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The Jesus' Wife Papyrus and the Resurrection

from the April 15, 2014 eNews issue

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Just in time for the celebration of Christ's Resurrection, the world is excited about a fragment of papyrus that talks about Jesus' wife. In September of 2012, Harvard Divinity School Professor Karen L. King announced at the International Coptic Congress in Rome that there existed a fragment of papyrus in which Jesus is quoted as saying, "Jesus said to them, 'My wife...she will be able to be my disciple.'" Chemists and biologists and other scientists at Harvard, Columbia, and M.I.T. have analyzed the fragment and have declared it authentic. That is, it's actually an ancient bit of papyrus from the fourth to eighth centuries and not a forgery.

As soon as King presented the papyrus to the world, it raised controversies. A variety of groups rejected the papyrus as a fake, a sloppy forgery with uncertain provenance, until recently when experts said, "It does appear to be genuinely old." Does it mean Jesus actually had a wife? Not a bit. New Testament scholars have argued that the phrase should be translated, "The bride of Christ"—as in the Church. It wasn't written until at least 2–3 centuries after Jesus, anyway, which makes the words highly unlikely to have been Jesus' own.

The papyrus, lovingly called the Gospel of Jesus's Wife, gives evidence that Christians several centuries after Jesus were discussing issues about discipleship and celibacy and marriage. Regardless of its age or authenticity, it has stoked arguments in some churches about the kinds of leadership roles women should hold. Should women be allowed to be priests and pastors?

The most important issue that bits of historical writing like this raise are the old arguments that Jesus never died – that he got married and lived on. That's the real question: Did Jesus die and rise again from the dead? Four books that date to the First Century say he did. The four Gospels, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all declare that Jesus died and rose again. Paul's companion Luke says, "I know thoroughly about this," (Luk 1:3–4) and Jesus' disciple John says, "I'm a witness" (Jhn 21:24).

The fact that the Gospels are in the Bible doesn't make them any less historical writings. The Church father Irenaeus of Lyons wrote in about A.D. 180:

Matthew also issued a written Gospel among the Hebrews in their own dialect, while Peter and Paul were preaching in Rome and laying the foundation of the Church. After their departure, Mark, the disciple and interpreter of Peter, did also hand down to us in writing what had been preached by Peter. Luke also, the companion of Paul, recorded in a book the Gospel preached by him. Afterwards John, the disciple of the Lord, who also had leaned upon his breast, did himself publish a Gospel during his residence at Ephesus in Asia.

— Against Heresies 3:1:1

Little fragments about Jesus' wife written centuries later can't touch on the testimony recorded by eyewitnesses and researchers within decades after the fact.

Evidence For the Resurrection

The Resurrection of Christ is the most powerful event in history. It has affected the last 2000 years of history and politics, from peasants to kings to nations. Christianity has spread across the entire world, into every country and into a vast number of ethnic groups and languages. Billions of people have experienced the life-giving, healing, forgiveness and freedom offered by God because Jesus Christ conquered death and rose again from the grave.

The apostle Paul wrote in 1 Cor 15:12–22 that without the resurrection of Christ, the Christian faith is useless. "And if Christ be not raised," Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins. Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable."

There are many skeptics who disregard the resurrection of Jesus Christ of Nazareth as a fable. However, the evidence for Jesus' resurrection is extremely strong, even to the point of converting some who sought to disprove it:

The Empty Tomb

Though well-trained Roman soldiers guarded the tomb of Jesus Christ, it was empty 3 days after Jesus' death as Jesus had repeatedly foretold (Matt 12:40, Mark 8:31). The guards had fled (a death penalty offense). The massive stone had been rolled away, and the body was gone - and was never produced by the enemies of the Christians. The linen grave clothes in which the Jews bury their dead were still in the tomb, undisturbed. From the Jewish historian Josephus to a compilation of 5th-century Jewish writings called the "*Toledoth Jeshu*", even Jewish sources and traditions admit that the tomb was empty. The body was never found.

Living Witnesses

There were a multitude of witnesses who saw Jesus Christ alive after his death. The disciples, the travelers on the road to Emmaus and a number of women all spoke to Jesus alive. Thomas doubted until he was able to put his fingers into Jesus' wounds (John 20:26–27). He later spread the Gospel all the way to India. The apostle Paul tells of 500 people to whom Jesus appeared at one time, most of whom were still alive and available for questioning when Paul wrote his letter (1 Cor 15:6). Jesus Christ was seen alive many times by hundreds of different people over the course of forty days after his death (John 20–21, Acts 1:3).

The Disciples

Christ's followers, who had been fearful and who had run away when Jesus was arrested, were completely changed after the Resurrection and became courageous witnesses. Peter, who had denied knowing Christ when recognized by a simple servant girl, became the powerfully bold leader of those who had seen Christ alive, speaking to the thousands gathered in Jerusalem for the Feast of Shavuot—Pentecost. A person may die for a lie if they do not know it is a lie. But people do not give their lives up and face severe persecution to spread a lie they themselves invented. The fact that the disciples willingly suffered beatings and persecution and death is strong evidence that they had actually witnessed the resurrection they refused to stop telling people about. Their message quickly spread across the Middle East and Europe and even into Asia without any military conquest or political support involved—and in spite of strong opposition.

Saul of Tarsus

A devoutly religious Pharisee, who persecuted the Church and had Christ's followers thrown in prison, Paul had his life absolutely changed by his encounter with Christ. He became a devoted follower of Christ himself, spreading the Gospel throughout Turkey and Greece in the face of beatings and shipwrecks and imprisonment and, finally, execution.

“If the New Testament were a collection of secular writings, their authenticity would generally be regarded as beyond all doubt.”

— F. F. Bruce, Manchester University

“I claim to be an historian. My approach to Classics is historical. And I tell you that the evidence for the life, the death, and the resurrection of Christ is better authenticated than most of the facts of ancient history ...”

— E. M. Blaiklock, Professor of Classics, Auckland University

His Miracles Today

Perhaps the greatest evidence today of Christ's resurrection is the work that he is still doing in the lives of everyday people. In the name of Jesus, people are still being healed emotionally and physically and spiritually by the same power that raised Jesus Christ from the dead. Sinners are being freed from the burden and pain and shame of sin—sometimes immediately, sometimes after long years of steady work by the Holy Spirit in their lives. Hearts are being mended and lives are being turned around. The best evidence today is the faithful follower of Christ who can say, “He saved me, and I am not the person I used to be” just as the apostles testified 2000 years ago.

Further Reading

- [Evidence for the Resurrection](#)
 - Leadership U
- [Contemporary Scholarship and the Historical Evidence for the Resurrection of Jesus Christ](#)
 - Leadership U
- [The New Testament Documents: Are They Reliable?](#)
 - FF Bruce
- [Evidence Supporting the Bible](#)
 - CARM - Christian Apologetics and Research Ministry
- [His Unfamiliar Face](#)
 - Koinonia House
- [Against Heresies \(Book III, Chapter 1\)](#)
 - New Advent