

Biblical Archaeology

Kerby Anderson provides an update on recent archaeological finds that corroborate the historicity of the Bible.

One of the most important proofs for the historical accuracy of the Bible can be found in archaeology. Ancient history and archaeology should confirm the accuracy of this record. That is what we find when comparing these finds with the written record of Scripture.

My focus will be to summarize a few of the past archaeological finds that confirm the Bible and then provide an update on some of the newest archaeological discoveries made in just the last few years that are very significant. On the Probe website, we have an excellent summary done twenty years ago of archaeology and the Old Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-old-testament/) and archaeology and the New Testament (probe.org/archaeology-and-the-new-testament/).



Archaeology not only has confirmed the historical record found in the Bible, but it also provides additional details not found in the original writings of the biblical authors. Archaeology also helps explain Bible passages by providing context of the surrounding culture as well as the social and political circumstances.

We must also admit the limitations of archaeology. Although these archaeological finds can establish the historical accuracy of the record, they cannot prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. Also, we must admit that even when we have an archaeological find, it still must be interpreted. Those interpretations are obviously affected by the worldview perspective and even bias of the historians and archaeologists.

Even granting the skeptical bias that can be found in this

field, it is still amazing that many archaeologists acknowledge the biblical confirmation that has come from significant archaeological finds.

Dr. William Albright observed, "There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament tradition."^{1}

Archaeologist Nelson Glueck and president of Hebrew Union College concluded, "It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a Biblical reference. Scores of archaeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible. And, by the same token, proper evaluation of Biblical description has often led to amazing discoveries."^{2}

Millar Burrows, Professor of Archaeology at Yale University, remarked that "On the whole, however, archaeological work has unquestionably strengthened confidence in the reliability of the Scriptural record. More than one archaeologist has found his respect for the Bible increased by the experience of excavation in Palestine."^{3}

Old Testament Archaeology

There are so many significant archaeological finds that confirm the historical accuracy of the Old Testament. Perhaps the most famous and most significant find is the Dead Sea scrolls. A young shepherd boy found the first of them in a cave in 1947. Eventually over 800 fragments were found. This includes a complete scroll of the book of Isaiah.

Many of these scrolls are from before the time of Jesus Christ. That is important because it provided a way to check the accuracy of the transmission of the Old Testament. The earliest copies of the Old Testament that we had before this discovery were a thousand years later. When we compare the

Dead Sea scrolls to these later manuscripts, we can see that there were very few variations (mostly due to changes in spelling or grammar). The transmission through the scribe was very accurate.

Another significant find was archaeological documentation of King David. Archaeologists working at one site uncovered an inscription that means "house of David" that dates to the ninth century BC.

Another important archaeological find was the Hittite nation. The Hittites are mentioned nearly 50 times in the Old Testament, but there was no solid archaeological evidence they existed until the 20th century. Some argued that the Bible must be wrong since it mentions this nation but archaeological evidence was lacking.

The Hittites were a major force against the Jews. Israel needed to conquer them in order to enter the Promised Land (Joshua 11:3-4). King David had Uriah the Hittite killed because of his adultery with his wife, Bathsheba (2 Kings 11:3-21). Fortunately, archaeologists did uncover abundant evidence of the Hittites in Turkey. They found a temple, sculptures, a storeroom with 10,000 clay tablets. Later they even uncovered the Hittite capital city of Hattusha.

Archaeologists with the Israel Antiquities Authority digging at Tel Lachish found an ancient toilet that confirms Old Testament history. To understand its significance, we need to look at the record of King Hezekiah. We read in 2 Kings that he removed the Asherah poles from the high places and smashed the sacred stones that were used in the Canaanite cultic worship.

Archaeologists discovered large rooms that appear to be a shrine where four-horned altars were destroyed. They also found a seat carved in stone with the hole in it that was used as a toilet. It was mostly likely placed there as a form of

desecration for the whole room.[\[4\]](#) This correlates with the biblical description in 2 Kings 10:27 that Jehu and his followers “demolished the pillar of Baal, and demolished the house of Baal, and made it a latrine to this day.”

New Testament Archaeology

Jesus spent much of his time in Capernaum by the Sea of Galilee. It is mentioned 16 times in the New Testament. Archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the fishing industry there (anchors, fishhooks), which would have been used by many of the disciples. The houses were one-story buildings, with roofs of wooden beams or branches. This explains how men carried a man to the roof and let him down in front of Jesus (Mark 2:1-4). Jesus taught in the synagogue in Capernaum (Mark 1:21-22, Luke 4:31-36). The remains of a synagogue built in the 4th century sits atop the black basalt foundations of this synagogue that existed at the time of Jesus.

In Jerusalem are many archaeological discoveries from the time of Jesus. That includes the remains of the temple as well as the pool of Bethesda (John 5:1-15) and the pool of Siloam (John 9:1-7).

Archaeology (as well as history) verifies the existence of many political leaders mentioned in the New Testament. A Denarius coin shows a portrait of Tiberius Caesar. This is also significant because Jesus asked the people whose likeness was on the coin (Mark 12:17). The name Pontius Pilate was found in an inscription at Caesarea Maritima.

Sometimes archaeology can shed light on what seems like a sharp disagreement in the Bible. In Paul's letter to the Galatians, he recounts what he said to Peter who stopped eating meals with gentile Christians. He argued that Peter lived like a Gentile even though he was a Jew.

The answer lies in the fact that Paul was a devout Pharisee,

who took kosher food laws and purity very seriously. Peter, though Jewish, was not a Pharisee and grew up in Bethsaida on the north shore of the Sea of Galilee. Archaeological excavations uncovered some non-kosher evidence. Some were eating wild boar and catfish, which were considered unclean and not to be eaten by Jew following the Torah.[\[5\]](#)

Archaeological finds at Corinth include the city's *bema* seat, where Paul stood trial (Acts 18:12-17) and an inscription with the name Erastus, a city administrator who was an associate of Paul (Acts 19:22; 2 Timothy 4:20; Romans 16:23).

Critics have challenged the historical record of Luke because of alleged inaccuracies. Classical scholar Colin Hemer documents that Luke is a very accurate historian.[\[6\]](#) He identifies 84 facts in the Book of Acts that have been confirmed by historical and archaeological research. This includes nautical details, names of gods, designation of magistrates, and proper names and titles.

These are just a few of the archaeological discoveries in the past that have confirmed the Old Testament and the New Testament. In the next section we will look at some of the most recent archaeological discoveries.

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Within the last few years, there have been major archaeological discoveries that further confirm biblical history. An article in *Christianity Today* provides a list of the top ten archaeological discoveries.[\[7\]](#) Here are just a few of these important discoveries.

The Israel Antiquities Authority announced the discovery of a limestone column on which the word "Jerusalem" was spelled out in Aramaic. This is the oldest inscription of this nature found so far. You might expect that there would be lots of such inscriptions, but that turn out to be very rare.

The inscription was found in an ancient potter's village that must have served pilgrims making their way to the Temple in Jerusalem. A potter's field calls to mind the one bought by the priests (Matthew 27:7) with the money Judas returned.

The Jewish tabernacle and the Ark of the Covenant were located for a time in Shiloh. Excavation there produced a clay pomegranate. In the Bible, the pomegranate was a common temple decoration (1 Kings 7:18; 2 Kings 25:17). Small pomegranates embroidered with blue, purple, and scarlet yarns hung from the hems of the priestly robes (Exodus 28:33). This discovery affirms the sacredness of Shiloh.

Scientists and archaeologists believe they made have found the site of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. They found evidence that a "high-heat" explosive event north of the Dead Sea wiped out all civilization in the affected area. It killed all the people within a 25-kilometer circular area. The fertile soil would have been stripped of nutrients by the high heat. Waves of briny salt would have washed over the surrounding area and spread through hot winds.

The scientists suggest that a cosmic airburst event from a meteor was the reason for the disappearance from the site. It apparently took 600 years for the region to recover before it could once again be inhabited. This fits with the description in Genesis 19, which says that burning sulfur rained down on Sodom and Gomorrah and killed all the people and all the vegetation of the land.

Archaeologist Dr. Stephen Collins says that there was a violent conflagration that ended occupation at the site. There is "melted pottery, scorched foundation stones, and several feet of ash and destruction debris churned into a dark gray matrix as if in a Cuisinart." He and another author in a joint paper conclude that all of this provides "signs of a highly destructive and thermal event that one might expect from what is described in Genesis 19."[\[8\]](#)

Recent Archaeological Discoveries

Above we looked at a few of the most recent archaeological discoveries that confirm the historical accuracy of the Bible. Most of them were found in an article in *Christianity Today*. Here are a few more significant discoveries.

An inscribed piece of limestone discovered in a tomb along the west bank of the Nile was revealed to be a Semitic abecedary (alphabet in ABC order). It dates back to the time of Moses and fits with the statement that “Moses wrote down everything the Lord had said” (Exodus 24:4). It turns out he wasn’t the only one writing in a Semitic script in Egypt at that time.

When ISIS terrorists captured Mosul, they blew up the tomb of the prophet Jonah. This uncovered the remains of a palace of the Assyrian King Esarhaddon. Previous archaeological teams stopped digging in certain sites in Iraq for fear of destroying them. That was a case of the traditional tomb of Jonah, until ISIS started digging beneath it to find artifacts to sell. As one article put it, “ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible.”[\[9\]](#) The tunnels they dug revealed a previously untouched Assyrian palace in the ancient city of Ninevah. Inscriptions found in the old city of Nineveh give an order of Assyrian kings that matches perfectly with the biblical order.

Extra careful processing of dirt from an archaeological dig in the southwest corner of the Temple Mount provided a *beka* weight. This was used (Exodus 38:6) to measure the silver in the half-shekel temple tax that was collected from each member of the Jewish community.

Another seal impression seems to be (a letter is missing) the name “Isaiah the prophet.” It was found near the Temple Mount near another seal impression that says “King Hezekiah of Judah” that was uncovered two years earlier. Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah are mentioned in the same verse 17 times. This

clay seal gives the impression that Isaiah had access to the king's palace as his adviser.

A ring with the name "Pontius Pilate" on it was excavated decades ago but only could be read recently due to advanced photographic techniques. Of course, this is not the first time that his name has surfaced in archaeology, but it is still a significant find. The ring is not fancy enough to have been worn by Pilate. It was probably worn by someone authorized to act on his authority and would use it to seal official communications.

This is an exciting time for archaeological investigation. New finds provide even more evidence of the historical accuracy of the Old Testament and the New Testament. Archaeology has provided abundant confirmation of the Bible.

Notes

1. William F. Albright, *Archaeology and the Religions of Israel* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1956), 176.
2. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert* (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136.
3. Millar Burrows, *What Mean These Stones?* (New York: Meridian Books, 1956), 1.
4. Richard Gray, "The wrong kind throne: Toilet discovered 2-800-year-old shrine," *Daily Mail*, 28 September 2016.
5. Craig A. Evans, "Why Archaeology Matters for Bible Study," *Bible Study Magazine*, March/April 2019, 18-19.
6. Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (University Park, PA: Eisenbrauns, 1990).
7. Gordon Govier, "Biblical Archaeology's Top 10 Discoveries of 2018," *Christianity Today*, December 27, 2018.
8. Amanda Borschel-Dan, "Evidence of Sodom? Meteor blast cause of biblical destruction, say scientists," *Times of Israel*, 22 November 2018.
9. "ISIS Accidentally Corroborates the Bible," *Facts and Trends*, March 19, 2018.

Archaeology and the Old Testament

Dr. Patrick Zukeran surveys the importance of archaeology with regard to its confirmation of biblical history.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

Understanding Archaeology

Christianity is a historical faith based on actual events recorded in the Bible. Archaeology has therefore played a key role in biblical studies and Christian apologetics in several ways.

First, archaeology has confirmed the historical accuracy of the Bible. It has verified many ancient sites, civilizations, and biblical characters whose existence was questioned by the academic world and often dismissed as myths. Biblical archaeology has silenced many critics as new discoveries supported the facts of the Bible.

Second, archaeology helps us improve our understanding of the Bible. Although we do not have the original writings of the authors, thousands of ancient manuscripts affirm that we have an accurate transmission of the original texts.^{1} Archaeology can also help us to understand more accurately the nuances and uses of biblical words as they were used in their day.

Third, archaeology helps illustrate and explain Bible passages. The events of the Bible occurred at a certain time,

in a particular culture, influenced by a particular social and political structure. Archaeology gives us insights into these areas. Archaeology also helps to supplement topics not covered in the Bible. Much of what we know of the pagan religions and the intertestamental period comes from archaeological research.

As we approach this study we must keep in mind the limits of archaeology. First, it does not prove the divine inspiration of the Bible. It can only confirm the accuracy of the events. Second, unlike other fields of science, archaeology cannot recreate the process under study. Archaeologists must study and interpret the evidence left behind. All conclusions must allow for revision and reinterpretation based on new discoveries. Third, how archaeological evidence is understood depends on the interpreter's presuppositions and worldview. It is important to understand that many researchers are skeptics of the Bible and hostile to its world view.

Fourth, thousands of archives have been discovered, but an enormous amount of material has been lost. For example, the library in Alexandria held over one million volumes, but all were lost in a seventh century fire.

Fifth, only a fraction of available archaeological sites have been surveyed, and only a fraction of surveyed sites have been excavated. In fact, it is estimated that less than two percent of surveyed sites have been worked on. Once work begins, only a fraction of an excavation site is actually examined, and only a small part of what is examined is published. For example, the photographs of the Dead Sea Scrolls were withheld from the public for forty years after they were uncovered.

It is important to understand that the Scriptures remain the primary source of authority. We must not elevate archaeology to the point that it becomes the judge for the validity of Scripture. Randall Price states, "There are indeed instances where the information needed to resolve a historical or

chronological question is lacking from both archaeology and the Bible, but it is unwarranted to assume the material evidence taken from the more limited content of archaeological excavations can be used to dispute the literary evidence from the more complete content of the canonical scriptures.”[\[2\]](#) The Bible has proven to be an accurate and trustworthy source of history.

Noted archaeologist Nelson Glueck writes, “As a matter of fact, however, it may be clearly stated categorically that no archeological discovery has ever controverted a single biblical reference. Scores of archeological findings have been made which confirm in clear outline or exact detail historical statements in the Bible.”[\[3\]](#)

The Discovery of the Hittites

The Hittites played a prominent role in Old Testament history. They interacted with biblical figures as early as Abraham and as late as Solomon. They are mentioned in Genesis 15:20 as people who inhabited the land of Canaan. 1 Kings 10:29 records that they purchased chariots and horses from King Solomon. The most prominent Hittite is Uriah the husband of Bathsheba. The Hittites were a powerful force in the Middle East from 1750 B.C. until 1200 B.C. Prior to the late 19th century, nothing was known of the Hittites outside the Bible, and many critics alleged that they were an invention of the biblical authors.

In 1876 a dramatic discovery changed this perception. A British scholar named A. H. Sayce found inscriptions carved on rocks in Turkey. He suspected that they might be evidence of the Hittite nation. Ten years later, more clay tablets were found in Turkey at a place called Boghaz-koy. German cuneiform expert Hugo Winckler investigated the tablets and began his own expedition at the site in 1906.

Winckler’s excavations uncovered five temples, a fortified citadel and several massive sculptures. In one storeroom he

found over ten thousand clay tablets. One of the documents proved to be a record of a treaty between Ramesses II and the Hittite king. Other tablets showed that Boghaz-koy was the capital of the Hittite kingdom. Its original name was Hattusha and the city covered an area of 300 acres. The Hittite nation had been discovered!

Less than a decade after Winckler's find, Czech scholar Bedrich Hronzny proved the Hittite language is an early relative of the Indo-European languages of Greek, Latin, French, German, and English. The Hittite language now has a central place in the study of the history of the Indo-European languages.

The discovery also confirmed other biblical facts. Five temples were found containing many tablets with details of the rites and ceremonies that priests performed. These ceremonies described rites for purification from sin and purification of a new temple. The instructions proved to be very elaborate and lengthy. Critics once criticized the laws and instructions found in the books of Leviticus and Deuteronomy as too complicated for the time it was written (1400 B.C.). The Boghaz-koy texts along with others from Egyptian sites and a site along the Euphrates called Emar have proven that the ceremonies described in the Jewish Pentateuch are consistent with the ceremonies of the cultures of this time period.

The Hittite Empire made treaties with civilizations they conquered. Two dozen of these have been translated and provide a better understanding of treaties in the Old Testament. The discovery of the Hittite Empire at Boghaz-koy has significantly advanced our understanding of the patriarchal period. Dr. Fred Wright summarizes the importance of this find in regard to biblical historicity:

Now the Bible picture of this people fits in perfectly with what we know of the Hittite nation from the monuments. As an empire they never conquered the land of Canaan itself,

although the Hittite local tribes did settle there at an early date. Nothing discovered by the excavators has in any way discredited the Biblical account. Scripture accuracy has once more been proved by the archaeologist.[\[4\]](#)

The discovery of the Hittites has proven to be one of the great archaeological finds of all time. It has helped to confirm the biblical narrative and had a great impact on Middle East archaeological study. Because of it, we have come to a greater understanding of the history of our language, as well as the religious, social, and political practices of the ancient Middle East.

Sodom and Gomorrah

The story of Sodom and Gomorrah has long been viewed as a legend. Critics assume that it was created to communicate moral principles. However, throughout the Bible this story is treated as a historical event. The Old Testament prophets refer to the destruction of Sodom on several occasions (Deut. 29:23, Isa. 13:19, Jer. 49:18), and these cities play a key role in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles (Matt. 10:15, 2 Pet. 2:6 and Jude 1:7). What has archaeology found to establish the existence of these cities?

Archaeologists have searched the Dead Sea region for many years in search of Sodom and Gomorrah. Genesis 14:3 gives their location as the Valley of Siddim known as the Salt Sea, another name for the Dead Sea. On the east side six wadies, or river valleys, flow into the Dead Sea. Along five of these wadies, ancient cities were discovered. The northern most is named Bab edh-Drha. In 1924, renowned archaeologist Dr. William Albright excavated at this site, searching for Sodom and Gomorrah. He discovered it to be a heavily fortified city. Although he connected this city with one of the biblical "Cities of the Plains," he could not find conclusive evidence to justify this assumption.

More digging was done in 1965, 1967, and 1973. The archaeologists discovered a 23-inch thick wall around the city, along with numerous houses and a large temple. Outside the city were huge grave sites where thousands of skeletons were unearthed. This revealed that the city had been well populated during the early Bronze Age, about the time Abraham would have lived.

Most intriguing was evidence that a massive fire had destroyed the city. It lay buried under a coating of ash several feet thick. A cemetery one kilometer outside the city contained charred remains of roofs, posts, and bricks turned red from heat.

Dr. Bryant Wood, in describing these charnel houses, stated that a fire began on the roofs of these buildings. Eventually the burning roof collapsed into the interior and spread inside the building. This was the case in every house they excavated. Such a massive fiery destruction would match the biblical account that the city was destroyed by fire that rained down from heaven. Wood states, "The evidence would suggest that this site of Bab edh-Drha is the biblical city of Sodom."[\[5\]](#)

Five cities of the plain are mentioned in Genesis 14: Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zoar, and Zeboiim. Remnants of these other four cities are also found along the Dead Sea. Following a southward path from Bab edh-Drha there is the city called Numeria. Continuing south is the city called es-Safi. Further south are the ancient cities of Feifa and Khanazir. Studies at these cities revealed that they had been abandoned at the same time about 2450-2350 B.C. Many archaeologists believe if Bab ed-Drha is Sodom, Numeria is Gomorrah, and es-Safi is Zoar.

What fascinated the archaeologists is that these cities were covered in the same ash as Bab ed-Drha. Numeria, believed to be Gomorrah, had seven feet of ash in some places. In every one of the destroyed cities ash deposits made the soil a spongy charcoal, making it impossible to rebuild. According to

the Bible, four of the five cities were destroyed, leaving Lot to flee to Zoar. Zoar was not destroyed by fire, but was abandoned during this period.

Although archaeologists are still disputing these findings, this is one discovery we will be hearing more about in years to come.

The Walls of Jericho

According to the Bible, the conquest of Jericho occurred in approximately 1440 B.C. The miraculous nature of the conquest has caused some scholars to dismiss the story as folklore. Does archaeology support the biblical account? Over the past century four prominent archaeologists have excavated the site: Carl Watzinger from 1907-1909, John Garstang in the 1930's, Kathleen Kenyon from 1952-1958, and currently Bryant Wood. The result of their work has been remarkable.

First, they discovered that Jericho had an impressive system of fortifications. Surrounding the city was a retaining wall fifteen feet high. At its top was an eight-foot brick wall strengthened from behind by an earthen rampart. Domestic structures were found behind this first wall. Another brick wall enclosed the rest of the city. The domestic structures found between the two walls is consistent with Joshua's description of Rahab's quarters (Josh. 2:15). Archeologists also found that in one part of the city, large piles of bricks were found at the base of both the inner and outer walls, indicating a sudden collapse of the fortifications. Scholars feel that an earthquake, which may also explain the damming of the Jordan in the biblical account, caused this collapse. The collapsed bricks formed a ramp by which an invader might easily enter the city (Josh. 6:20).

Of this amazing discovery Garstang states, "As to the main fact, then, there remains no doubt: the walls fell outwards so completely, the attackers would be able to clamber up and over

the ruins of the city.”{6} This is remarkable because when attacked city walls fall inward, not outward.

A thick layer of soot indicates that the city was destroyed by fire as described in Joshua 6:24. Kenyon describes it this way. “The destruction was complete. Walls and floors were blackened or reddened by fire and every room was filled with fallen bricks.”{7} Archaeologists also discovered large amounts of grain at the site. This is again consistent with the biblical account that the city was captured quickly. If it had fallen as a result of a siege, the grain would have been used up. According to Joshua 6:17, the Israelites were forbidden to plunder the city, but had to destroy it totally.

Although the archaeologists agreed Jericho was violently destroyed, they disagreed on the date of the conquest. Garstang held to the biblical date of 1400 B.C. while Watzinger and Kenyon believed the destruction occurred in 1550 B.C. In other words, if the later date is accurate, Joshua arrived at a previously destroyed Jericho. This earlier date would pose a serious challenge to the historicity of the Old Testament.

Dr. Bryant Wood, who is currently excavating the site, found that Kenyon’s early date was based on faulty assumptions about pottery found at the site. His later date is also based on the discovery of Egyptian amulets in the tombs northwest of Jericho. Inscribed under these amulets were the names of Egyptian Pharaohs dating from 1500-1386 B.C., showing that the cemetery was in use up to the end of the late Bronze Age (1550-1400 B.C.). Finally, a piece of charcoal found in the debris was carbon-14 dated to be 1410 B.C. The evidence leads Wood to this conclusion. “The pottery, stratigraphic considerations, scarab data and a carbon-14 date all point to a destruction of the city around the end of the Late Bronze Age, about 1400 BCE.”{8}

Thus, current archeological evidence supports the Bible’s

account of when and how Jericho fell.

House of David

One of the most beloved characters in the Bible is King David. Scripture says that he was a man after God's own heart. He is revered as the greatest of all Israelite kings and the messianic covenant is established through his lineage. Despite his key role in Israel's history, until recently no evidence outside the Bible attested to his existence. For this reason critics questioned the existence of a King David.

In the summer of 1993, an archaeologist made what has been labeled as a phenomenal and stunning discovery. Dr. Avraham Biran and his team were excavating a site labeled Tell Dan, located in northern Galilee at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Evidence indicates that this is the site of the Old Testament land of Dan.

The team had discovered an impressive royal plaza. As they were clearing the debris, they discovered in the ruins the remains of a black basalt stele, or stone slab, containing Aramaic inscriptions. The stele contained thirteen lines of writing but none of the sentences were complete. Some of the lines contained only three letters while the widest contained fourteen. The letters that remained were clearly engraved and easy to read. Two of the lines included the phrases "The King of Israel" and "House of David."

This is the first reference to King David found outside of the Bible. This discovery has caused many critics to reconsider their view of the historicity of the Davidic kingdom. Pottery found in the vicinity, along with the construction and style of writing, lead Dr. Biran to argue that the stele was erected in the first quarter of the ninth century B.C., about a century after the death of King David.

The translation team discovered that the inscription told of

warfare between the Israelites and the Arameans, which the Bible refers to during this period. In this find, a ruler of the Arameans probably Hazael is victorious over Israel and Judah. The stele was erected to celebrate the defeat of the two kings. In 1994 two more pieces were found with inscriptions which refer to Jehoram, the son of Ahab, ruler over Israel, and Ahaziah, who was the ruler over the "House of David" or Judah. These names and facts correspond to the account given in chapters 8 and 9 of 2 Kings. Dr. Hershel Shanks of *Biblical Archaeological Review* states, "The stele brings to life the biblical text in a very dramatic way. It also gives us more confidence in the historical reality of the biblical text."[\[9\]](#)

The find has confirmed a number of facts. First, the use of the term "House of David" implies that there was a Davidic dynasty that ruled Israel. We can conclude, then, that a historic King David existed. Second, the kingdoms of Judah and Israel were prominent political entities as the Bible describes. Critics long viewed the two nations as simply insignificant states.

Dr. Bryant Wood summarizes the importance of this find this way. "In our day, most scholars, archaeologist and biblical scholars would take a very critical view of the historical accuracy of many of the accounts in the Bible. . . . Many scholars have said there never was a David or a Solomon, and now we have a stele that actually mentions David."[\[10\]](#)

Although many archeologists remain skeptical of the biblical record, the evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible continues to build.

Notes

1. See [Are the Biblical Documents Reliable?](http://www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable/) available on the Web at www.probe.org/are-the-biblical-documents-reliable/
2. Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, OR.: Harvest

House Publishers, 1997), 46. e, 173.

3. Nelson Glueck, *Rivers in the Desert*, (New York: Farrar, Strous and Cudahy, 1959), 136. e, 173.

4. Fred Wright, *Highlights of Archaeology in the Bible Lands*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1955), 94-95.

5. Price, 118.

6. John Garstang, *The Foundations of Bible History; Joshua, Judges* (London: Constable, 1931), 146.

7. Kathleen Kenyon and Thomas Holland, *Excavations at Jericho Vol. 3: The Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Tell*, (London: BSA), 370.

8. Bryant Wood, "Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho?" *Biblical Archaeological Review*, March/April, 1990, 57.

9. John Wilford, "Areologists say Evidence of House of David Found." *Dallas Morning News*, 6 August 1993, 1A

10. Price, 173.

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20. Wright, Fred. *Highlights of Archaeology in the Bible Lands*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1955.
21. Yamauchi, Edwin, *The Stones and the Scriptures*. Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott Company, 1972.

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"There is No Proof Your

Pathetic Manmade God Ever Lived"

There is not one proof that Jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed along by g*dd*mn fools. Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet another savior. Josephus never wrote that passage about jesus and only a f***ing fool would believe it was anything other than another 'christian' lie and forgery. Josephus was a Jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement. You people lie like dogs and couldn't tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him. Hell, man don't you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane than Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it. History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer Moses and the pimp Abraham. Thank goodness, for you couldn't find a more disgusting and perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn't allow in my neighborhood. Why don't you try the truth for a change?

I am sorry that our material has caused you to respond with such negative emotion.

But if I may, I'd like to engage some of your points.

There is not one proof that jesus ever lived. Everything you quoted on your stupid page was all hearsay that was passed

along by g*dd*mn fools.

This is a fairly broad generalization. Could you refer to something specific so we can get a better idea of what you object to most?

Yeshu was real and lived one hundred years before your concocted fake savior. There was jesus of gamala who was another savior. There was jesus bar kocba, yet another savior.

Do you have some documentation for these various Jesus characters so we can research ourselves? This is a commonly held notion but the documentation we often see is not reliable.

Josephus never wrote that passage about jesus and only a fing fool would believe it was anything other than another 'christian' lie and forgery. Josephus was a jew and would have been stoned to death for such a statement.***

Concerning Josephus, Michael [Gleghorn] clearly indicates that the second passage he refers to by Josephus was likely edited by a Christian scholar to include the references to Jesus as the Christ and other messianic phrases. Most scholars regard the rest of the passage as genuine.
www.probe.org/ancient-evidence-for-jesus-from-non-christian-sources/.

You people lie like dogs and couldn't tell the truth if your lives depended on it. There were at least 50 well known authors/historians during the era that your pathetic manmade god was said to have lived yet not one of them bothered to write one word about him.

Can you provide us a list of a few of these authors/historians? You have to consider that any news did not travel very far or very fast in that era. Many of Jesus' miracles would be beyond belief for many and would have just

been dismissed. It makes sense therefore, that Jesus was noted a few decades later when the number of his followers continued to grow despite severe persecution.

Hell, man don't you think with all his miracles and dead people popping out of graves during his crucifixion that someone might sit up and take notice? There are no people on this planet meaner or more insane than Christians. Also, our Founders did not found this nation on your sickening repulsive deadly religion and most of them hated it.

I agree with you to a degree. Jefferson and Franklin were likely [deists](#) who used the Bible when it suited them. [George Washington](#) however, seems to be a genuine Christian. Do you have sources who indicate otherwise?

History is completely silent on all the major bible characters, including the child raping killer Moses and the pimp Abraham.

Well, that's not exactly true. Roman and Jewish historians make reference to Jesus and Christians in the first century. Also a stone from around 800BC contained the phrase "House of David." Babylonian records refer to the appropriate kings of Judah in the early years of the Babylonian captivity, both those left in Jerusalem and those taken to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar is real as are the accounts of various Assyrian kings mentioned in Chronicles and Kings. The Babylonian and Persian kings are accurately reflected in Daniel. It's quite unlikely to find any archeological references to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. They were nomadic herders who didn't keep any history.

Thank goodness, for you couldn't find a more disgusting and perverted bunch if you spent your life looking. Yahweh was a real b*stard that I wouldn't allow in my neighborhood. Why don't you try the truth for a change?

We are looking for the truth and confidently believe we have

found it in Jesus Christ of Nazareth. I suspect that something else besides your perceived lack of evidence is driving the strength of your rejection. Whatever that may be, I am truly sorry that some Christian or group of Christians have grievously harmed you in some way in the past. No true Christians ever claim to be perfect or to have exhaustive knowledge. But we have seen and experienced the truth in ways that are quite convincing.

Respectfully,

Raymond G. Bohlin, Ph.D.

<https://sites.google.com/site/yahwehelohiym/sons-of-god/the-boundaries-of-the-nations>

Yahweh was just a hateful petty tribal god and one of the many sons of el elyon, the most high god, and your bible proves it but you people do not understand what the hell you read and keep the lies going.

I'm afraid your source is a bit behind the times. While some of what he says is correct, that some names of God go back to the Ugaritic language, his/her reliance on the Documentary Hypothesis is outdated.
www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/09/24/the-documentary-hypothesis.aspx#Article

"Sons of God" appears elsewhere in the Old Testament, in Genesis 6:2,4 and Job 38:7. In each case it is either a reference to men who followed God (Genesis 6) or angels (Job 38). Nothing new or damaging here.

If you just look a little further in the Old Testament you find Isaiah saying;

I am the Lord, I have no peer,
there is no God but me.

I arm you for battle, even though you do not recognize me.
I do this so people will recognize from east to west
that there is no God but me;
I am the Lord, I have no peer.
Remember what I accomplished in antiquity!
Truly I am God, I have no peer;
I am God, and there is none like me (45:5-9)

The God of the Bible is a monotheistic God throughout. And we do have a nearly complete Book of Isaiah from the [Dead Sea Scrolls](#) and the only difference with the Masoretic text of AD 900 is a few spelling changes.

One item at a time.

www.stephenjaygould.org/ctrl/buckner_ncn.html

I also advise you to read *Liars for Jesus* and Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Paine helped word our Constitution and Bill of Rights and named this country The United States of America. Few Christians will speak about his book because it cannot be refuted intelligently. His part 3 proves there are NO OT prophecies of jesus and makes jackasses of anyone who says otherwise. Can you people read? Christians don't follow the doctrine of jesus, they follow the apostate liar paul. Read the *Egyptian Book of the Dead* to find the Lord's Prayer and the so-called ten commandments along with many other items the murdering jews (who are not jews but are liars from the synagogue of satan) stole and created their rotten religion. Much of what they stole was from the ancient Sumerians who lived about 1000 years before the hyksos came to be known as Hebrews. Their epic of creation was used by these maggots to create the most bloody and perverted religion this world has known, until Christians showed up.

Hmmm. I don't recall claiming that the U.S. is a Christian nation. You won't find that anywhere on our website. But do

read from George Washington's farewell address:

Of all the dispositions and habits, which lead to political prosperity, Religion and Morality are indispensable supports. In vain would that man claim the tribute of Patriotism, who should labor to subvert these great pillars of human happiness, these firmest props of the duties of Men and Citizens. The mere Politician, equally with the pious man, ought to respect and to cherish them. A volume could not trace all their connexions with private and public felicity. Let it simply be asked, Where is the security for property, for reputation, for life, if the sense of religious obligation desert the oaths, which are the instruments of investigation in Courts of Justice? And let us with caution indulge the supposition, that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education on minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience both forbid us to expect, that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle.

Clearly he doesn't say what religion, but there was little else in America at that time except for different forms of Christianity. Even if he only means a loose form of deism, he clearly questions that government can function for long without it.

So you really want to use Thomas Paine as your source for the conviction that there are no OT prophecies about Jesus? There is so much we didn't know in the late 18th century. Archaeology was barely a fledgling science. So many manuscripts were unknown. We have thousands of OT and NT manuscripts today that Paine had no knowledge of whatsoever. Isaiah 52:13 through 53:12 is about as clear a prophecy of Jesus that you will find. And remember we have a complete copy of Isaiah from the Dead Sea Scrolls, well before Jesus lived.

Liars for Jesus looks like an interesting book. I have no

doubt there has been sloppy scholarship on the part of many in the religious right. At Probe Ministries we make every effort to research with integrity and write with a biblical reasonableness and respect for those we disagree with.

Two of the foremost and revered Jewish Archaeologists in Israel have proven the OT is a lie but preachers will never tell that. They are greedy dogs and deceivers.
www.hiddenmysteries.org/mysteries/history/jehovah.html

I am familiar with the archaeologists you mention and their conclusions are quite controversial. Archaeology comes with a need for publicity to help donors and foundations continue your funding. Making such an outrageous claim would certainly get headlines and keep the dollars flowing.

I'm not surprised that there are "official" documents declaring that YHWH had Ashterah as a consort. The Jewish histories of the Bible are filled with condemnation for continuing to worship in the high places and using Ashterah poles for fertility. They did indeed worship many gods at times. The Bible doesn't hide that.

But again, this document refers to the Documentary Hypothesis and the P source. This has been debunked for decades but is still used in many secular universities because it fits their predetermined conclusions about biblical texts.

By the way, you can find documentation for the House of David inscription here:
www.reclaimingthemind.org/blog/category/archaeology/.

Also we do have the oldest form of writing from Tell Mardikh, the Ebla Tablets. These date to between the 26th and 23rd centuries BCE. There are names, of places, people, and customs similar to those found in Genesis. If Genesis was supposedly written in the 7th century BCE as many claim, these names,

places and customs could not be known.

evidenceforchristianity.blogspot.com/2008/11/ebla-tablets-ancient-sumerian.html

Elba Tablets?! Ha, your man was long ago discredited. You must keep up.

www.infidels.org/library/modern/james_still/reliability.html

Everything the so-called jews have or ever had was stolen from other cultures. It is easy to understand why those horrid creatures have been tossed out of every nation they tried to infiltrate with their money making schemes and corruptions. They were the central bankers our founders hated and tried to keep out of this nation. The Presidents who came against them were assassinated. Jackson managed to survive the attempts they made on his life but they still managed to gain the upper hand again and now the swine damn near own this entire nation. The only method used to gain control of Palestine was more lies. Go figure. You don't have a clue what is even happening in this world and who is in control.

I don't think Mr. Still refutes much of anything about the Ebla Tablets. He admits that Pettinato is a Sumerologist and therefore will have skills of translation. The only quibble Mr. Still seems to have with Pettinato is his claim to find the name Yah, similar to Yahweh. OK fine, he just offers another opinion. He says nothing about the names of the cities on the plain. He lost almost all credibility with me in his opening three paragraphs, claiming that Christianity is just a faith and mystery religion according to Paul. Then says Josh McDowell's theology is in tension with this since McDowell wants an inerrant scripture based on facts. Sorry, I don't see any tension at all. Paul refers to actual events in his letters, things that happened to him and things he learned from the apostles. Paul is the one in 1 Corinthians 15 who

puts a lot of weight on the historical resurrection. There's no tension. He's making mountains out of ant hills.

His account of how the gospels came about is some shoddy tying together of weird threads. The so-called "Q" document does not exist. It is only supposed to exist because it fits this model. He refers to some of the church fathers to back up some of his points but not to the early tradition among those same church fathers that Mark was written by Mark from Peter's recollections. Luke is indeed an historian. Still's confusion over the middle chapters is not worth responding to. Most conservative scholars now suggest that all the gospels were written before AD 70 because none of them mention the destruction of Jerusalem and the Jewish temple when Jesus specifically predicts this in all three synoptic gospels. It would be easy to add this as an editorial proof that Jesus got it right. Especially if these gospels were supposedly cobbled together from sayings and other recollections.

Last, I really liked the part about Jesus waving a magic wand over Lazarus in the catacombs indicating they saw him as a magician. I haven't actually seen the picture though I looked for one. Found a few articles stating the same but no documentation. I suspect that it's another Everest out of an ant hill.

I'm still working on the Thomas Paine refutation of messianic prophecies. Not terribly impressed though. As suspected some of his objections no longer hold up. He also assumes away the supernatural so when Isaiah refers to the Persian Cyrus who wasn't even born in Isaiah's time, he uses that to say that obviously Isaiah was written after 500 BCE. It's bad form to assume away what you are trying to discredit.

Funny how you keep claiming that men like Paine just assume things while he at least existed and that is more than you can say about your bible supermen. It would be one thing to have

one of these paragons of virtue (not) to disappear but to have the great majority of them to vaporize from all historical records should wake up even the village idiot. I guess when a man makes his living off conning the sheeple he will stand by his deception until the end. Religion is now a trillion dollar a year BUSINESS. That is like waiting for a used car salesman to tell the buyer to be ware, there may be something wrong with his intended purchase. If Christians really claim the bible is the word of god they must really be confused about what the book says since there are over 3000 sects of Christianity and they disagree on many points. If god is not the author of confusion he sure messed up with his only written word to man. Not only is the bible a mess of contradictions and falsehoods, it is by far the filthiest and bloodiest book ever penned by man. You claim the Creator of this entire world had any part of that filth and to me that is where blasphemy truly is found. You are obviously rooted in lies or you are just taking advantage of brainwashed people to make a living. Either way, you will never open your eyes. Enjoy the holiday of greed and materialism with the rest of the Christian world.

Your hatred blinds you at least as much as you would say my faith blinds me.

I will readily admit that much that passes for Christianity indeed is little more than business. But I would say you are guilty of following the old adage of throwing out the baby with the bathwater. We're not all liars, cheats and frauds.

Jesus did/does exist.

He indeed fulfilled dozens of OT prophecies about the Messiah.

Performed signs and miracles beyond the plain ability of a simple magician, control over nature that frightened even his own disciples, raised a man dead for four days, healed a man blind from birth.

He died for my sins and for yours.

His historical resurrection proved his claims of deity and opened the door for all who call Him Lord and believe that God raised him from the dead, will be saved. Ten of eleven disciples died a martyr's death, believing all that they saw and heard was real.

You are following the imaginations of those who are guilty of seeking to destroy what they simply don't like. Besides, as the evolutionary biologist J.B.S. Haldane said, "If my brain is simply composed of atoms, and my thoughts are simply the interaction of atoms in my brain, I have no reason to suppose my brain to be composed of atoms" (loose paraphrase). In a fully materialistic universe, there is no truth, no way to truly know what is real; truth is simply what works, for the moment. Truth is indeed relative and ultimately unknowable. So why bother with your crusade? If some choose to believe a benevolent fiction, what do you care? Obviously you do care, you believe some things to be true and false. I only observe that you need to borrow from a Christian worldview to do so.

Pascal's wager is still worth considering; if I am wrong and death is the end and there is no afterlife, I've lost nothing. I've lived a good life, loved my wife and kids, kind to my neighbors, supported an Indian boy, and help give others hope. If you're wrong, you lose everything.

I will enjoy the celebration of the Incarnation that the now secular culture of the USA has turned into a necessary economic ritual. My family will enjoy a very modest Christmas.

I hope you can enjoy some time with friends or family during this end of year.

Respectfully,

Dr. Ray Bohlin

Tales From the Crypt: Do We Have the Bones of Jesus?

February 26, 2008

The last week in February started out with an incredible announcement. James Cameron (director of the film *Titanic*) and Simcha Jacobovici announced that they have found the bones of Jesus! At their news conference, they promoted their Discovery Channel special *The "Lost Tomb of Jesus"* that will air on March 4th and also promoted the book by Simcha Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino entitled *The Jesus Family Tomb: The Discovery, the Investigation, and the Evidence That Could Change History* released by Harper-Collins.

If proved reliable, these findings would call into question the very cornerstone of Christianity: the resurrection of Jesus. But are they true?

The foundational claim is that they have discovered the family tomb of Jesus Christ. Is this really the tomb of Jesus or his family? There are many good reasons to believe this tomb has no relationship at all to Jesus and his family. Many are asking what to think about these claims. Therefore, I put together a quick two-page summary of some of the criticisms and concerns that surfaced in the first few hours after the announcement. Before we look at those criticisms, let's first review the history of this tomb.

We have known about this tomb since it was discovered in 1980. Back then, Israeli construction workers were digging the foundation for a new building in a Jerusalem suburb. Their digging revealed a cave with ten limestone ossuaries. Archeologists removed the limestone caskets for examination.

When they were able to decipher the names on the ten ossuaries, they found: Jesua, son of Joseph, Mary, Mary, Mathew, Jofa and Judah, son of Jesua. At the time, one of Israel's most prominent archeologists (Professor Amos Kloner) didn't associate the crypt with Jesus. He rightly argued that the father of Jesus was a humble carpenter who couldn't afford a luxury crypt for his family. Moreover, the names on the crypt were common Jewish names.

None of this has stopped Cameron and Jacobovici from promoting the tomb as the family tomb of Jesus. They claim to have evidence (through DNA tests, archeological evidence, and Biblical studies) to prove that the ten ossuaries belong to Jesus and his family. They also argue that Jesus and Mary Magdalene might have produced a son named Judah. However, a number of biblical scholars say this is really just an old story now being recycled in an effort to create a media phenomenon that will sell books and guarantee a large audience for the television special.

First, does it really make sense that this would be the family tomb of Jesus? Remember that Jesus was in Jerusalem as a pilgrim and was not a resident of the city. How would his family be able to buy this tomb? As we already mentioned, Joseph (who had probably already died in Galilee) and his family did not have the funds to buy such an elaborate burial site. Moreover, they were from out of town and would need time to find this tomb location. To accept this theory, one has to believe they stole the body of Jesus and moved it to this tomb in a suburb of Jerusalem all within about a day's time.

Second, if this is the family tomb of Jesus and his family,

why is Jesus referred to as the son of Joseph? As far as we can determine from history, the earliest followers of Jesus never called Jesus the son of Joseph. The record of history is that it was only outsiders who mistakenly called him that.

Third, if this is the family tomb of Jesus, why do we have the name of Matthew listed with the rest of the family? If this is the Matthew that traveled with Jesus, then he certainly was not a family member. And you would have to wonder why James (who remained in Jerusalem) would allow these inscriptions as well as allow the family to move the body from Jerusalem to this tomb and perpetrate a hoax that Jesus bodily rose from the grave. Also, the fourth-century church historian Eusebius writes that the body of James (the half-brother of Jesus) was buried alone near the temple mount and that his tomb was visited in the early centuries.

Fourth, there is the problem with the common names on the tombs. Researchers have cataloged the most common names at the time. The ten most common were: Simon/Simeon, Joseph, Eleazar, Judah, John/Yohanan, Jesus, Hananiah, Jonathan, Matthew, and Manaen/Menahem. These are some of the names found on the ossuaries and thus suggest that the tomb belonged to someone other than Jesus of Nazareth and his family. In fact, the name Jesus appears in 98 other tombs and on 21 other ossuaries.

Finally there is the question of the DNA testing. Apparently there is evidence that shows that the DNA from the woman (in what they say is the Mary Magdalene ossuary) and the DNA from the so-called Jesus ossuary does not match. So they argue that they were not relatives and thus must have been married.

But does the DNA evidence really prove that? It does not prove she is his wife. In fact, we really don't even know who in the ossuaries are related to the other. Moreover, we do not have an independent DNA control sample to compare these findings with. At best, the DNA evidence shows that some of these people are related and some are not.

All of this looks like sensationalism from Simcha Jacobovici (who has a reputation as an Indiana-Jones type) and James Cameron (the director of the highly fictionalized Titanic). The publicity is certain to sell books and draw a television audience, but it is not good history or archaeology.

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Follow-up from Kerby 2/28/07

My commentary was a brief (two-page) summary of some of the criticisms and concerns that many people surfaced in the first few hours after the announcement. Now that we have a few days of reflection on the claims by James Cameron and Simcha Jacobovici, I think we can begin to provide an even more detailed perspective.

Here are some good commentaries and blogs posted by experts in the field as well some news articles that quote these people. Some of these experts have been able to see the Discovery Channel special "The Lost Tomb of Jesus" and thus can give even more detail than I was able to do when I first wrote my commentary on Monday, February 26. The first two links are for commentaries by Dr. Darrell Bock, Dallas Theological Seminary. He was on my radio program "Point of View" and provided some great insight. The next link is for a commentary by Ben Witherington, Asbury Theological Seminary. The following three are news articles quoting from experts:

Hollywood Hype: The Oscars and Jesus' Family Tomb, What do they share?

<http://dev.bible.org/bock/node/106>

No need to yell, only a challenge for some who need to step up and could:

<http://dev.bible.org/bock/node/107>

The Jesus Tomb? Titanic Talpiot tomb theory sunk from the

start:

benwitherington.blogspot.com/2007/02/jesus-tomb-titanic-talpiot-tomb-theory.html

'Jesus tomb' documentary ignores biblical & scientific evidence, logic, experts say

<http://www.bpnews.net/bpnews.asp?ID=25053>

Ten reason why the Jesus tomb claim is bogus:

<http://tinyurl.com/2rmj8a>

Remains of the Day: Scholars dismiss filmmakers' assertions that Jesus and his family were buried in Jerusalem:

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2007/februaryweb-only/109-33.0.html>

Kerby Anderson

“Did Jericho Have Walls Or Not?”

I was reading your article [Archaeology and the Old Testament](#) which states that Jericho was found to have walls. But I was also reading at <http://www.library.cornell.edu/colldev/mideast/jerques.htm> which states that Jericho didn't have walls.

I was wondering if you could elaborate further or perhaps explain this apparent contradiction.

There are three Jericho sites: Old Testament Jericho, New Testament Jericho, and modern day Jericho. When referring to the city of Jericho, one must be sure which one we are referring to. Also, the walls of Jericho are not standing up on

the surface. When cities are conquered in the Middle East, they are often abandoned and are buried by the sands, and often a new city is built on top of them. So the walls of Ancient Jericho are today below the surface. Two outstanding archaeologists on the site are Dr. Bryant Wood, and Randal Price. Randal Price's web site is www.worldofthebible.com. Thanks for reading the article.

Pat Zukeran

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“The Archaeological Evidence for the Bible is Non-Existent!”

The archaeological evidence of the Bible is scarce. In fact, it is non-existent. After 200 years of Christian archaeologists digging up the whole Middle East, they haven't found any proof of the Exodus of the Jews from Egypt, Hebrew Slaves or the Ten Plagues. NONE!!! And this from a nation of people who wrote EVERYTHING down in stone!! And Sinai has no proof of any large group of people travelling through it EVER!!! The first evidence correlating to the biblical story doesn't appear in Canaan archaeology until around 100 years before the Babylonian Captivity (around 600 BC).

This lack of evidence includes persons such as David and Solomon who should be recorded in other nations and supposedly lived relatively close to those who wrote the Bible in the Babylonian Captivity around 500 B.C.

In the words of Shakespeare, "Methinks thou dost protest too much." It is true that we would like to have more archaeological evidence than we now have. But of course, from an archaeologist's perspective, this is always the case. Further, your assertion that **no** evidence exists, is an overstatement which cannot be substantiated. And it is not accepted by the majority of those scholars who are active in the Levant. I would suspect that you are reading a narrow spectrum of archaeologists who support your desired conclusions. And there are many European and Israeli archaeologists along with Christian ones who do not share your opinion nor that of those you apparently are reading. Let me give you some examples from these scholars who feel there is substantial evidence mitigating against such a pessimistic stand.

Egypt

I will start here, because there is no doubt that we see clear evidence of Egyptian culture, language, etc., imbedded in both the Old Testament and archaeology. As you may know, the *lingua franca* (official language) used by Heads of State and commerce was Akkadian cuneiform. Assyria, Babylon, and Egypt all conversed with each other in this language. It is a northern Semitic language. If the Israelites actually spent 400 years as slaves in Egypt, we would expect this familiarity of Egyptian language and culture among the Israelites. And if Moses was a real person—a Hebrew brought up in the Royal Egyptian family—he would have probably been tri-lingual, and able to converse in Hebrew, Egyptian and Akkadian.

Exodus, Sinai

We find abundant evidence of an Egyptian heritage and influence throughout the Pentateuch, Joshua, and Judges. As stated above, we would like more archaeological corroboration to clearly identify Biblical names, places, events, etc. For some areas the evidence is strong. For others, it is either

sparse, or nonexistent. I will elaborate on this later in considering Jerusalem, but will state here the premise that an *absence* of archaeological data does not necessarily mean there is none. Perhaps we have the *wrong site* (historical Mt. Sinai is an example). Or perhaps we just haven't dug in the *right place*. To argue vigorously from "silence" is not strong proof.

We do have some indications of Egyptian influence on two biblical elements: the Tabernacle/construction described in Exodus 25-27; 36-38, and the arrangement of the Israelite travel/military camp. The order of the camp and the order of the march are laid out in great detail in Numbers 2. Much of what Egyptian archaeologists have discovered pertaining to the above find many similarities in the structures/construction/arrangement of the various war camps of the Pharaohs.

The desert Tabernacle of the Bible (Exodus 26) is described as one of elaborate design of gold, silver, bronze, wood, linen, goats' hair and leather. It so happens that this desert tent is also the centerpiece of every Egyptian war camp, but it serves as Pharaoh's personal, special tent, not a religious shrine.

The best example comes from a famous battle (at Kadesh) between Ramesses II and the Hittite nation around 1275 B.C. This is one of the most momentous battles in antiquity and the best documented...at Thebes, Karnak, Luxor, Abydos and Abu Simbel—on papyrus and stone, in both poetic and prose forms. The best pictorial is found at Abu Simbel. The parallels between Ramesses' camp and the biblical Tabernacle, beginning with the dimensions, are striking.

- *The camp forms a rectangular courtyard twice as long as it is wide.*
- *The main entrance is located in the middle of the short walls.*

- *A road from the entrance leads directly to a two chamber tent: a reception compartment and directly behind it Pharaoh's chamber. It too has a 2:1 ratio.*
- *The tent and camp lie on an east/west axis with the entrance on the east.*
- *In pharaoh's inner tent is representation on each side of the winged falcon god Horus.*
- *Their wings cover the pharaoh's golden throne in the same manner that the wings of the Cherubim covered Yahweh's golden throne/ark (Exodus 35:18-22).*

Given your assumption that the Old Testament didn't materialize until the Persian period (fifth century B.C.), we would expect Mesopotamian influence, but we do know from several palatial reliefs found at Nineveh that the Assyrians had a *very different* form of military camp. The camp's perimeter is always *oval* in shape and the form of the king's tent bears little resemblance to the Tabernacle. Where would these sixth century B.C. "authors" come up with this accurate, Egyptian-oriented detail/description seven centuries removed?

I won't elaborate on this (unless you want documentation), but the Ark of the Covenant in the Holy of Holies, its design, materials, and portability, so graphically designed in Exodus 25:19-22, is also mirrored in Egyptian funerary structures to a high degree of detail.

Another remarkable example is to compare three cities mentioned in Numbers 22 (Dibon); Numbers 13:22; Joshua 10:36,37; Judges 1:10 (Hebron); and Judges 4-5 (Qishon). These passages all describe a well-known, well-traveled road (the Arabah) in the Transjordan from the southern tip of the Dead Sea to the plains of Moab (opposite Jericho). This is not to be confused with the great north-south Kings Highway (also mentioned in the Bible) which stretched from northern Arabia to Syria.

Although Thomas Thompson and other “Rejectionists” claim these cities didn’t exist in the late Bronze Age II (1400-1200 B.C.), we have extra-biblical evidence that they *did*. You may know that the Pharaohs recorded, along with their achievements and military exploits, maps and the names of roads, geographical data, etc. We get a rather full picture of this road over time by several pharaohs who mention/describe this specific road on their victory monuments.

The first comes from Thutmosis III (1504-1450 B.C)., who mentions four towns/cities along this road which are also found in the Bible: Iyyim, Dibon, Abel, and Jordan. The second and third come from Amenophis III (1387-1350 B.C.) and Ramesses II (c. 1379-1212 B.C.)—found on the west side of the great hall at Karnak. He mentions two of the names found in the Bible. Further evidence comes from the Moabite stone (ninth century B.C.).

I could go into more detail about this if you are interested, but to summarize what I’m saying, there is evidence from independent and varied sources that such places existed several centuries *before* the proposed dates of the Exodus. Consider this comparison:

Late Bronze Egyptian Name	Biblical Name	Modern Name
(Yamm) ha-Malach	Melah (“Salt”)	Yam ha-Melach
Iyyin	Iyyin	Ay
Heres/Hareseth	Heres/Hareseth	Kerak (CH = K)
Aqrabat		al-Aqraba
Dibon/Oartho	Dibon	Dhiban
Iktanu		Tell Iktanu
Abel	Abel-shittim	Tell Hammam
Jordan	Jordan	Jordan (River)

If you will look at Numbers 33:45-50, you would have to say in light of the above that this is a pretty impressive and

credible piece of ancient historical writing, and most Bible scholars still consider it so. Its exacting specificity and precision of detail strongly indicates that the ancient historian who wrote it had at least had *sources* that accurately preserved the memory of a road (and cities along its route) used in very early times dating clear back to Late Bronze Age II.

On the face of it, we would have to reject Thomas Thompson (et al.)'s conclusion that *no* such cities existed at the proposed time of the Exodus. The places mentioned in the Biblical accounts did in fact exist at the time. None of these pieces of information were fabricated centuries later. There would be no purpose to include them (or make them up).

Israelites

I am not going to spend any time trying to convince you that Moses was an historical person, but I would like to refer you to an Egyptian stele in the temple at Thebes which gives us the earliest known mention of Israel. It is a 7.5 foot high funerary monument of Pharaoh Merneptah, who ruled from 1213 to 1203 B.C. As you may know, these monuments outlined a Pharaoh's lifetime accomplishments and were written (or dictated) by him for his tombstone prior to his death. He refers to conquering Israel (among others) and says, "Israel is laid waste, his seed (people) is not." Israel is referred to as "a people," that is, they were already known and acknowledged as a distinct ethnic group at that time! In my mind, this reference provides persuasive, early evidence against those who argue that there was not a distinct people called the Israelites until after the Babylonian Captivity in the sixth century B.C. (600 years later—ridiculous!)

I will be discussing the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) in another context later, but will here state that a people designated as the "Hab(or p)iru" (i.e., Habiru) in the Amarna Letters (14th Century B.C.) is still considered by many

scholars to be a possible, additional mention of the Hebrews.

Another substantial line of evidence comes from discoveries of a new community in the central hill country of Canaan which sprang up late in the 13th to the 11th centuries B.C. Some 300 small, agricultural villages are now known. They are new in the archaeological record and have certain identifying characteristics which include the layout of the village and the signature (Israel: four-room houses, pottery, and the absence of pig bones, which are numerous at other sites in trans-Jordan, and the coastal towns [Philistines, Phoenicians]). The above layouts of village and town fit exactly the biblical descriptions found in Joshua, Judges, and Samuel. These newcomers also brought with them new agricultural technology not evidently known heretofore by the Canaanites living there when the Israelites arrived. And it has been pointed out that this new community did not evolve over time (natural, gradual population increase), but rather, migrated into the area more rapidly, and they almost exclusively chose *new* sites to build, instead of taking over existing Canaanite dwellings, and well away from their urban areas.

This new people introduced the terracing of hills for their agricultural needs, which were carefully designed with retaining walls (rock) to take advantage of all rainfall (as well as available springs) coming down to these areas of rocky, sloping terrain. These villages stretch all the way from the hills of the lower Galilee in the north to the Negev in the south. Population estimates at the end of the Bronze age in this area numbered 12,000 (13th century) but grew rapidly to about 55,000 in the 12th century B.C., and then to about 75,000 in the 11th century B.C.

As I mentioned above, another uniqueness in these settlements is that their food system was found by archaeologists to be void of pig bones in excavated remains. This is another indication of a particular, ethnic/religious community. And

religiously, there is also a complete absence of any kind of temple, sanctuary, or shrine, and also of any stone idols (deities). This assemblage is sufficiently homogeneous and distinctive to warrant *some* kind of designation, or label. If not Israel, *WHO?* Archaeologist William Dever has suggested naming this 12th to 11th century assemblage of individuals as “proto-Israelites.”

David, Solomon, and Jerusalem

As you may know, there is a hot debate going on among archaeologists concerning the tenth century B.C., the purported time of the United Kingdom under David and his son, Solomon. Are they historical figures, or did some author(s) invent these mythical persons centuries later? And what can be said about Jerusalem? There is very little archaeological evidence to substantiate that it existed in the tenth century B.C. as described in the Bible. This has led a small group of archaeologists to conclude David and Solomon never existed, and Jerusalem was not the thriving royal capital of the Israelites. I will develop this in more detail later, but I first want to say again that an *absence* of evidence does not necessarily and automatically bring us to conclude *nothing* was going on in the tenth century B.C. at Jerusalem. This is an argument from silence. There are alternative explanations. First of all, the most likely place where Jerusalem’s public buildings and important monuments would be located is on the Temple Mount, which for obvious reasons (Arab occupation), cannot be excavated. Thus, the most important area for investigation to uncover possible confirmation for David and Solomon is off limits to us.

Secondly, even those areas which *are* partially available to excavate—the ridge known as the City of David, for example—was continuously settled from the tenth to the sixth centuries B.C. Destructions leave a distinct mark in the archaeological record. But where there is continuous occupation (i.e. conqueror after conqueror) we would not expect to find remains

of earlier building activity for the simple reason that Jerusalem was built on terraces and bedrock. Each new conqueror destroyed what was underneath, robbed and reused stones from earlier structures, and set its foundations again on solid rock.

We mostly have Herod to thank for our present inaccessibility to what lies underneath the flat, massive platform of today's Temple Mount when he began construction in 20/19 B.C. To accomplish this task of leveling, it is estimated that roughly 1.1 million cubic feet of rock was removed from the northeast corner and was used in the southeastern corner to first fill in a portion of the Kidron Valley and then raise up 150 feet from bedrock with fill to level that side!

So we would not expect to find abundant remains of earlier strata (though there are a few indications [capitals, columns, masonry] of Herod's Temple). For these reasons it is dangerous and misleading to draw negative inferences from the lack of archaeological evidence.

Fortunately, however, we *do* have another means of testing what was happening in Jerusalem even *before* the tenth century B.C. It comes from the Amarna Letters (14th century B.C.) where Jerusalem (referred to as "Urusalim") is specifically mentioned. These 300 documents, written in Akkadian cuneiform, are mostly diplomatic correspondence from local rulers in Canaan to two Pharaohs—Amenophis III [1391-1353] and Amenophis IV (also known as Akhenaten) [1353-1337]. At this time Canaan was under Egyptian hegemony, and Jerusalem was ruled by a local king, or vassal.

It is clear from these documents that 400 years *before* our century in question (tenth century B.C.), Jerusalem was a capital city over a considerable area, and we are told it had a palace, a court with attendants and servants, a temple, and scribes who had charge of diplomatic correspondence with Egyptian authorities. Six letters were sent by the king of

Jerusalem to the pharaohs, which confirm a diplomatic sophistication of his court and the quality of his scribe.

Apart from these crucial letters, we find the *archaeological* evidence to confirm this history both *opaque* and *nil*. Scholars would never have guessed from their excavations of Jerusalem that any scribal activity took place there in Late Bronze Age II. We should not be surprised at this, however. From the standpoint of location, elevation, climate, water sources, and defense, Jerusalem is, and always has been, by far the most choice and desirable place for occupation and settlement. That being the case, we should be surprised if we found *no* indication of ancient activity there.

The truth of the matter is we must realize how little has been recovered; and perhaps how little can ever be recovered from ancient Jerusalem. There is very little from the 17th century, the 16th century, 15th, 14th, 13th, 12th, 11th, 10th, or the 9th century B.C.! Or to put it in other terms, we have little archaeological evidence of Jerusalem for the Late Bronze Age or Iron Age I or from the first couple of centuries of Iron Age II—a period of a *thousand* years!

But it isn't totally void of evidence. The "Stepped Stone" Structure on the eastern ridge of the city of David, the oldest part of Jerusalem, is a mammoth, five-story support for some unknown structure above it. It measures 90 feet high and 130 feet long. The dates given to it by archaeologists range from the late 13th to the late 10th centuries. But whatever the exact date will turn out to be within these centuries, this structure shows that Jerusalem could boast of an impressive architectural achievement(s) and had a population large enough to engage in such huge public works projects. This structure dates to David's time, or earlier. Contrary to some archaeologists who claim "no evidence," some 10th century pottery has been found, though not in great abundance (which holds true for all the other centuries at Jerusalem). Milat Ezar also dates a black juglet found which dates to the tenth

century. Ezer also dates the fortifications and gate just above its location as also tenth century B.C.

Granted, the Jerusalem of the United Monarchy was not as grand or glorious as Herod's Jerusalem, but the alternative conclusion that the city was abandoned for a thousand years on the basis of the paucity of archaeological evidence, seems to me to be very improbable. And I reach this conclusion, not on any Biblical evidence, but quite apart from it.

A further example comes from the fifth century B.C., and specifically the rebuilding of the Temple and walls of Jerusalem by Ezra and Nehemiah after the Babylonian captivity (when the Persians allowed the Jews to return). The Temple is assumed not to have been anything beyond a very modest structure. In fact, it was never even referred to by the Jews as the "Second Temple" and was demolished when Herod began his project in the first century B.C. But there is little doubt that Nehemiah's wall was constructed, even though almost no trace of it has been found in excavations. Jerusalem of the Persian period is known only from fills and building fragments and is mainly identified because it is sandwiched between the debris from the Iron Age and the Hellenistic periods. This is another example of the difficulty in recovering strata that developed peacefully and did not end with some catastrophic construction, and thus another caution against drawing negative conclusions from negative archaeological evidence. I will come back to this with some conclusions after we have considered David and Solomon.

David and Solomon

With respect to David, until recently no historical, archaeological evidence has been available to deny or confirm if he lived. But in 1993, the discovery by excavator Avraham Biran of a stone slab (and two additional fragments of same) at the ancient Tel Dan near Mt. Hermon contains an extra-biblical reference to David. The specific words are "Beth

David," or, "House of David." This is a formulaic term frequently used, not just by Israel, but by all peoples throughout the Levant to describe a particular dynasty—their own, or other States (political entities). A small group of archaeologists have rejected it out of hand, and some have even suggested that it is probably a forgery *planted* by Avraham Biran himself! In reality, the inscription was found, *in situ*, in *secondary* use, that is, reused and inserted into the outer wall of a gate that was destroyed in the eighth century B.C. by the Assyrians. Paleographically, experts date it to the ninth century B.C.

The discovery of this artifact presents a terrible problem for the archaeologists you appear to have been reading, because this is a non-Israelite source, outside the Bible, that refers to the dynasty, or "House" of David.

There are two other possible indications (not yet conclusive) which mention David. Kenneth Kitchen (University of Liverpool) makes a strong case for a mention of David by pharaoh Sheshonq I in the tenth century B.C. It is in the temple of Amun at Karnak. This pharaoh is mentioned in I Kings 14:25 (Hebrew: *Shishak*). The exact letters are *dvt*. In the transliteration of words from one Semitic language to another, **d** and **t** are often used interchangeably. We have a clear example of this from the sixth century B.C. in a victory inscription of an Ethiopic ruler who is celebrating his triumphs. He quotes two of David's Psalms (19 and 65), and the reference is *unmistakably* to the Biblical king David. Here too the **t** is used rather than the **d**. Granted, this is sixth century, but it shows an Ethiopic king was aware of and refers to David as a real person and two of his literary efforts.

An additional reference comes from the Moabite Stone (which is not yet completely deciphered). It is also called the Mesha Stele, which is contemporaneous with the Tel Dan inscription (ninth century B.C.) Andre Lemaire, the eminent French paleographer, believes he has detected a reference to the

House of David on the Mesha Stele.

With respect to Solomon, we can pretty well document when he ruled (and) died by comparing the King Lists of the Assyrians and the Egyptians with each other as well as with various kings of Judah, of Israel, of Egypt, and Assyria mentioned in Kings, Chronicles, and the Prophets of the O.T.

Astronomy helps us here. The Assyrians recorded a solar eclipse during the reign of Assur-dan III, and modern astronomers have calculated a firm date that it occurred in 763 B.C. We have from Assyria a record of 261 continuous years, with names and dates of kings as well as the noting of any important events which occurred during each year. We thus have a "peg" for a long line of Assyrian rulers from 910 to 649 B.C.

There is no controversy about the *Divided* kingdom. At some historical time (Solomon's death—930 B.C.) the United Kingdom split, with Rehoboam, Solomon's son, ruling as king of Judah in the south, and simultaneously, Jeroboam I assumed rule of northern Palestine and became the first king of Israel.

Solomon's son, Rehoboam (his reign: 931-913 B.C.) is not mentioned by name in Egyptian or Assyrian records (like Ahab, Jehu, and Jereboam, etc), but we have a very clear and accurate Egyptian chronology of the ten kings of the XXII Dynasty, beginning with Shoshenq I (Shisack in Hebrew)'s invasion of Israel (926,925 B.C.) during the time of Rehoboam's reign. (Cf. I Kings 14:35,36; II Chronicles 12:1-9 where this king and this event are recorded.) Both Egyptian and Bible chronologies mirror one another!

We are talking history here. The Bible records this invasion during Rehoboam's reign. Shoshenq chronology confirms the event. And if we can point with accuracy to an event which occurred at the very time the Bible designates Rehoboam and his reign, what assumptions should we come to about the

history immediately preceding it? If Rehoboam is an historical figure, why do we assume arbitrarily that his father (Solomon) is a fictitious/mythical character just because we haven't yet been fortunate enough to find archaeological confirmation? Until recently we have said the same thing for a time about many of the items/people/places mentioned above. Again, lack of evidence does not equal "myth."

In the ninth century B.C., Shalmaneser III (859-824 B.C.) mentions two kings of Israel: Ahab (872-853 B.C.) in 853 B.C. and Jehu (841-818 B.C.) in 841 B.C. Using the Assyrian dates, we can count back the years from 853 B.C. 78 years and arrive at the year of Solomon's death and the beginning of the reigns of both Rehoboam and Jeroboam I (931/930 B.C.) The Biblical chronology *mirrors* these dates. Now, without written records of some kind, how could this clever author(s) of the fifth century B.C., who purportedly conjured up all of this, create such a detailed chronology with such accuracy?

I am not going to go into more detail about Solomon which ties into the hot debate over the tenth century B.C. These involve for example Megiddo, Gezer, and Hazor which the Bible attributes to Solomon with their impressive renovations during this century. We are told in the Bible that Solomon married pharaoh's daughter and gave Gezer to him as her dowry (1 Kings 3:1; 7:8; 9:16,24; 11:1). This Pharaoh was probably Siamun (979-960 B.C.).

In summary, all indications are that Solomon's life took place in the middle of the tenth century B.C. (970-930). Using the Egyptian and Assyrian king lists, which agree with the Biblical royal chronologies, we can pinpoint Solomon's death: 930/931 B.C. We find at this time that the pharaohs were marrying their daughters to various foreign rulers. There is no reason to reject the premise that mini-empires such as David's and Solomon's could flourish in the centuries between 1200-900 B.C. when the power of the two great empires (Egypt and Assyria) began to and did wane.

I do not think one can make a good case that some Hellenistic writer from 300 B.C. would possess the resources/information at that late date to write with such accuracy of the United Kingdom as we find from the biblical sources.

I have borrowed liberally from a host of archaeologists to respond to your question. I have not taken the time to document/footnote all this material which has come from numerous, well-known archaeologists from Europe, Israel, and the U.S.A.

If you would read a wider spectrum of scholars you will find the vast majority reject your major premise on these areas. I can document all of this if necessary.

Jimmy Williams
Probe Ministries

Archaeology and the New Testament

Dr. Patrick Zukeran shows that numerous people, places and events described in the New Testament have been verified by archeology.



This article is also available in [Spanish](#).

There is an ongoing debate among scholars regarding the historical accuracy of the Bible. Some feel that the Bible is a fictitious work and should be read as a work of literary fiction. Others feel it is an accurate historical work divinely inspired by God. Archaeology has played a major role in determining the trustworthiness of the Bible. In a [previous](#)

[article](#), we discussed archaeological confirmations of the Old Testament. In this one, we will look at the archaeological discoveries that have confirmed the historical accuracy of the New Testament. There is a great deal of evidence outside of the Bible that confirms the account of Jesus as written in the Gospels.

It is important to realize, however, that it is unrealistic to expect archaeology to back up every event and place in the New Testament. Our perspective is to look for what evidence exists and see whether or not it corresponds with the New Testament.

Historical Confirmation of Jesus

The first evidence comes from the four Gospels which, themselves, are proven to be accurate.^{1} Outside the biblical text are several witnesses as well. Jewish historian Josephus (37 A.D.100 A.D.) recorded the history of the Jewish people in Palestine from 70 A.D. to 100 A.D. In his work *Antiquities*, he states:

Now there was about this time, Jesus, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works, a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews and many of the gentiles. He was the Christ and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him. For he appeared alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct to this day.^{2}

Although he mentions Jesus in a sarcastic way, Josephus confirms the facts that Jesus did do many great miracles, drew a following, was crucified, and was proclaimed alive on the third day.

Pliny the Younger, Emperor of Bythynia in northwestern Turkey, writing to Emperor Trajan in 112 A.D. writes:

They were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang an anthem to Christ as God, and bound themselves by a solemn oath not to commit any wicked deed, but to abstain from all fraud, theft and adultery, never to break their word, or deny a trust when called upon to honor it; after which it was their custom to separate, and then meet again to partake of food, but ordinary and innocent kind.

One of the most important Romans historians is Tacitus. In 115 A.D. he recorded Nero's persecution of the Christians, in the process of which he wrote the following:

Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judea, . . . but even in Rome.[\[3\]](#)

There are over 39 extra-biblical sources that attest to over one hundred facts regarding the life and teachings of Jesus.

Accuracy of the Gospels

The accuracy of the Gospels has been supported by archaeology. The names of many of the Israelite cities, events, and people described in them have now been located. Here are a few examples.

The Gospels mention four neighboring and well-populated coastal cities along the Sea of Galilee: Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin, and Tiberias. Jesus performed many miracles in the first three cities. Despite this testimony, these cities rejected Jesus and therefore were cursed by Him (Matt. 11:20-24; Luke 10:12-16). These cities eventually disappeared from history and their locations remained missing for

centuries. Their demise fulfills the prophetic condemnation of Jesus.

Only recently has archaeology recovered their possible locations. Tell Hum is believed to be Capernaum. (A "tell" is a mound or elevated land that has arisen by repeated and long-term rebuilding of the same site. Layers of civilizations can be found at different strata). The locations of Bethsaida and Chorazin still remain unconfirmed, but the present site at a tell 1.5 miles north of the Galilean shoreline is believed to be Bethsaida, while Tell Khirbet Kerezah, 2.5 miles northwest of Capernaum, is thought to be Chorazin.

Matthew 2 states that Jesus was born during the reign of Herod. Upon hearing that a king had been born, the frightened Herod ordered all children under the age of two to be killed. His slaughter of innocents is consistent with the historical facts that describe his character. Herod was suspicious of anyone whom he thought may take his throne. His list of victims included one of his ten wives, who was his favorite, three of his own sons, a high priest, an ex-king, and two of his sister's husbands. Thus, his brutality portrayed in Matthew is consistent with his description in ancient history.

John's accuracy has also been attested to by recent discoveries. In John 5:1-15 Jesus heals a man at the Pool of Bethesda. John describes the pool as having five porticoes. This site had long been in dispute until recently. Forty feet underground, archaeologists discovered a pool with five porticoes, and the description of the surrounding area matches John's description. In 9:7 John mentions another long disputed site, the Pool of Siloam. However, this pool was also discovered in 1897, upholding the accuracy of John.

Evidence for Pontius Pilate, the governor who presided over the trial of Jesus, was discovered in Caesarea Maritima. In 1961, an Italian archaeologist named Antonio Frova uncovered a fragment of a plaque that was used as a section of steps

leading to the Caesarea Theater. The inscription, written in Latin, contained the phrase, "Pontius Pilatus, Prefect of Judea has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius." This temple is dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius who reigned from 1437 A.D. This fits well chronologically with the New Testament which records that Pilot ruled as procurator from 2636 A.D. Tacitus, a Roman historian of the first century, also confirms the New Testament designation of Pilate. He writes, "Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus. . . ."

Confirmation Regarding the Crucifixion

All four Gospels give details of the crucifixion of Christ. Their accurate portrayal of this Roman practice has been confirmed by archaeology. In 1968, a gravesite in the city of Jerusalem was uncovered containing thirty-five bodies. Each of the men had died a brutal death which historians believe was the result of their involvement in the Jewish revolt against Rome in 70 A.D.

The inscription identified one individual as Yohan Ben Ha'galgol. Studies of the bones performed by osteologists and doctors from the Hadassah Medical School determined the man was twenty-eight years old, stood five feet six inches, and had some slight facial defects due to a cleft right palate.

What intrigued archaeologists were the evidences that this man had been crucified in a manner resembling the crucifixion of Christ. A seven-inch nail had been driven through both feet, which were turned outward so the nail could be hammered inside the Achilles tendon.

Archaeologists also discovered that nails had been driven through his lower forearms. A victim of a crucifixion would have to raise and lower his body in order to breathe. To do

this, he needed to push up on his pierced feet and pull up with his arms. Yohan's upper arms were smoothly worn, indicating this movement.

John records that in order to expedite the death of a prisoner, executioners broke the legs of the victim so that he could not lift himself up by pushing with his feet (19:31-33). Yohan's legs were found crushed by a blow, breaking them below the knee. The Dead Sea Scrolls tell that both Jews and Romans abhorred crucifixion due to its cruelty and humiliation. The scrolls also state it was a punishment reserved for slaves and any who challenged the ruling powers of Rome. This explains why Pilate chose crucifixion as the penalty for Jesus.

Relating to the crucifixion, in 1878 a stone slab was found in Nazareth with a decree from Emperor Claudius who reigned from 41-54 A.D. It stated that graves must not be disturbed nor bodies to be removed. The punishment on other decrees is a fine but this one threatens death and comes very close to the time of the resurrection. This was probably due to Claudius investigating the riots of 49 A.D. He had certainly heard of the resurrection and did not want any similar incidents. This decree was probably made in connection with the Apostles' preaching of Jesus' resurrection and the Jewish argument that the body had been stolen.

Historian Thallus wrote in 52 A.D. Although none of his texts remain, his work is cited by Julius Africanus' work, *Chronography*. Quoting Thallus on the crucifixion of Christ, Africanus states, "On the whole world, there pressed a most fearful darkness, and the rocks were rent by an earthquake, and many places in Judea and other districts were thrown down." [\[4\]](#) Thallus calls this darkness, "as appears to me without reason, an eclipse of the sun." [\[5\]](#)

All the discoveries made are consistent with the details in the crucifixion account given by the writers of the Gospels. These facts lend indirect support for the biblical accounts of

Jesus' crucifixion and that the tomb was empty.

Historical Accuracy of Luke

At one time, scholars did not view Luke's historical accounts in his Gospel and Acts as accurate. There appeared to be no evidence for several cities, persons, and locations that he named in his works. However, archaeological advances have revealed that Luke was a very accurate historian and the two books he has authored remain accurate documents of history.

One of the greatest archaeologists is the late Sir William Ramsay. He studied under the famous liberal German historical schools in the mid-nineteenth century. Known for its scholarship, this school taught that the New Testament was not a historical document. With this premise, Ramsay investigated biblical claims as he searched through Asia Minor. What he discovered caused him to reverse his initial view. He wrote:

I began with a mind unfavorable to it [Acts], for the ingenuity and apparent completeness of the Tübingen theory had at one time quite convinced me. It did not then in my line of life to investigate the subject minutely; but more recently I found myself often brought into contact with the Book of Acts as an authority for the topography, antiquities, and society of Asia Minor. It was gradually borne in upon me that in various details the narrative showed marvelous truth.[\[6\]](#)

Luke's accuracy is demonstrated by the fact that he names key historical figures in the correct time sequence as well as correct titles to government officials in various areas: Thessalonica, politarchs; Ephesus, temple wardens; Cyprus, proconsul; and Malta, the first man of the island.

In Luke's announcement of Jesus' public ministry (Luke 3:1), he mentions, "Lysanias tetrarch of Abilene." Scholars questioned Luke's credibility since the only Lysanias known

for centuries was a ruler of Chalcis who ruled from 4036 B.C. However an inscription dating to be in the time of Tiberius, who ruled from 1437 A.D., was found recording a temple dedication which names Lysanius as the “tetrarch of Abila” near Damascus. This matches well with Luke’s account.

In Acts 18:12-17, Paul was brought before Gallio, the proconsul of Achaia. Once again archaeology confirms this account. At Delphi an inscription of a letter from Emperor Claudius was discovered. In it he states, “Lucius Junios Gallio, my friend, and the proconsul of Achaia . . .”[\[7\]](#) Historians date the inscription to 52 A.D. which corresponds to the time of the apostle’s stay in 51.

In Acts 19:22 and Romans 16:23, Erastus, a coworker of Paul, is named the Corinthian city treasurer. Archaeologists excavating a Corinthian theatre in 1928 discovered an inscription. It reads, “Erastus in return for his aedilship laid the pavement at his own expense.” The pavement was laid in 50 A.D. The designation of treasurer describes the work of a Corinthian aedile.

In Acts 28:7, Luke gives Publius, the chief man on the island of Malta, the title, “first man of the island.” Scholars questioned this strange title and deemed it unhistorical. Inscriptions have recently been discovered on the island that indeed gives Publius the title of “first man.”

“In all, Luke names thirty-two countries, fifty-four cities, and nine islands without error.”[\[8\]](#) A. N. Sherwin-White states, “For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . Any attempt to reject its basic historicity must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted.”[\[9\]](#)

The Shroud of Turin

The Gospels record that after His crucifixion Jesus was

wrapped in a long linen cloth and placed in the tomb (Matt. 27:59). John records that when Peter investigated the empty tomb, he found the burial cloth folded neatly next to where Christ once laid (20:6-7).

A linen shroud called the Shroud of Turin, on display at the Vatican, has been claimed to be that burial cloth. It is 14.25 feet long and 3.5 feet wide. On it is an image with pierced wrists and ankles believed to be that of Christ.

The shroud first appeared for public display sometime after 1357 in Lirey, France. A knight named Geoffrey de Charny brought the shroud to France. In 1453 de Charny's granddaughter gave the shroud to the Duke of Savoy who then in 1578 brought it to Turin, Italy. In 1983, it was willed to the Vatican.

In 1898, Secondo Pia photographed the shroud and believed the image was a negative image like that of a photograph. This added to the mystery of the shroud since photography had not been invented during medieval times. In 1973 a group of experts confirmed the fact that no pigment of paint was found even under magnification. For many, this was proof of the shroud's authenticity.

The most extensive study was undertaken in 1977. An international team of Swiss, American, and Italian scientist studied the shroud for five days at the Savoy Royal Palace at Turin. They used six tons of equipment and 2.5 million dollars for their research. It has been one of the most intensely studied artifacts of all time.

The study could not determine the authenticity of the fabric. Experiments that followed proved the image contained blood as well as aragonite, a particular calcium carbonate that is found in Jerusalem's first century tombs. Swiss criminologist Max Frei found forty-eight samples of pollen, of which seven could have come from plants in Palestine. The weave of the

cloth was herringbone twill, a style that existed in ancient times.

Although these findings supported the authenticity of the shroud, other findings testified otherwise. In 1987, the shroud was carbon 14 tested to verify its date. Laboratories in Oxford, Zurich, and the University of Arizona tested the cloth. The result indicated a fourteenth century date for the shroud. This conclusion continues to be challenged and future tests are sure to follow. Another problem is that coins minted by Pontius Pilate were placed over the eyes of the figure. This was not a Jewish custom, nor does it seem likely that Joseph of Arimathea or Nicodemus would have placed on Jesus' eyes a coin with the image of the leader who condemned him.

Despite the fourteenth century date, scientists are still unable to explain how the negative image was created. The shroud remains a mystery as well as a lesson for us as believers that we should not put our faith in mysterious articles.

Notes

1. See "[Authority of the Bible](http://probe.org/authority-of-the-bible-a-strong-argument-for-christianity/)" at probe.org/authority-of-the-bible-a-strong-argument-for-christianity/.
2. Josephus, Book 18, Chapter 3:3
3. Tacitus, *Annals*, 15.44
4. Julius Africanus, *Chronography*, 18:1.
5. Ibid.
6. William Ramsay, *St. Paul the Traveler and the Roman Citizen* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1982), 8.
7. John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1991), 227.
8. Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI.: Baker Books, 1999), 47.
9. A. N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 189.

