

Jesus & DaVinci

Discover the real Jesus

Was Jesus Married? Darrell L. Bock Ph.D.

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It has long been believed that Jesus was single. Every detail of Scripture indicates this. When he was in ministry, there is no mention of a wife. When he was tried and crucified, there is no mention of his having a wife. After his death, there is no mention of a wife. Whenever Jesus' family is referred to, it is his brothers and sisters who are mentioned, but never a wife. Nor is there any indication that he was widowed.

Attempts to suggest that any of the many women associated with his ministry were, in fact, his wife are empty speculation. This includes the woman with the alabaster container who anointed Jesus (read Luke 7:36-50). This woman's act was shocking and would not have been nearly so surprising had she been his wife.

We can contrast Jesus to the rest of the apostles, Peter, and the brothers of the Lord, all of whom are said to have had wives (1 Corinthians 9:5). This passage shows that the church was not embarrassed to reveal that its leaders were married-or to suggest that they had the right to be. The same would have been true of Jesus, if he had been married.

It is often suggested that because Jesus was a teacher and functioned like a rabbi that he would have been married as well, since that was the Jewish custom. Sometimes it is noted that the apostles called him 'rabbi' (Mark 11:21).

However, two factors make this argument weak. First, Jesus was not technically a rabbi, nor did he portray himself as one. The apostles addressed him as such to say he was their teacher, not because he held any kind of official Jewish office. The Jews asked Jesus 'by what authority' he did certain things because he did not hold any kind of formal office within Judaism. He did not have an official position that would have permitted him to do things like act within the temple (Mark 11:28). As far as the Jewish leaders were concerned, Jesus had no recognized role within Judaism. Read another view on whether Jesus acted as a rabbi.

Second, the example of the call to be 'eunuchs for the kingdom' appears, in part, to be rooted in Jesus' own commitment and example not to be married (Matthew 19:10-12). In fact, the rationale for the Roman church's later view that priests should not be married partially stems from the view that Jesus was not married.

So if we ask what the hard evidence is that Jesus was married, there really is a very short answer. There is none.

So why remain single? What advantage is there to this? In 1 Corinthians 7, Paul elaborated on Jesus' theme about 'eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom.' Paul expressed his preference that people remain single. Paul explained that the present time of distress, by which he meant the difficulty of life until Jesus returns, made being single better when it came to serving the kingdom. The married person must worry about the affairs of earth: how to care for his wife and, by implication, his family. The unmarried person can serve the Lord without such distraction (1 Cor. 7:27-35).

Nevertheless, Paul also made it clear this was a choice, not a command: "But if you marry, you do not sin." (7:28). Paul himself chose to remain single, probably for the very reasons he suggests in 1 Corinthians 7. He understood, as Jesus did, that others were not called to be single (1 Cor 7:1-7).

Traditions encouraging a dedicated single life also existed elsewhere in Judaism. Members of the ascetic Jewish sect of the Essenes were known for their emphasis on celibacy (Josephus, Antiquities 18.1.5.21; Jewish War 2.8.2.121-122; Philo, Hypothetica 11.14-18). At Qumran, most appear to have been celibate, although a Dead Sea Scroll about the community suggests some possibility (1QSa 1:4-10) of marriage, woman, and children in the messianic times. For those Essenes at Qumran, the point of remaining single was also dedication to God.

So Jesus was single. His marital status was one dimension of his dedication to God. At least, that is how many Jews would have understood it. As Jesus faced rejection, it was of benefit that he did not have a wife or children. These are likely some of the concerns Paul alluded to in speaking of "worry for earthly things." Jesus had a singular focus on preaching the kingdom of God, and his choice to be single underscored that calling.

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