

EXPLORATION: BIBLE

By Chip Thompson

#11 Archeology of the Bible – LAZARIA

The Tomb of Lazarus is today called, LAZARIA. This ancient site has a CRAZY history.



Photo of the entrance to the Tomb of Lazarus, early 1900's. [Library of Congress: G. Eric and Edith Matson, no copyright restrictions]

John chapter 11 tells the story of a Jewish man named Lazarus that Jesus raised from the dead. [You should read this story.] Skeptics today would question the truthfulness of the story, because in our world, 100% of the time, dead people stay dead. If this story is true, however, it changes everything. If Jesus had the power to raise Lazarus from the then there is hope for us beyond the grave as well.

Is this really the tomb of Lazarus? All we can do is examine the evidence in support of this site and then make a determination for ourselves. THE EXCAVATIONS AT BETHANY (1949-1953), by Archeologist Sylvester Saller, say nothing about excavating the Lazarus Tomb. At first this seems problematic because the excavations centered around the tomb. But Saller could not excavate the tomb because it was NEVER buried. This tomb has been visited since the 1st century A.D. and Saller could not find something that was never lost – he could not excavate something that was never buried. This

is the first clue that identifies this as the authentic tomb of Lazarus. Something happened here, that the local people NEVER FORGOT.

History identifies this as the tomb of Lazarus. Eusebius of Caesarea (330 A.D.) and The Pilgrim of Bordeaux (333 A.D.) both reported seeing, “The crypt where Lazarus had been laid to rest.” Jerome of Bethlehem (390 A.D.) and the Pilgrim Egeria (410 A.D.) confirm the existence of the Lazarium, the first church, built to commemorate the tomb. Egeria reported, “When the liturgy for Lazarus on the Saturday in the seventh week of Lent was performed, ‘So many people have gathered that they fill not only The Lazarium itself, but all the fields around.’”



My mom Carol (top), my wife Jamie (middle), and my aunt Becki inside the “New Entrance” to the Tomb, cut through the bedrock by the Franciscans 500 years ago. [Photo by Chip Thompsons, 2015]

Authentic biblical sites are always marked by archeology stacked on top of itself. In the Bethany Excavations, what did Saller find?

1. East of the tomb, with a courtyard connected to the tomb entrance was an ancient Byzantine Church (The Lazarium) that dates to the late 300's A.D.
2. An earthquake in the early sixth century destroyed the Lazarium which was quickly replaced by a second larger Byzantine Church.
3. This second church was destroyed/or badly damaged in an Arab invasion and a third slightly larger church was erected in its place.
4. Arab incursions also destroyed the third church. By the mid-sixth century Palestine was under Muslim control. This lasted for 451 years until the Crusaders in 1099 A.D. regained possession of Jerusalem. Then, in 1138 A.D., Crusader King Fulk & Queen Melisende purchased the village of Bethany and erected a Crusader church over the Tomb of Lazarus.
5. Jerusalem again fell to the Arabs in 1187 A.D. and the Crusader church was destroyed. By 1384 A.D., the Arab Mosque of Al-Uzair enclosed the entrance of the Lazarus tomb and a few

years later the tomb entrance was permanently blocked shut. 6. Because Christian access to the tomb was impossible, the Franciscans were eventually permitted to cut a new entrance into the tomb from the north.

7. Today, the 500-year-old Franciscan tomb entrance can be accessed from a small alley that runs parallel to two modern Christian churches (A Catholic Church to the east and a Greek Orthodox Church to the west) with the Arab mosque in the middle that still blocks the original tomb entrance.

SO, IS THIS THE AUTHENTIC TOMB OF LAZARUS? ABSOLUTELY, YES! The fact that so much attention has been given to this small spot is CRAZY if this is not the tomb of Lazarus. And, if Lazarus did not raise from the dead, why is this tomb remembered above any other tomb?



INSIDE THE TOMB – Left to Right: Carol Thompson; my aunt Becki; Britney and Jamie Thompson; and Shane and Kim Jones. What you see is a thousand-year-old Crusader vault constructed inside the actual cave/tomb of Lazarus. [Photo by Chip Thompson, 2014]

In John 11, when Jesus arrived in Bethany, the sisters of Lazarus said, “Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died.” Jesus said, “Your brother will rise again.”

The people who were present asked, “Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?” Jesus said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?”

Then Jesus told them, “Take away the stone... and Jesus cried with a loud voice, ‘Lazarus come forth!’” Then, “he who had died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, ‘Loose him, and let him go.’”

JESUS RAISED LAZARUS FROM THE DEAD – DO YOU BELIEVE THIS? I MOST CERTAINLY DO!