



The Jesus Dynasty: The Hidden History of Jesus, His Royal Family, and the Birth of Christianity

By James D. Tabor

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Based on a careful analysis of the earliest Christian documents and recent archaeological discoveries, *The Jesus Dynasty* offers a bold new interpretation of the life of Jesus and the origins of Christianity. The story is surprising, controversial, and exciting as only a long-lost history can be when it is at last recovered.

In *The Jesus Dynasty*, biblical scholar James Tabor brings us closer than ever to the historical Jesus. Jesus, as we know, was the son of Mary, a young woman who became pregnant before her marriage to a man named Joseph. The gospels tell us that Jesus had four brothers and two sisters, all of whom probably had a different father than his. He joined a messianic movement begun by his relative John the Baptizer, whom he regarded as his teacher and a great prophet. John and Jesus together filled the roles of the Two Messiahs who were expected at the time: John, as a priestly descendant of Aaron, and Jesus, as a royal descendant of David. Together they preached the coming of the Kingdom of God. Theirs was an apocalyptic movement that expected God to establish his kingdom on earth, as described by the Prophets. The Two Messiahs lived in a time of turmoil as the historical land of Israel was dominated by the powerful Roman Empire. Fierce Jewish rebellions against Rome occurred during Jesus' lifetime.

John and Jesus preached adherence to the Torah, or the Jewish Law. But their mission was changed dramatically when John was arrested and then killed. After a period of uncertainty, Jesus began preaching anew in Galilee and challenged the Roman authorities and their Jewish collaborators in Jerusalem. He appointed a Council of Twelve to rule over the twelve tribes of Israel, and among the Twelve he included his four brothers. After Jesus was crucified by the Romans, his brother James -- the "Beloved Disciple" -- took over leadership of the Jesus dynasty.

James, like John and Jesus before him, saw himself as a faithful Jew. None of them believed that their movement was a new religion. It was Paul who transformed Jesus and his message through his ministry to the Gentiles. Breaking

with James and the followers of Jesus in Jerusalem, Paul preached a message based on his own revelations, which would become Christianity. Jesus became a figure whose humanity was obscured; John became merely a forerunner of Jesus; and James and the others were all but forgotten.

James Tabor has studied the earliest surviving documents of Christianity for more than thirty years and has participated in important archaeological excavations in Israel. Drawing on this background, Tabor reconstructs for us the movement that sought the spiritual, social, and political redemption of the Jews, a movement led by one family. *The Jesus Dynasty* offers an alternative version of Christian origins, one that takes us closer than ever to Jesus and his family and followers.

This is a book that will change our understanding of one of the most crucial moments in history.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Tabor, chair of religious studies at UNC-Charlotte, offers a bold and sometimes speculative interpretation of the historical Jesus and his family, beginning with his paternity. Evaluating several possibilities, Tabor concludes that the most historically plausible claim is that Jesus' father was neither God nor Joseph, but another man, possibly a Roman soldier named Pantera. He also argues that Joseph likely died when Jesus was young, leaving Jesus head of a household that included his six half-siblings. Like many scholars, Tabor emphasizes that we must understand Jesus in the context of first-century Judaism. After Jesus' death, his brother James took over the titular family dynasty. James championed a version of the faith quite different from Paul's, and, although James was more faithful to Jesus' original teachings, Paul's Christianity won. Tabor not only challenges Christian dogma, he also makes some assumptions with which not all scholars will agree: he places a great deal of emphasis on the hypothetical text Q, calling it "our most authentic early Christian document." This book is accessible and sure to be highly controversial, attracting the attention of reporters, spiritual seekers, historians and fans of *The Da Vinci Code*. (Apr.)

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From Booklist

Startling claims in nonfiction works about Jesus and early Christianity are hardly new (hello, *Holy Blood, Holy Grail*), but Tabor, an academic and archaeologist, makes a solid case for the dynastic aspects of the Jesus movement and the importance of James the Just, Jesus' brother, during the period when the early church was forming. That said, the structure of the book seems scattered. Tabor begins with several exciting archaeological finds with which he was involved, including the discovery of a cave that might have been used by John the Baptist and the very recent discovery of a tomb with ossuaries that could be linked to Jesus' family members. This fascinating narrative hooks readers but doesn't quite meld with the rest of the book. Another problem is his emphasis on the genealogies of Jesus presented in Matthew and Luke, which are discounted by many scholars. Yet Tabor dares to go where few authors do: he takes on the subjects of Jesus' earthly paternity (including the case for a Roman father), his relationship to John the Baptist as partner rather than forerunner, and Jesus' expectations for his movement (as opposed to the direction in which it was taken by Paul). This breaks new ground on the journey to find the historical Jesus, and it is certain to prompt much discussion--and not a little controversy. *Ilene Cooper*

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Unknown

"Many scholars have undertaken studies of Jesus and his legacy; none has dared advance the boldly provocative theses of *The Jesus Dynasty*." -- Bart Ehrman, author of *Misquoting Jesus*

"Provocative. . . . Takes the search for the historical Jesus to a bold . . . new level." -- Jay Tolson, *U.S. News & World Report*

"James Tabor stands out among his generation of biblical scholars for his thorough familiarity with the full range of textual evidence from the first centuries, his extensive experience with archaeological excavations, and his imagination and creativity. Tabor has a remarkable ability to discern the contours of vital religious movements from the scattered bits and pieces of evidence that survive from antiquity. Anyone who takes the career of Jesus seriously will have to reckon with his bold, new synthesis."

-- Professor Eugene V. Gallagher, Rosemary Park Professor of Religious Studies, Connecticut College

Users Review

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