

# Jesus Tomb: Fact Or Fiction?

[ISRAEL UPDATE] from David Dolan

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Shalom from Jerusalem,

Local residents and visiting tourists (of which there are many at present) are eagerly waiting to see if snow descends on the capital city in the coming hours, with forecasters warning of that possibility as temperatures dip to freezing overnight. Meanwhile, I am sending you a copy of my latest commentary for the World Net Daily web site. It concerns the recent claim that the ancient family tomb of Jesus of Nazareth has been discovered in my old Jerusalem neighborhood, East Talpiot. In fact, I note that I lived virtually next door to the supposed site for some 15 years before moving to central Jerusalem in 2001. The commentary features some news released just today concerning the controversy, emanating from a local Christian scholar who is a longtime acquaintance of mine. Read and enjoy!

I recently learned that a US media interview I did via satellite from my apartment roof for the Harvest TV program, broadcast near the end of last summer's Lebanon war, had been posted on the popular YouTube web site. It was sparked by the discovery last year of an ancient book of Psalms in an Irish bog, found open to Psalm 83. I note that I've written a chapter on that prophetic psalm in my 2001 book ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD? If you would like to look at the posted video, which is still quite timely, click on this link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZ-vmsXgmVA> Just ignore the long summertime shadows around my eyes! The book itself is available from my web site, [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com)

Speaking of Ireland (and that's also timely since this Saturday is St. Patrick's Day), it appears that a recent intervention by some prominent Irish Christian and Jewish friends has prompted a solution to my journalist visa and Israeli press card situation, which I mentioned for prayer last July. I will not go into the details here, but I do want to thank those directly involved in this welcome intervention, and also to all of you around the world who prayed for a positive outcome.

With the prospects of another war with Hizbullah forces in Lebanon again looming large before us this year, if not also with their Syrian and Iranian masters, Israel's top governmental leaders, including Prime Minister Olmert and Defense Minister Peretz, have just been warned that they will be named in an official commission investigation into last summer's war, apparently in a negative manner. The report is scheduled to be released next month.

Analysts say this could lead to the collapse of the Olmert government. I will report on that and other important developments in Israel in this month's Israel News update, to be sent out to you in less than two weeks time.

## **JESUS: DEAD OR ALIVE?**

By David Dolan

Media circuses are hardly rare occurrences here in Jerusalem.

In fact, as I write this column, workers with CNN International are setting up a big blue tent (I kid you not) just across the street from my apartment building, preparing to broadcast a report by correspondent Ben Weideman from underneath the protective canopy on a stormy March afternoon.

I should mention that the view from my central Jerusalem street is usually worth filming whatever the weather, especially facing north toward Mount Zion and the biblical Temple Mount.

That was not the case with my former home in the East Talpiot neighborhood. While the view from my top floor flat was not all that bad, it was hardly noteworthy. I mainly looked out at dozens of other tall apartment buildings that dominate the southeast Jerusalem suburb.

But something allegedly quite historic was lurking in the shadows of the stone-faced apartment building located just next to mine: The burial tomb of Jesus, his wife Mary Magdalene and their son Judah, not to mention his Jewish mother and other family members!

Ben Weideman was among hundreds of Israeli and international journalists that recently filmed stirring reports near an innocuous cement slab located in East Talpiot. The unpretentious slab lies in the corner of a small fenced in rose patch planted along a narrow foot path just below the apartment building that I lived next to for 15 years.

The media was reporting on the "historic discovery," announced in New York by Titanic film producer James Cameron and Israeli born-Canadian documentary maker Simcha Jacobovici, that the slab probably covered the entrance to the Jesus Family Tomb! The stunning late February proclamation was intentionally timed to promote their television program on that riveting theme, broadcast one week later on the US Discovery Channel, and also in Great Britain and here in Israel.

I first got wind of the contention that the bones of Jesus and family were unearthed in my humble neighborhood when the BBC broadcast that momentous claim in a 1996 television documentary. As I walked past the site in the months and years after the screening, usually on my way to the nearby East Talpiot supermarket and post office, I often recalled the relatively short controversy that the British documentary sparked off.

But this time, the dustup seems destined to linger much longer in the air, coming as it does in the titanic wake of Dan Brown's best selling Da Vinci Code and producer Ron Howard's subsequent blockbuster film.

There is just one tiny problem with the super-hyped Jesus Tomb claim: Nearly all archeological experts dismiss it out of hand, or at least note it is both highly improbable and entirely unprovable, and therefore hardly worth mentioning.

By now, most everyone has heard the main reason why. The Hebrew names Yeshua (Jesus), Miriam (Mary), Judah, and Yoseph—all found inscribed on stone burial ossuaries situated inside the ancient tomb when it was discovered by Israeli construction workers in 1980—were extremely common monikers in the time of Jesus. To allege that they point to the family tomb of Christianity's revered redeemer is a giant stretch, to say the least.

But Cameron and Jacobovici claim another name was found inside the tomb that nearly seals their case—Mary Magdalene! It is almost statistically impossible that her unique second name would be found with the others if we were not talking about the tomb of the world renowned Jesus of Nazareth and his relatives, they maintain.

American scholar Stephen Pfann, who serves as a locally trained textual scholar and paleographer at Jerusalem's Holy Land University, has just conducted an intensive examination of the ossuary that supposedly held the bones of the Messiah's alleged bride. He insists that the burial box is inscribed with two apparently unrelated names, the second of them Mara, the Greek version of Martha, not Magdalene. He discerned that the two names were etched in distinctive styles on the stone ossuary by clearly different hands. Scholars have long known that such burial receptacles often housed the bones of more than one person, mainly for economic reasons.

Professor Pfann, who I've known for many years, along with his scholarly wife Claire, noted that neither Cameron nor Jacobovici are even remotely qualified to put forth such gargantuan contentions, especially given the far reaching implications for the historic Christian faith. The Israeli filmmaker, who starred in the ratings-rich TV program, shot back that scholars and archeologists are simply upset that he and other modern journalists and documentary makers are "breaking their monopoly" on deciphering ancient artifacts.

Although a professional journalist myself, I am quite happy to have trained electricians fix my broken power lines in my stead, experienced plumbers determine what is wrong with my kitchen pipes, skilled physicians operate on my body, certified dentists fill cavities in my teeth, knowledgeable mechanics work on my car, etc.

As for my personal spiritual beliefs, I don't expect them to be determined by colorful filmmakers working out of Hollywood or Toronto, no matter how much mammon they procure from their sensational claims.

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**DAVID DOLAN** is a Jerusalem-based author and journalist who has lived and worked in Israel since 1980.

[HOLY WAR FOR THE PROMISED LAND](#) (Broadman & Holman), his latest book, is an overview of the history of the Israel and of the bitter Arab-Israeli conflict that rages there, plus some autobiographical details about the author's experiences living in the land since 1980. It especially examines the important role that militant Islam plays in the conflict.

[ISRAEL IN CRISIS: WHAT LIES AHEAD?](#) (Baker/Revell), which examines the political and biblical prospects for a regional attack upon Israel, settlement in the disputed territories, and related topics, is also available for purchase, along with an updated edition of his popular end-time novel, [THE END OF DAYS](#) (21st Century Press).

You may order these books at a special discount price by visiting his web site at [www.ddolan.com](http://www.ddolan.com).

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