

## **What About Jesus' Wife? (2012)**

Houston Hodges, for Writer's Corner on WLRH, Huntsville, AL USA

The world of Biblical scholarship has been rocked by a scholarly earthquake. Karen King, a Harvard professor, showed reporters a little fragment of Egyptian papyrus, about the size of a business card, dating from three hundred years after the time of Jesus, which quotes Jesus as saying, "My wife..."

It stops there; doesn't say anything else about that wife, not even whether she existed; after all, the remainder of the torn-off text might have said, "My wife, if I ever get one, will be the queen of my disciples," or on the other hand, might have said, "My wife is in charge of the kitchen." Regardless, it's started a fire-storm of imagination and supposition -- especially for Catholics, since their official position is that one reason priests and nuns don't marry is because Jesus didn't -- but it's intriguing for the rest of us, too.

The questions it raises really are provocative. What would husband-wife conversations have been like? Were there ever any disagreements? If not, what kind of a marriage could it have been? Did she ever urge him to slow down and take it easy, to watch his step about offending all those big shots... and to be careful about what he ate, or to be sure to drink more water? Did she mend his robe, or suggest that he get a new pair of sandals? It seems that a lot more material could have been added to those books by Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John.

For me, certainly one of the most fascinating questions would have been, "What happened to her?" After Jesus' departure, would she have been there in some little town in Galilee, living on into the twilight, savoring memories of life with a really remarkable guy?

For a lot of us, the question would be, "What difference does it make?" Would he be more or less admirable, if he was married? Does this make him more approachable, more human, more normal... or does it somehow reduce the glow, bring him down to earth, rub off some of the luster and polish of uniqueness?

It's clear that the little two-by-three inch fragment was torn from a larger sheet of papyrus; someday maybe more of it will turn up, in an antique shop in Cairo or Baghdad or New York City... until then, we get to muse and wonder and imagine, "What would Jesus write about his wife... if he had one?"

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Houston Hodges, a Presbyterian minister, says he has more questions than answers about the Bible. He preaches and teaches at the Big Cove Presbyterian Church over the mountain in Hampton Cove.