microscope) equipped with EDS (Electron Dispersive Spectroscopy).

“The scientists concluded: ‘[T]he patina does not contain any modern elements (such as modern pigments) and it adheres firmly to the stone. No sign of the use of a modern tool or instrument was found. No evidence that might detract from the authenticity of the patina and the inscription was found’” (*Bible Archaeology Review*, Nov-Dec. 2002, page 28).

Lemaire describes the ossuary in detail, saying:

“The newly revealed ossuary with the startling inscription bearing the name of James is unadorned, unlike numerous ornately carved ossuaries. The only decoration is a line forming a frame about 0.5 inch (1.2 cm) from the outer edges. Many ossuaries have little feet. This one does not. However, scarce decoration does not indicate a lower social status of the dead, as a leading authority on ossuaries has observed.

“This ossuary is not exactly rectangular, but that is true of most of the ossuaries that we know. It is 20 inches long (50.5 cm) at the base and flairs out to almost 22 inches (56 cm) at the top. Although one of the short sides is perpendicular

to the base, the other is slanted, giving the box a trapezoid shape. The ossuary is 10 inches (25 cm) wide and 12 inches (30.5 cm) high” (p.27-28).

This type of ossuary is generally dated to the period between 20 BCE and 70 CE (20 BC and 70 AD). The classical shape of the letters fits this period. None of the letters display the developments typical of the following period, says Lemaire. He adds, “Moreover, the cursive shape of three of the letters (*dalet*, *yod* and *aleph*) indicates an even narrower span of time: the last decades before the Roman destruction of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. – the *exact period when James, the brother of Jesus, would have died*” (*ibid.*).

Joseph Fitzmeyer, formerly of the Catholic University of America, and one of the world’s leading experts in first century Aramaic, and an eminent scholar and editor of the Dead Sea Scrolls, was shown the inscription on the ossuary. He has edited a number of Aramaic texts among the scrolls. He at first was bothered by the spelling of the word for “brother” on the ossuary. It is spelled *aleph*, *het*, *waw*, *yod*. In Hebrew it is simply *aleph*, *het*. However, further research revealed to Fitzmeyer that the same spelling of “brother” was used in the Dead Sea Scroll known as the “Genesis Apocryphon.” In addition, he found another example where the same form was used – an ossuary inscription where the the deceased individual was referred to as someone’s brother.

This interesting sidelight shows how difficult it would have been for someone to forge or fake the inscription. Says Hershel Shanks, editor and publisher of *Bible Archaeology Review*, “Either a putative forger had to know first century Aramaic better than Father Fitzmeyer or the inscription is authentic. To my mind this is one of the strongest arguments for the authenticity of the James inscription.”

Biggest New Testament Discovery

“This is probably going to be the biggest New Testament find in my lifetime, as big as the Dead Sea scrolls,” said Ben Witherington, a New Testament professor at Asbury Theological Seminary in Wilmore, Kentucky .

He adds, “Christianity, Judaism, and Islam are all historical religions, and they have to be open to historical inquiry. To some extent they stand or fall on the authenticity of the historical record. This gives us one more piece of evidence outside of the Bible that these are real people, and that they’re important people, and provides a small confirmation for the claims made about James as the brother of Jesus.”

In an article regarding the discovery, Witherington declared, “If, as seems probable, the ossuary found in the vicinity of Jerusalem and dated to about 63 A.D. is indeed the burial box of James the brother of Jesus, this inscription is the most important extrabiblical evidence of its kind. It would confirm that James existed, was someone important, and was the brother of another early Jew who was very important – Jesus.”

Witherington adds, “The inscription in cursive Aramaic sets a limit on the period when it could have been written, and the careful checking of the characters suggests the inscription is from the appropriate time period, not a later forgery.”

Witherington points out that what is most unusual about the inscription is the reference to Jame’s brother. This alone suggests that the brother mentioned must have been someone very important, as it was not the customary practice to list a brother on a burial ossuary.

Jewish Burial Customs

The historical record reveals that from the first century B.C. to about 70 A.D., it was the burial custom of Jews to place their dead in a cave for a year, then retrieve the bones and put them in an ossuary. Several hundred such boxes from that era have been found -- some ornately carved and others plain, some with feet and others without.

The burial custom changed in 70 A.D., when the Romans destroyed Jerusalem and burned down the Temple.

What is highly unusual about the inscription is the mention of a brother. Andre Lemaire, a paleographer at the Sorbonne, declares, “So far, with all the inscriptions we have, only one other has mentioned a brother.” He goes on, “This is a very important point for the problem of identification. There would need to be a special reason to mention the brother. It suggests the brother was also prominent, an important person.”

Jesus and Joseph were fairly common names of that era, and James, slightly less so. Statistical analysis suggests that the possibility of these three names occurring in the given relationships (son of Joseph, brother of Jesus) is very small. Therefore the likelihood that this particular burial box is that of the New Testament figures is very high.

Says *Biblical Archaeology Review*, which published the scoop of the century in an extraordinary article in its November-December 2002 issue: “The names James (Jacob), Joseph, and Jesus were all fairly common among Jews at the turn of the era. Rahmani’s catalogue of ossuaries in Israel lists 233 inscriptions. All three names are among those that appear the most frequently. Joseph is found 19 times, Jesus ten times, and James/Jacob five times. Rachel Hachlili has studied names used at this time in all types of inscriptions. Joseph appeared in 14%, Jesus in 9% and James/Jacob in 2 percent of the cases.”

Based on these percentages, a little more than a quarter of one percent of the male population were named either “James/Jacob son of Joseph” or the reverse. So about half this figure would have been James/Jacob son of Joseph. But how many of these would have had an important brother named Jesus? If each male had two brothers, over two generations perhaps 0.05 percent of the population would have been called “James, son of Joseph,” and would have had a brother “Jesus.” But how many of these would have

been considered important enough to mention in an inscription and how many of them would have been buried in ossuaries?

Concludes *Biblical Archaeology Review*, “When we take into account that this ‘James/Jacob, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus’ had a brother who was by this time well known and that the ‘James/Jacob, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus’ had a special relationship with this brother as the leader of the Jerusalem church, it seems very probable that this is the ossuary of the James in the New Testament. If so, this would also mean that we have here the first epigraphic mention – from about 63 C.E. – of Jesus of Nazareth” (“Burial Box of James Brother of Jesus,” Andre Lemaire, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Nov-Dec. 2002, p.33).

The Amazing Details

Translating the inscription was the easy part. Tying the ossuary to Jesus of Nazareth was much more difficult.

Scientists at the Geological Institute of Israel examined the box, which is made of Jerusalem limestone, and judged it to be about 2,000 years old. The inscription is written in Aramaic, in a form that further narrows the possible time frame.

“The script is very important for the date because the Aramaic script changed over time in ways we could measure,” said P. Kyle McCarter, a paleographer at Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland. “It’s the most important criterion for dating this object, and the script is consistent with a date in the middle of the first century A.D.”

The fact that the box is very plain, apart from the beautiful script, is not surprising, according to experts. “Highly decorated boxes are the ones that are unusual,” said McCarter. Andre Lemaire asserted that extensive study of several hundred ossuaries found in Jerusalem has shown no connection whatsoever between the ornateness of the design and the importance of the person whose bones they contained.

The lack of knowledge about where the ossuary came from is worrisome but not unusual, the experts say. “It means there will always be doubts about the thing,” said McCarter. “They’ve applied every possible test to it to determine its character and authenticity, but there will always be a cloud over it and there will always be those who doubt because it wasn’t recovered in a legitimate archaeological dig.” He added, “But this is not an unusual situation. We get this a lot.”

Jesus, Joseph and James

Whether Jesus was the son of God is a theological problem, said Lemaire. But historians don’t doubt the existence of either James or Jesus; both are mentioned frequently in early historical accounts.

Following the death of Jesus in 29 A.D., James assumed leadership of the Christian church in Jerusalem until he himself was martyred in 62 A.D. According to biblical accounts, he was one of the first apostles to see Jesus after his resurrection.

He is referred to as the brother of Jesus in both the Bible and in contemporary historical accounts. In Matthew 13:55-56, for instance, Jesus is said to have four brothers and two sisters. But the exact nature of these relationships -- whether they were full siblings by blood, half siblings, or cousins -- has been open to interpretation.

“If you're Catholic, you think they're cousins because the perpetual virginity of Mary is official church doctrine,” said Witherington. “But there are a lot of problems in the historical record with that. When James is referred to as the ‘brother of our lord’ in the New Testament, the word used means ‘blood brother. It would have to be qualified in context to mean something different.”

Declared Witherington, “The ossuary gives us another piece of evidence outside the Bible that these are blood brothers and sisters of Jesus.” He points out that Aramaic word used for “brother” on the ossuary, *akhui*, certainly means “brother,” and not a more distant relative. The language confirms that James was a blood relation to both Jesus and Joseph. It is not commenting on Jesus’ relationship with Joseph but on James’ relationship to both Joseph and Jesus.

James in the Bible

Was James a half-brother of Jesus? We read the clear evidence in the gospel of Matthew: “When He had come to His own country, He taught them in their synagogue, so that they were astonished and said, ‘Where did this man get this wisdom and these mighty works? Is this not the carpenter’s son? Is not His mother called Mary? And His brothers, James, Joses, Simon, and Judas? And His sisters, are they not all with us?’” (Matt.13:54-56).

The apostle Paul points out that after His resurrection, Christ was seen by Peter, then by the twelve apostles, followed by 500 brethren at once, and then James, his brother (I Cor.15:1-8).

James is mentioned as one of the chief “pillars” of the Church at Jerusalem – the headquarters Church – during the first century. Paul says that when he himself was converted, he went up to Jerusalem “to see Peter, and remained with him fifteen days. But I saw none of the other apostles except James, the Lord’s brother” (Gal.1:18).

Later, when a great controversy arose in the Church regarding circumcision, Paul again went up to Jerusalem to present his case before the leadership there. He relates, “And when James, Cephas (Peter), and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we should go to the Gentiles and they to the circumcision” (Gal.2:9). Note that

James is mentioned first in the passage, indicating that he was most likely the chief apostle or “first among equals.”

James’ vital role in the Jerusalem church is revealed in Acts 15, where we read of the church council debate over the question of circumcision. Certain Pharisees presented their claim that Gentile believers had to be circumcised to enter the church, and Paul presented his case that circumcision was not necessary. After hearing both sides of the question, the apostles and elders heard Peter confirm that the Holy Spirit had been given to Gentiles without the need of circumcision when God used him to open the gospel to the Gentiles. Then James made the final decision, saying, “Therefore I judge that we should not trouble those who from among the Gentiles are turning to God” (Acts 15:1-19). He was evidently the head of the Jerusalem church at that time.

When Paul returned to visit Jerusalem in about 58 A.D., Luke his biographer mentions, “And when we had come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly. On the following day Paul went in with us to James, and all the elders were present” (Acts 21:17-18). It is clear from the context that James was the leading figure in the Jerusalem church at the time.

James’ apostleship is also attested to by the epistle he wrote “to the twelve tribes scattered abroad” (James 1:1).

Early church history tells us more about James.

James in Church History

Josephus in *Antiquity of the Jews* tells us about James, a very important figure in the early church. He relates how a young and bad-tempered Ananus took the high priesthood, being a Sadducee. He assembled the Sanhedrin of the judges, and “brought before them the brother of Jesus, who was called Christ, whose name was James, and some others [or some of his companions] and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned: but as for those who seemed the most equitable of the citizens, and such as were the most uneasy at the breach of the laws, they disliked what was done; they also sent to the king [Agrippa] desiring him to send to Ananus that he should act so no more, for that what he had already done was not to be justified” (bk.20, chap.9, 1).

Agrippa removed him from being high priest after only three months – but by then the damage was done. The date for the death of James, is dated by Josephus to 62 A.D., when the high priest Ananus briefly held office.

The early church historian Eusebius tells us more of the story of James’ death. Quoting Hegesippus, who lived in the generation after the apostles, he writes that after the death of Peter and Paul:

“[Administration of] the church passed to James, the brother of the Lord, along with the apostles. He was called ‘the Just’ by everyone from the

Lord's time to ours, since there were many Jameses, but this one was consecrated from his mother's womb. He drank no wine or liquor and ate no meat. No razor came near his head . . . He used to enter the temple alone and was often found kneeling and imploring forgiveness for the people, so that his knees became hard like a camel's from his continual kneeling in worship of God and in prayer for the people. Because of his superior righteousness he was called the Just and *Oblias* – meaning, in Greek, 'Bulwark of the People' and 'Righteousness' – as the prophets Declare regarding him.

“Representatives of the seven sects among the [Jewish] people, which I previously described (in the *Memoirs*), asked him what ‘the door of Jesus’ meant, and he replied that he was the Savior. Because of this, some believed that Jesus was the Christ. The sects mentioned above did not believe in a resurrection or in One who is coming to reward each according to his deeds, but those who did believe did so because of James. Now, since many even of the rulers believed, there was an uproar among the Jews, scribes, and Pharisees saying that the whole populace was in danger of expecting Jesus as the Christ. So they assembled and said to James: ‘We call on you to restrain the people, since they have gone astray after Jesus, believing him to be the Christ. We call on you to persuade all who come for the Passover concerning Jesus, since all of us trust you. We and the entire population can vouch for the fact that you are righteous and take no one at face value. . .

“So the scribes and Pharisees made James stand on the temple parapet, and they shouted to him, ‘O righteous one, whom we all ought to believe, since the people are going astray after Jesus who was crucified, tell us, what does ‘the door of Jesus’ mean?’ He replied with a loud voice, ‘Why do you ask me about the Son of Man? He is sitting in heaven at the right hand of the Great Power, and he will come on the clouds of heaven.’ Many were convinced and rejoiced at James’ testimony, crying, ‘Hosanna to the Son of David.’ Then the scribes and Pharisees said to each other, ‘We made a bad mistake in providing such testimony to Jesus, but let us go up and throw him down so that they will be afraid and not believe him.’ And they cried out, ‘Oh, oh, even the just one has gone astray!’ This fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah: ‘Let us remove the just man, for he is unprofitable to us. Therefore they shall eat the fruit of their works.’

“So they went up and threw down the righteous one. Then they said to each other, ‘Let us stone James the Just,’ and they began to stone him, since the fall had not killed him. But he turned and knelt down, saying, ‘I implore you, O Lord, God and Father, forgive them: they do not know what they are doing.’ While they were pelting him with stones, one of the priests among the sons of the Rechabites, to whom the prophet Jeremiah bore witness, cried out, ‘Stop! What are you doing? The righteous one is praying for you.’ Then one of them, a laundryman, took the club that he used to beat out clothes and hit the Just on the head. Such was his martyrdom. They buried him on the spot by the temple, and his gravestone is still there by the temple. He became a true witness to both Jews and Gentiles that Jesus is the Christ” (Eusebius, *The Church History: A New Translation with Commentary*, p.82-83).

Eusebius declared, “Just after this Vespasian began to besiege them.”

Eusebius points out that this account by Hegesippus is in full agreement with that of Clement, and that so extraordinary was James the Just that “even the more intelligent of the Jews thought that this was why the siege of Jerusalem immediately followed his martyrdom” (page 83).

Josephus, the first century Jewish historian and a general in the Jewish army in the war of 70 A.D., likewise wrote: “These things happened to the Jews as retribution for James the Just, who was a brother of Jesus who was called Christ, for the Jews killed him despite his great righteousness” (*ibid.*). This quotation is not found in an extant copy of Josephus, but is cited by Origen, showing Eusebius did not fraudulently manufacture the story out of thin cloth.

So What?

Non-believers may ho hum and yawn, and question the amazing discover of the bone box of James, the brother of Jesus, son of Joseph, with a “ho hum” attitude, and exclaim, “What difference does it make? So what?” “Who cares?”

The significance of this discovery, however, goes far to establish the historicity of the New Testament record, its authenticity, and reliability. No longer can critics and skeptics ridicule, ignore, and easily dismiss the New Testament account of the life of Christ and the history of the early Church.

The discovery is without parallel. It is truly the “biggest” archaeological discovery of the century – perhaps in all Biblical archaeology! Once again the faith of believers in the Holy Scriptures stands confirmed, as founded on truth. So isn’t it about time we brush off our Bibles, and study them with rekindled, renewed interest, fervor, and enthusiasm – with renewed zeal and dedication? This same Jesus, whose very existence is attested to by the inscription on the burial box of His brother James, is soon going to come again! We will all have to give account to Him when He comes!