

Who was the biological father of Jesus?

A Review of the old and most modern discussion about the father of Jesus

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Summary: According to the New Testament and other documents, Joseph of Nazareth was not the biological father of Jesus. Teenager Maria and her aunt Elizabeth lived in pluralistic and Roman occupied Jerusalem and became pregnant around the same time. Among the possible fathers of Jesus, a Roman Phoenician soldier was named: Pantera, born in Sidon around 22 BC and died in the Rhinelands in 40 BC. Origin of Alexandria, one of the influential early Fathers of the Church, quotes Celsus, that Maria had an adulterous affair with Pantera resulting in the birth of Jesus (Yeshu, ben Pantera; Jesus, son of Pantera). A gravestone for Pantera was found in Kreuznach, Germany, in 1859. -Was Jesus ever married? What was his relationship to Maria Magdala; did they have children? Did Jesus ever live outside of Palestine, even as far as Kashmir, between his 13th and 30th year, and where did he live, if he survived crucifixion?

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The Pregnancy of Maria and Elisabeth. Saba Zakhria (Zechari'ah) had not had sex with his wife Enisbai (Elizabeth) of the Aaron tribe for over 20 years (Luk 1; 4:51). Maria, a close relative of Elizabeth was pregnant with Jesus before she married her fiancé Joseph (Luke 1:34). There were traditional customs to have a child when the marriage was barren, as the story of Abraham, Sarah and her slave Hagar, and their sons Isaac and Jacob (Gen 21) with a problematic ongoing relationship between Abraham and Hagar reports. - In regard to the pregnancy of Maria and Elizabeth the books of the New Testament talk about a miracle and the early followers and friends of Jesus must have known, that Joseph definitely was not biological Jesus' father. Both women lived in Jerusalem, which was occupied by Roman soldiers; the Jewish population was divided between orthodox, Zoroastrian, Manichean and other religious fractions, some hoping for the final appearance of the Messiah (Sass 2014). We must assume that various form of sex occurred between the occupied and the occupiers. Looking back to the end of World War 2, US and other soldiers in Sicily and Italy exchanged foods and cigarettes for sexual favors, some also raped women. I remember that the same thing happened in Germany, and stories regarding Russian and American occupiers were not different; some black Americans fathered black babies and the affair was noticeable, but if soldiers were just white, babies did show their background. Of course, soldiers would not get married even it was a true affair, as they would lose their job. The situation in occupied Jerusalem might have been similar. Married Elizabeth and teenager Maria belonged to a privileged upper-class and consensual sex with other partners would not be totally excluded in that multicultural city of Jerusalem at that time.

Elizabeth got pregnant six month earlier than Maria, who seemed to have lived in Jerusalem and in close familial contact with Elizabeth. When Zakhria was already very sick and could not speak anymore, 'his wife Elizabeth conceived, and for five months she hid herself, saying "Thus the

Lord has done to me in the days when he looked on me, to take away my approach to men” (Luke 1:24f). Mary, in order to avoid disgrace in her neighborhood, spent three months of her pregnancy in the house of Elizabeth (Luke 1:36-56). In Matthew 1:18-25 we read: ‘When his mother Mary betrothed to Joseph, before they came together, she was found with child from the Holy Spirit; and her husband Joseph, being a just man and unwilling to put her to shame, resolved to divorce her quietly. But as he considered this, behold an angel of the Lord appeared to him in a dream, saying “Joseph, son of David, do not fear to take Mary your wife, for that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Spirit; she will bear a son and you shall call him Jesus, for he will save his people from their sins.” And this took place to fulfill what the Lord had spoken to the prophet: “Behold, a virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and his name shall be called Emanuel (which means, God with us)”. When Joseph woke from sleep, he did as the angel of the Lord commanded him; but knew her not until she had born a son; and he called his name Jesus.”

At the same time according to Luke, an angel spoke to Mary, a virgin, who lived in Nazareth and who was engaged to Joseph from the King David family: ‘Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a child, and you shall call name Jesus.’ (Luke 1:30f). The same angel explained even further to Maria that her and Elizabeth’s pregnancy were not the result of sinful sex, but the result of God’s foresight and plan. ‘Mary said to the angel. “How shall this be, since I have no husband”. And the angel said to her, “the Holy Spirit will come up to you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. And behold, your kinswomen in her old age also conceived a son; and this is the sixth month with her, who was called barren. For with God nothing is impossible. And Mary said “behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” And the angel departed from her (Luke 1:34-38). The answers given by the angel to console and even to make happy these two pregnant women are similar to other religious stories about divine birth and conception. Up to today, no medical research ever has confirmed such a story of divine conception. Joseph married the pregnant Mary before Jesus was born. Pregnant unmarried girls were a shame to the family and the pregnancy needed to be interrupted or the pregnant girl be killed, also she could not be married to a decent man anymore. John the Baptist was the only child of Elizabeth, but the bible (Mark 6:3; Matthew 13:55f) mention as brothers of Jesus James, Joseph/Joses, Judas/Jude and Simon as sons of Mary, also sisters whose names traditionally were not given. Was Joseph the father of these boys and were Maria and Joseph still married, when those boys were born?

Did Jesus know his biological father? Many of Jesus’ early followers seemed to have known that Joseph was not the biological father of Jesus. But did Jesus know his biological father and actually have contact with him? - One day, Jesus traveled to Tyre (Mark 7:24) and went back the 20 miles to Sidon and then to the Sea of Galilee. Did Jesus in Tyre see the Syrian soldier Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera, who according to Celsus was his biological father during his sexual relationship with Mary? Celsus quotes as his source Origin, who wrote that Jesus’s mother ‘turned out by the carpenter who was betrothed to her, as she had been convicted of adultery and had a child by a certain soldier named Panthera’ (Tabor 2006). We don’t know much about this soldier in the Roman army, who was mentioned by the name Pantera. He seemed to be of Syrian origin, sold to the army under the prospect that he would be a free man after a certain number of

years of service. Of course, soldiers were not married and were not allowed to marry. His full name Tiberius Julius Abdes Pantera probably was given to him when he obtained Roman citizenship through his long army service. The name Pantera, i.e., ‘panther’, was famous among the warriors; Abdes means ‘servant of God’ and could indicate a Semitic or even Jewish family background. The Talmud and other medieval Jewish scholars referred to ‘Yeshu, ben Pandera’, i.e., ‘Jesus the son of Pandera’. Pandera seems to have had a successful career in the Palestine lands before he and his Cohort I Sagittariorum were transferred to the Rhineland near Bingen. It might be that Pandera was the standard bearer, i.e., signifier. Enlisted soldiers had to serve for 25 years and were not allowed to marry before their 40th birthday, if at all. Pandera might have been born around 22 BCE and died around 40 CE; so, he could have been between 16 and 39 when Jesus was fathered (Tabor 2006). A tombstone was found in Bad Kreuznach, near Bingen in Germany with the engraving ‘T J Abdes Pantera / Sidonia ann(or)um LXII, stpen(diorum) XXXX miles exs(ignifer), con(horte I sagittariorum, h(ic) s(itus e(st): Tiberus Iulius Abdes Pantera, fro Sidon, aged 62 years, served 40 years, former standard bearer, of the first cohort of archers, lies here’. The Babylonian Talmud lists also Jesus and Pantera, cf. Wikipedia.

What else do we know about Jesus? Joseph, Maria and Jesus had to escape to Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15) under King Herod before they returned to Nazareth, where Jesus got an education and probably helped Joseph in his carpenter job. The family seemed to have made frequent pilgrimages to Jerusalem on the occasion of Passover. When Jesus was 12 years old and his parents left Jerusalem after Passover to go back to Nazareth, they missed Jesus and got very concerned (Luke 2:41-52) After three days of searching, they found Jesus in the temple ‘sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were astonished; and his mother said “Son, why have you treated us so” ..and he said “did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?” And he went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart’.

But what happened to Jesus after the return from Jerusalem to Nazareth? Did he join a caravan to



The Roza Bal Shrine of (Jesus?) in Srinagar in Kashmir, India.



Tiberius Pandera’ s Gravestone in Bingerbrueck, Germany.

Tibet and studied with Buddhist monks? ((Olsson 2019, Kerstin 2001); but we see no reference to Buddhist teaching in the New Testament. And what happened at and after the crucifixion (Luke 23:32-53)? Did Jesus survive, because on the eve of Sabbath the soldiers wanted to go home, and they might have killed the two others who were crucified by drawing blood, and gave the corpse of Jesus, whom they thought would die soon anyway, to his mother Mary and Maria Magdala, and Joseph of Arimathea, with or without a secret money donation from either one of them? (Luke 23). Jesus was laid to rest in the grave belonging to Joseph of Arimathea, where his corpse was not found the next morning by Mary Magdala, his mother Mary and other women who had followed him from Galilee, but there were two men in 'dazzling apparel' and then there all of a sudden, the 'resurrected' Jesus appeared (Luke 24:1-8). Jesus made some more appearances, but then he departed 'from them and was carried up into heaven' (Luke 24:51). Did the resurrected Jesus travel far away to India, together or without Maria Magdala or his mother? An Islamic sect Ahmaddiyya claimed that Jesus died in India and buried in the Rozabal shrine in Srinagar (Ahmad 1952, Kashmiri 1973). Or did he and Maria Magdala escape to Southern France and had children which constituted the family of the Carolingian dynasty, from Pippin to Charlemagne? But France still was in the political and supervisory domain of the Roman Empire and that would have been a risky decision, except for the 'official genealogy' of the Carolingers.

Jesus the Christ and John the Baptist. John and Jesus were brought up in educated and religious families. John joined the fashionable new Manichean religion and made the baptism in the Jordan famous for those who wanted to be reborn or expected to be reborn. Jesus lived in Galilee and around the age of 30 (Luke 3:23) wandered around with disciples, preaching and healing. Their teaching represents the new charismatic ethical message quite different from the old Jewish doctrines and sabbatical rules. John's answer was very simply to the Roman soldier whether the immortality and the 'kingdom of heaven' was only for Jews: 'Rob no one by violence or by false accusation, and be content with your wages' (Luke 3:14). Jesus said simply 'blessed are the peacemakers' (Matthew 5:9). St John in his letter to the Romans argued: 'the commandments "you shall not commit adultery, you shall not kill, you shall not steal, you shall not covet" and any other commandment, are summed up in this sentence "you shall love your neighbor as yourself". Love does no wrong to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfilling of the law' (Romans 13:8-10). These non-ideological Imperatives come close to the Confucian rule 'do not do to others, what you would not desire for yourself' or the Taoist Golden Rule 'the world is a sacred vessel, if you tamper with it, it will be ruined, if you treat it as an object, you will use it. In fact, there is a time being going ahead, and a time for being in time, a time for being behind, a time in motion, a time for being at rest'. The French Revolution said in non-religious and humanistic terminology "Equality, Liberty, Solidarity" (Sass 2016:26f). In his 1934 'Three Studies on the Fifth Commandment' Pastor Fritz Jahr in Halle/Saale summarized three humanistic ethical duties: [1] the Golden Rule alike Kant's 'Categorical Imperative' or Schopenhauer's 'don't hurt anyone, but help everyone, as far as you can', [2] the duty to self-preservation ('whoever fulfills the duties towards oneself, avoids many forms of harms to other people. Whoever protects his own life. In this regard, he fulfills one's duty also towards the community', [3] the 'Bioethical Imperative' (Jahr 2013, 77-84).

John the Baptist summarized these Mandaean six moral teaching: 'Don't trust the beauty of the bodies, as they can rot very easily? Don't put your trust on the limping Satan, as he is not good

for anything and cannot save himself out of the all-consuming fire. Do not suppress the weak, who cannot support you in fighting. Do not move the borders of injustice and do not move border stones; if someone moves borders, the sentence of condemnation will be spoken over him. Criticize your friends in an open way and guide your friendship in a correct way. Do not flatter and do not lie and cheat; whoever flatters, he will be drawn on his face into the burning fire.’(Lidzbarski 1925, p.39). Pope John Paul II and famous Mandeian Sheik Abdallah called each other ‘cousins’ at a remarkable personal meeting in June 1990 (Sass 2018:322).

Jesus had a similar teaching, when he gave his sermon on the mountain: ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted. Blessed are the meek for they inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the sons of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.’ (Matthew 5:3-10).

Both John and Jesus promoted a non-dogmatic ethical and bioethical teaching and practice, actually most modern bioethics as defined by Pastor Fritz Jahr in 1926 in the ‘Bioethical Imperative: Respect every living being as an end in itself and treat it, if possible as such’ (Jahr 2013:20f). Jesus and John in their non-dogmatic theology and ethics would handily join us in our Easter song: ‘Christ, the Lord, is risen today, Alleluia! Sons of men and angels say, Alleluia! Raise your joys and triumphs high, Alleluia! Sing, ye heavens, and earth, reply, Alleluia!

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