

Is There New Evidence That Jesus Had a Wife?

The Internet has been abuzz with intriguing headlines announcing that scholars have determined the so-called “Gospel of Jesus’s Wife” papyrus is “authentic” and that there is “no forgery evidence” in the manuscript.

What exactly does this mean? And should Christians be concerned that a new discovery might contradict the biblical account and undermine their faith?

Actually, the report from scholars working with Harvard Divinity School found that the manuscript is much younger than previously thought. In other words, it is even further removed from the time of the New Testament than scholars originally believed—meaning that, at most, it is a very late myth without a stitch of historical support.

What the report did say was that there was no evidence that any part of this small manuscript had been forged, so what was written was “authentic” in terms of not being the work of a modern forger.

But the scholars did not determine that the apparent reference to Jesus having a wife was authentic. How could they?

As New Testament scholar Darrell Bock observed back in September 2012 when the find was first announced, “In the New Testament, the church is presented as the bride of Christ. And then in Gnostic Christianity in particular, there’s a ritual—about which we don’t know very much—that portrayed the church as the bride of Christ. So we could simply have a metaphorical reference to the church as the bride, or the wife, of Christ.”

And what if this text recorded Jesus as saying that one of His

disciples would be His wife?

Bock explained, "This would be the first text—out of hundreds of texts that we have about Jesus—that would indicate that he was married, if it's even saying that. So to suggest that one text overturns multiple texts, and multiple centuries, of what has been said about Jesus and what's been articulated about him, I think is not a very wise place to go, just simply from a historical point of view."

Initially, when Harvard professor Karen King learned about this papyrus fragment written in the Coptic language, which was used by the ancient, heretical gnostic Christians, she thought it might have been a forgery, as did other scholars, especially from the Vatican. But upon further study, she concluded it was not, dating it to the fourth century A.D.

Yet how seriously should we take a fourth-century report about Jesus, who was crucified around 30 A.D., especially when it contradicts every other piece of evidence we have about Jesus up to that time? As Bock said, this "is not a very wise place to go, just simply from a historical point of view."

To give you a parallel example, how seriously would future historians take a report written 300 years after Pearl Harbor that contradicted every single report that preceded it, including all reports from all eye witnesses?

But the latest report—the one creating such a stir—claims that the tiny manuscript should not be dated to the fourth century. Instead, scholars have now dated it to approximately 741 A.D., meaning more than 700 years after the time of Jesus. What kind of "evidence" is this?

It would be similar to historians 1,000 years from now finding a letter written in the year 2510 claiming that George Washington, who died in 1799, was actually an alien from Mars. How seriously would it be taken? (Come to think of it, the *Ancient Aliens* series has probably made a similar claim

already!)

There remains no evidence of any kind that Jesus had a wife (note to the reader: Dan Brown's fictional *Da Vinci Code* is not evidence), and the only thing scholars did was determine that this small papyrus fragment was not a modern forgery, although it is hundreds of years younger than they originally thought.

Of course, it is still not totally clear that the manuscript even claims Jesus had a wife, but we know that within 150 years of the time of Jesus, there were fictional Gospels circulating with all kinds of bogus claims. Should it surprise us, then, that many centuries later, another fictitious account with yet another new claim would be written down?

Unfortunately, many casual readers and skeptics now think that some "authentic" new evidence has been discovered supporting the idea that Jesus was married, and even Christians are asking if they should be concerned about this latest find.

Rest assured that nothing has been discovered that even remotely challenges the biblical account, and if this very late text does imply that Jesus had a wife, what we have is an authentic fabrication and nothing more.

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