

# Archaeology and the Bible

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*Archaeology is important for biblical studies in a number of indirect ways. It not only shines light on the geographical, cultural, political, and religious backgrounds of biblical texts but also helps our understanding of biblical languages and provides insight for textual criticism. Texts discovered at Tell el-Amarna (Amarna letters), Tell-Mardikh (Ebla tablets), Tell-Hariri (Mari tablets), Yorghun Tepe (Nuzi tablets), Ras Shamra (Ugarit archives), Boghazkoy (Boghazkoy tablets), Qumran (Dead Sea Scrolls), and Jerusalem (silver amulet scrolls) are examples of archaeological finds that are tremendously important for these reasons.*

*My focus here is on archaeological finds that have a more direct connection with the Bible. I am concentrating on finds that connect to specific people, places, and events mentioned in Scripture. I do not include discoveries of biblical towns, cities, and people groups unless there is something additional that in my judgment makes those finds particularly noteworthy. I will begin with finds or sites that are relevant to the patriarchal period and proceed chronologically.\**

## I. From Abraham to the Sojourn in Egypt

(2166 – 1876 B.C.)<sup>1</sup>

A. Boghazkoy Tablets – The Hittites are first mentioned in Scripture in Genesis 15 where God promises Abraham that

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\*) The sources consulted in this study are listed at the end.

<sup>1</sup> The dating of Abraham is reckoned as follows:

- a. Solomon's temple begun - **966 B.C.** (1) The Battle of Qarqar can be dated reliably to 853 B.C. (2) Ahab was ruling Israel (northern kingdom) during this battle, and Jehu paid tribute to Assyrian king Shalmaneser during his 18<sup>th</sup> year, which means in 841 B.C. Twelve years separate the reigns of Ahab and Jehu, so 853 B.C. was Ahab's last year and 841 B.C. was Jehu's first year. (3) One can work back from this to the date Jeroboam I began to reign in the northern kingdom of Israel, which was 931/930 B.C. Since he began to reign when Solomon died and Rehoboam assumed the reign of the southern kingdom of Judah, one can date Solomon's death at 931/930 B.C. Since Solomon reigned for 40 years (1 Ki. 11:42), one can determine that he began to reign in 971/970 B.C. 1 Ki. 6:1 says Solomon began to build the temple in the fourth year of his reign, which makes the date around 966 B.C.
- b. The Exodus - **1446 B.C.** - 966 + 480 (1 Ki. 6:1)
- c. Beginning of Israel's sojourn in Egypt (Jacob's migration there) - **1876 B.C.** - 1446 + 430 (Ex. 12:40). Gal. 3:17 means the law was introduced at Sinai 430 years after the period of the giving and renewal of the Abrahamic covenant to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not after its initial promulgation in Gen. 12:1-3. In Gleason Archer's words, "Paul is simply referring to the well-known period of the Egyptian sojourn, which separated the patriarchal age from the lawgiving at Mount Sinai." Gleason Archer, "The Chronology of the Old Testament" in Frank E. Gaebelien, ed., *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979) 1:363.
- d. Abraham's birth - **2166 B.C.** - 1876 + 290 (Gen. 47:9 says Jacob 130 when went to Egypt; Gen. 25:20, 26 say Isaac 60 when Jacob born; Gen. 21:6 says Abraham was 100 when Isaac was born)

he will give his descendants the land of various groups of people, one of whom was the Hittites. Just over a century ago, some scholars were suggesting that the Hittites, who are mentioned in about 57 verses in the Old Testament, were a fictional creation of the biblical writers. They jumped to that conclusion because there was no extrabiblical evidence of the Hittites' existence.

In the early twentieth century, thousands of written tablets were discovered by Hugo Winckler at Boghazkoy (ancient Hattusa), Turkey, about 130 miles east of Ankara. The language was deciphered in 1915 by Bedrich Hrozný which revealed that the tablets were the royal archives of Hittite kings from the fourteenth and thirteenth centuries B.C. Though this is later than Abraham, I include it here because it supports the reference from Abraham's day.

B. Abraham's Family Tomb – The cave/field of Machpelah is the burial place of at least Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, Jacob, and Leah (Genesis 23, 25:8-10, 49:29-33, 50:12-13). (Rachel was not buried there because of her sudden death during childbirth near Bethlehem – Gen. 35:19.) This tomb is fairly certainly located in Hebron at the site of the Muslim mosque known as Haram el-Khalil.

In the first century B.C., Herod the Great built an enclosure wall around the area and erected monuments in honor of the patriarchal figures. A church was built on the site in the fifth or sixth century A.D., which was later converted into a mosque, converted back to a church, and then converted back into a mosque.

The underground chambers where the patriarchal figures would have been entombed have received little investigation. The first recorded exploration of the cave was done by Augustinian monks in A.D. 1119. In 1967, after the Six-Day War, Moshe Dayan lowered a twelve-year-old girl with a flashlight into the underground chamber, and she described an arrangement similar to that recorded by the monks.

## II. Israel's Sojourn in Egypt (1876 – 1446 B.C.)

## III. Exodus and Wilderness Wandering (1446 – 1406 B.C.)

## IV. Conquest and the Judges (1406 – 1051 B.C.)

A. Jericho – Around 1400 B.C., the Israelites, through a miracle of God, conquered the city of Jericho (Joshua 6). Joshua 6:24 specifies that they burned the city and everything in it.

In the 1930s the British archaeologist John Garstang excavated ancient Jericho (Tell es-Sultan) and found a collapsed city wall and evidence that the city had been destroyed by fire. Based on pottery finds, Garstang dated the destruction to around 1400 B.C. He wrote in "Jericho and the Biblical Story," in *Wonders of the Past*, ed. J. A. Hammerton (New York: Wise, 1937), 1222:

In a word, in all material details and in date the fall of Jericho took place as described in the Biblical narrative. Our demonstration is limited, however, to material observations: the walls fell, shaken apparently by earthquake, and the city was destroyed by fire, about 1400 B.C. These are the basic facts resulting from our investigations. The link with Joshua and the Israelites is only circumstantial but it seems to be solid and without a flaw.

His conclusions were controversial, and in the 1950s, at his request, another British archaeologist named Kathleen Kenyon conducted further excavations. She confirmed that the city had been thoroughly destroyed by fire and found many jars filled with burned grain, which fits with the swiftness of Joshua's conquest. She concluded, however, as had an earlier archaeologist, that the destruction occurred around 1550 B.C., meaning there was no city for Joshua to conquer in 1400 B.C.

In the late 1980s, archaeologist Bryant Wood criticized Kenyon's dating analysis and found that four lines of evidence (ceramic data, stratigraphical considerations, scarab evidence, and radiocarbon dating) support Garstang's dating over Kenyon's.<sup>2</sup> He states, "All this evidence converges to demonstrate that City IV was destroyed in about 1400 B.C.E., *not* 1550 B.C.E. as Kenyon maintained."

B. Hazor – Hazor is described in Josh. 11:10 as "the head" of all the kingdoms of northern Canaan. It too was burned during the Israelite conquest (Josh. 11:11-13).

The average city in Palestine at this time covered about 15-20 acres, whereas Hazor (Tell el-Kedakh) occupied 200 acres. This confirms its description as the leading city of the area.

Yigael Yadin excavated Hazor from 1955-1958 and again in 1968. Excavations resumed in 1990 under the direction of Amnon Ben-Tor. The site shows the city was destroyed by fire on a number of occasions, one of which arguably was around 1400 B.C. For a recent, nontechnical discussion of the dating, see Doug Petrovich, "The Dating of Hazor's Destruction in Joshua 11 Via Biblical, Archaeological, and Epigraphical Evidence" at <http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2011/01/06/The-Dating-of-Hazors-Destruction-in-Joshua-11-Via-Biblical-Archaeological-and-Epigraphical-Evidence.aspx>.

C. Merenptah Stela – Merenptah (commonly known as Merneptah) was Pharaoh in Egypt from 1213-1203 B.C. After he died, he was eulogized poetically in a stela<sup>3</sup> extolling his great accomplishments. This stela was discovered by Flinders Petrie in 1896 in a temple in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt. Merneptah is presented as declaring the following with regard to his military campaign in Canaan which took place around 1210 B.C.:

The (foreign) chieftains lie prostrate, saying "Peace." Not one lifts his head among the Nine Bows. Libya is captured, while Hatti is pacified. Canaan is plundered, Ashkelon is carried off, and Gezer is captured. Yenoam is made into non-existence; **Israel is wasted, its seed is not**; and Hurru is become a widow because of Egypt. All lands united themselves in peace. Those who went about are subdued by the king of Upper and Lower Egypt...Merneptah.

This the only direct reference to Israel in Egyptian records and the only reference to Israel outside the Bible prior to 930 B.C., the time of the divided kingdom. The word for Israel has a marker indicating it is referring to a people-group, as opposed to the other named nations and city-states that have a marker indicating they are political entities. That fits well with Israel's identity as a tribal community during the time of the Judges.

The boasting on Merneptah's behalf certainly is not to be taken literally. Many scholars doubt that Merneptah even came into contact with Israel; they think Israel was included simply to round out the list of names representing the inhabitants of the land. Whatever the extent of this campaign in Canaan, God chose not to mention it in Scripture.

D. Shechem Temple – In Josh. 24:26-27 Joshua erects a large stone by the sanctuary of the Lord in Shechem. In

<sup>2</sup> See

<http://www.biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/05/D-id-the-Israelites-Conquer-Jericho-A-New-Look-at-the-Archaeological-Evidence.aspx>.

<sup>3</sup> A stela (stee-luh), also called a stele (stee-lee), is an ancient, upright stone slab with markings.

Judges 9, maybe 250 years later, the people have apostatized (Judg. 8:33-34) and apparently converted the sanctuary at Shechem into a temple devoted to Baal-berith (Baal of the covenant) (Judg. 9:4). It seems to be the same location as Josh. 24:26-27, since both accounts are at Shechem and both refer to a large stone, a tree, and a sanctuary.

Excavations last century revealed a temple at Shechem (Tell Balata) with a courtyard and a large stone in front. Archaeologist James Hoffmeier declares, "Mention was made earlier of the temple discovered at Shechem with the standing stela outside its forecourt. This temple is almost certainly the one mentioned in Judges 9."<sup>4</sup>

The Shechem site also reveals that the city was destroyed around 1125 B.C., which fits the time of Abimelech. Judges 9:45 says that Abimelech fought against Shechem and "razed the city."

## V. Saul, David, and Solomon (1051 – 930 B.C.)

A. Papyrus Anastasi I – This is not a direct connection with Scripture, but I wanted to mention it anyway. John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas write in reference to Goliath:

Champions of this size are not simply a figment of Israelite imagination or the result of embellished legends. The Egyptian letter on Papyrus Anastasi I (thirteenth century B.C.) describes fierce warriors in Canaan who are seven to nine feet tall. Additionally, two female skeletons about seven feet tall from the twelfth century have been found at Tell es-Sa'ideyeh in Transjordan.<sup>5</sup>

The part about Papyrus Anastasi I is correct.<sup>6</sup> The part about the female skeletons from Tell es-Sa'ideyeh is incorrect. According to Jonathan Tubb, the man in charge of the excavation at Tell es-Sa'ideyeh, no such skeletons were found there.

<sup>4</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, *Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion Hudson, 2008), 71.

<sup>5</sup> John Walton, Victor Matthews, and Mark Chavalas, *IVP Background Bible Commentary Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 306-307.

<sup>6</sup> The text is available at [http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/anastasi\\_i.htm](http://www.reshafim.org.il/ad/egypt/texts/anastasi_i.htm). The relevant portion states: "The (?) narrow defile is infested (?) with Shosu concealed beneath the bushes; some of them are of four cubits or of five cubits, from head (??) to foot (?), fierce of face, their heart is not mild, and they hearken not to coaxing. Thou art alone, there is no helper (?) with thee, no army behind thee. Thou findest no ////////////// to make for thee a way of crossing." The estimate for an Egyptian cubit is 52.5 cm = 20.66 in.

B. Pool of Gibeon – 2 Samuel 2:12-17 reports the contest between the twelve men of Abner, commander of Ishbosheth's forces, and the twelve men of Joab, commander of David's forces, at the Pool of Gibeon. This is the same site where, after the fall of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C., Johanan son of Kareah came upon Ishmael the son of Nethaniah in Jer. 41:11-12.

This pool or reservoir was discovered in excavations of the town in 1956-1960 by James Pritchard. A hole about 36 feet in diameter was cut through limestone bedrock down to a level floor at about 37 feet. A staircase and railing were cut into the limestone winding down to the level floor. From there, the stairs drop straight down through a tunnel for another 45 feet to the water table. It apparently was built to provide the inhabitants with a secure supply of water during a time of siege.

## VI. Divided Kingdom (Israel and Judah: 930 – 722 B.C.)

A. Shishak Inscription – 1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chron. 12:1-9 report that in the fifth year of the reign of the Judean king Rehoboam, Shishak king of Egypt captured fortified cities in Judah and was bought off with treasures when he came against Jerusalem. This is the same Shishak who earlier had given refuge to Jeroboam when he fled from Solomon (1 Ki. 11:40).

In 1825 an inscription dating from 920 B.C. was found at the temple of Amon in Thebes (modern Luxor), Egypt which confirms this raid by Shishak. Shishak is said in the inscription to have destroyed many cities in Judah (and Israel) but Jerusalem is not among them.

B. Ivory of Samaria – Ahab was king of Israel from about 874-853 B.C. 1 Kings 22:39 reports that he built an "ivory house," probably meaning a house full of ivory inlays in furniture and wall panels. Ivory was a luxury item, which is why Amos about a century later referred to it in Amos 6:1, 4 as a symbol of opulence and false security. He decried, "Woe to those who are at ease in Zion, and to those who feel secure on the mountain of Samaria . . . Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couches . . ."

Excavations last century uncovered the royal palace in Samaria from the time of Omri and Ahab. They also uncovered the remains of more than two hundred fragments of ivory inlay found in a storehouse near the palace.

C. Stela of Shalmaneser III (Kurkh Stele) – 1 Kings 20 reports Ahab's victory over the Syrian king Ben-hadad. Rather than kill Ben-hadad, Ahab makes a covenant with him and releases him. A prophet then condemns Ahab for having done so. 1 Kings 22:1 says that Israel and Syria were at peace for three years.

Ahab may have been tempted to make a covenant with Ben-hadad because of the rising threat posed by the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, who ruled in Assyria from 858-824 B.C. Shalmaneser was making his way west-

ward until he was temporarily checked in 853 B.C. in the battle of Qarqar, about 150 miles north of Damascus. Shalmanesser's annals of this campaign are inscribed on a stela found in 1861 in Kurkh by a British consul named J. C. Taylor. Shalmanesser claims he had a great victory at Qarqar, bragging that he choked the river with his enemies' corpses, but the fact he did not occupy the land and did not undertake another campaign to the west for a number of years makes it clear that he suffered a setback there.

What is significant is that Shalmanesser specifically refers to Ben-hadad (Hadad-ezer of Aram) and "Ahab the Israelite." He also represents them as allies fighting against him at Qarqar right in the time frame Scripture records they were at peace with one another.

D. Mesha Stela (Moabite Stone) – The three years of peaceful alliance between Israel and Syria ended soon after the battle of Qarqar (853 B.C.) when Ahab recruited Jehoshaphat the king of Judah to help him recover Ramoth-gilead from the king of Syria. In keeping with Ma-caiah's prophecy, Ahab was killed in the battle, and his son Ahaziah became king of Israel. 2 Kings 1:1, 3:4-5 note that when Ahab died Mesha the king of Moab, who had been paying tribute to Israel, rebelled against the king of Israel.

In 1868 a Bedouin in Jordan discovered a stela (3 feet high and 2 feet wide) containing 35 lines of inscription celebrating the accomplishments of Mesha the king of Moab, which he brought to the attention of a German missionary named F. A. Klein. This stela is believed to have been commissioned by Mesha somewhere between 840-820 B.C. Fortunately, a papier-mache cast (a squeeze) of the inscription was made by Ya'qub Karavaca. I say fortunately because the Bedouins, not liking that the Turks were brought in to help negotiate the purchase of the stone, broke it into scores of pieces. Some 57 pieces comprising about two-thirds of the inscription ultimately were purchased. Using the paper cast, a French scholar named Charles Clermont-Ganneau reconstructed the entire inscription in 1870.

The inscription records that the Israelite King Omri and his sons had ruled over Moab for many years but that Mesha threw off their domination. It recounts a military campaign that he waged to recover some land from Israel. This presumably was part of the initial "rebellion" mentioned in 2 Ki. 1:1, 3:5, which prompted Ahaziah's successor, Jehoram (Joram), to recruit Jehoshaphat the king of Judah to fight against Moab. Though Israel and Judah (and Edom) inflicted losses on Moab, Jehoram (Joram) failed to reinstitute Israelite control over Moab (2 Kings 3). The inscription also refers to "Yahweh," the God of Israel.

In 1994 Andre Lemaire reconstructed the text at a break near the end of the inscription to read "And the house [of Da]vid dwelt in Horonen." If that is correct, it is one of only two (possibly three – Shoshenq I inscription per Kitchen) mentions of David outside the Bible.

E. Tell Dan Stela – 2 Kings 8:25-29 reports that Jehoram (Joram), the king of Israel, and Ahaziah, the recently installed king of Judah, made war against Hazael king of Syria at Ramoth-gilead. Hazael had become king of Syria by murdering Ben-hadad. Ahaziah was Jehoram's nephew (2 Ki. 8:26) and walked in the wicked ways of Ahab's house. Jehoram (Joram) was wounded in the battle at Ramoth-gilead and went to Jezreel to convalesce. Ahaziah visited him there. This is around 842 B.C.

Jehu was a military commander in Israel (2 Ki. 9:5) whom God called to destroy the wicked house of Ahab in order to avenge on Jezebel the blood of the prophets and the other servants of God (2 Ki. 9:7). He killed Jehoram (Joram) at Jezreel, and his men mortally wounded the fleeing Ahaziah, who subsequently died at Megiddo. Jehu served as king of Israel from around 842-814 B.C. (2 Kings 9-10).

In excavations at Dan in northern Israel in 1993 and 1994, Avraham Biran found pieces of a stela dating from the mid- to late-ninth century B.C. The stela was commissioned by a Syrian king who refers to his battle with the kings of Israel and Judah. Though the names of the kings of Israel and Judah are only partially preserved, the only pair of kings that could fit what is preserved is Jehoram (Joram) and Ahaziah. So this stela very likely was commissioned by Hazael to brag about military accomplishments at the beginning of his reign.

In this stela, Hazael may claim to have killed Jehoram (Joram) and Ahaziah, which obviously conflicts with the scriptural record which reports that Jehu killed them. I say may claim because Shigeo Yamada translates the verb here as "strike, defeat" rather than "kill." Its usual sense, however, is "kill." If Hazael does indeed claim to have killed both kings, it is not hard to believe that he would take credit for their deaths since both kings had been fighting in the battle, Jehoram (Joram) had even been wounded, and both kings died soon after the battle (within the time Jehoram was still recovering from his wounds). Even if he knew about Jehu, claiming credit for their deaths is conceivable, especially in a piece of propaganda, because it was his forces that wounded Jehoram thus setting the stage for Jehoram and Ahaziah being vulnerable at Jezreel.

This stela refers to Ahaziah as being of the "house of David." There are only two other possible mentions of David outside the Bible (Moabite Stone and Shoshenq I inscription per Kitchen), so this is very significant. Prior to these discoveries, a number of modern scholars dismissed the David narratives as propaganda fabricated in Babylonian captivity to give Israel a respectable history.

F. Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III – After destroying the house of Ahab (2 Kings 9-10), Jehu ruled as king of Israel from around 842-814 B.C. In 1846 Austen Henry Layard discovered in Calah (modern Nimrud) a four-sided pillar of black limestone that is 6 feet six inches high. It is

known as the Black Obelisk<sup>7</sup> of Shalmanesser III because it commemorates through relief sculptures and inscriptions military campaigns during his reign.

He says that in the campaign in 841 B.C. he besieged Damascus, which was governed by Hazael, and received tribute from Jehu. Panels depict Israelites carrying various items of tribute and one shows Jehu, or more probably his ambassador, bowing before Shalmanesser. It is more probably Jehu's ambassador because his dress is not distinctive which is what one would expect for a king. The inscription identifies the supplicant as "Jehu, son of Omri" and says "I received from him silver, gold, a golden saplu-bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king, [and] wooden pu-ruhtu."

Jehu's paying tribute to Shalmanesser is not mentioned in Scripture, but it seems he opted as a new king to buy peace with Assyria rather than engage them in war. He is described as "son of Omri" not because he is a descendant of Omri but because Omri (1 Ki. 16:15-29) had been made such an impression on the Assyrians that all subsequent rulers of the land were identified with him; the "house of Omri" had become the Assyrian name for the land of Israel.

G. Rimah Inscription – Jehoash (Joash) king of Israel (not to be confused with the Joash [Jehoash] who was earlier king of Judah) is mentioned in 2 Kings 13. He reigned from around 802-786 B.C. A 51-inch high stela was discovered in 1967 at Tell al-Rimah in Iraq which recounts military efforts of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III, who reigned from around 810-782 B.C. The inscription states that Adad-nirari "received the tribute of Joash of Samaria." This probably occurred during Adad-nirari's western campaign of 796 B.C.

H. Shema' Seal – The eighth century B.C. ushered in prosperous times for both Israel and Judah. Jeroboam II ruled in Israel from 793-753 B.C., and Uzziah (Azariah) ruled in Judah from 792-740 B.C. Assyria, under Adad-nirari III (810-782 B.C.), had vanquished Damascus in 802 B.C., which freed Israel from Syria's (Aram's) dominance. Then in the first half of the eighth century B.C., Assyria itself went into a temporary decline. Under these circumstances, Jeroboam II and Uzziah (Azariah) brought Israel and Judah to a prominence second only to Solomon's golden age. The kingdoms prospered financially and expanded their borders.

The ancient seal was a stamp or engraving of a design or inscription or both set in a hard substance like stone or metal. It was used to make an impression on clay or wax and functioned like a modern signature. A person's unique seal was put on an object as a sign of authenticity or ownership.

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<sup>7</sup> An obelisk is a pillar of stone set up as a monument usually having four sides and tapering at the top.

In excavations at Megiddo in 1904, Gottlieb Schumacher uncovered a large and beautifully made jasper seal that from the style of the inscribed letters was dated to the early eighth century B.C. Above the roaring lion is the name of the seal's owner and below it his title: "(Belonging) to Shema' servant (of) Jeroboam." Shema' was evidently a high official in the administration of Jeroboam II, but since he is not mentioned in the Bible we do not know what his duties were. The seal disappeared after being sent to the Turkish Sultan in Istanbul, but before it was sent to him a bronze cast was made, which is now at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem.

I. Uzziah Seals – There are two ancient seals mentioning King Uzziah (Azariah), both of which are of unknown origin and are in the Louvre Museum in Paris. One is a ring seal made of agate that measures 0.63 x 0.47 inches. It has an Egyptian motif, and the inscription reads: "(Belonging) to Abiah servant of Uzziah." The other is a two-sided seal measuring 0.87 x 0.63 inches. The side with the man carrying the staff has the name "Shebaniah." The other side says "(Belonging) to Shebaniah servant of Uzziah."

Uzziah also is mentioned in an inscription dating from between 130 B.C. – A.D. 70 (so centuries after Uzziah died). It is part of the antiquities collection at the Russian Convent on the Mount of Olives that was acquired in the late 1800s. It says "Here were brought the bones of Uzziah king of Judah -- do not open!" From this it appears that Uzziah's bones were moved to another place some 600-700 years after their original interment. Perhaps, since he was a leper (2 Chron. 26:21-23), some felt his remains were unclean and needed to be moved outside the City of David.

J. Annals of Tiglath-pileser III – 2 Kings 15:19-20 reports that Menahem, who was king of Israel from around 746-737 B.C., paid the Assyrian king Pul, better known as Tiglath-pileser III, a thousand talents of silver. The so-called "annals" of Tiglath-pileser, which are inscribed clay tablets discovered by Layard at Calah (modern Nimrud) in 1845, state that Tiglath-pileser "received tribute from . . . Menahem of Samaria" (ANET, 283) and others and includes silver in the itemization of the collective tribute that was paid.

K. Building Inscription of Tiglath-pileser III – In 2 Kings 16 the Judean king Ahaz is attacked by Pekah king of Israel and Rezin king of Syria, presumably to force him to join their alliance against Assyria (see also Isa. 7:1-6). The chronology of Ahaz's reign is very difficult to sort out, but it seems to have run from 743-715 B.C. with part of that time involving co-regencies of some kind.<sup>8</sup> Around 734 B.C. he appealed to Assyria for help, as noted in 2

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<sup>8</sup> See Eugene H. Merrill, *Kingdom of Priests A History of Old Testament Israel* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 402-404; Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A History of Israel From the Bronze Age Through the Jewish Wars* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1998), 371.

Kings 16, sending silver and gold and agreeing to become an Assyrian vassal. A building inscription from Tiglath-pileser's reign lists among those from whom he received tribute "Jehoahaz (the longer form of Ahaz's name) of Judah" (ANET, 282).

L. Annals and Relief of Tiglath-pileser III – Tiglath-pileser gladly responded to Ahaz's request. 2 Kings 15:29 (see also 1 Chron. 5:6, 26) states "In the days of Pekah king of Israel, Tiglath-pileser king of Assyria came and captured Ijon, Abel-beth-maacah, Janoah, Kedesh, Hazor, Gilead, and Galilee, all the land of Naphtali, and he carried the people captive to Assyria." This invasion is recorded in Tiglath-pileser's annals for the years 733-732 B.C. He says he took the inhabitants of Israel (lit. "Omri-land") to Assyria and mentions some towns in Galilee. A relief scene celebrates the capture of Ashteroth just north of Gilead.

Tiglath-pileser also says in his annals that they (the Israelites) overthrew Pekah and that he placed Hoshea as king over them (ANET, 284). This fits nicely with the report in 2 Ki. 15:30 that Hoshea struck down Pekah at that time. And, of course, Tiglath-pileser was no friend to Judah (2 Chron. 28:16-21).

M. Ahaz Seals – In 1998 Robert Deutsch published a reddish brown seal (actually a bulla)<sup>9</sup> from a private collection with the following inscription: "Ahaz (son of) Jehotham [long form of Jotham], king of Judah." So both Ahaz and his father Jotham are listed on this seal. Deutsch also published another seal from Ahaz's reign which reads: "Ushna servant of Ahaz." Ahaz also is mentioned in a seal that names him as the father of Hezekiah (see below).

N. Hoshea Seal – Hoshea was the last king of the northern kingdom of Israel. He reigned from around 732-722 B.C. In 1995 Andre Lemaire published a seal from a private collection that was dated by the style and iconography to Samaria around 750-722 B.C. It measures about 1 x 0.66 inches, and the Hebrew inscription reads, "Belonging to Abdi, servant/minister of Hoshea."

O. Sargon's Palace – Isaiah 20:1 mentions that the Philistine city of Ashdod was captured by a military commander sent by Sargon king of Assyria. This is the only place in ancient literature that mentions this Sargon, and for that reason many concluded he was a fictional character.

In 1843, Paul Emile Botta discovered in Dur-Sharrukin (modern Khorsabad), about 12 miles northeast of Nineveh, a large palace that Sargon had begun building. The site was extensively reinvestigated by the Oriental Institute of

the University of Chicago nearly a century after Botta's work, and additional texts and inscriptions were recovered.

The entrance to the throne room was guarded by a massive pair of human-headed, winged bulls, measuring about 14 feet high, and an inscription refers to Sargon as "conqueror of Samaria and of the entire [country of] Israel" (lit. Omri-land). The attack on Ashdod noted in Isa. 20:1, which occurred around 712 B.C., also is confirmed in various inscriptions from Khorsabad (ANET, 285-286).

2 Kings 17:1-6 reports the fall of Samaria and the deportation of its people in 722-721 B.C. Sargon II succeeded Shalmaneser V as king of Assyria right around this time, and there is some uncertainty about Sargon's role in the actual fall of Samaria, though he certainly claims credit for it some years later.

## VII. Southern Kingdom Alone (Judah: 722 – 586 B.C.)

A. Taylor Prism – 2 Kings 18:7 states that Hezekiah king of Judah rebelled against the king of Assyria. 2 Kings 18:13 reports that in the fourteenth year of Hezekiah's reign Sennacherib, who was king of Assyria from around 704-681 B.C., captured the fortified cities of Judah. Hezekiah sent word to Sennacherib at Lachish confessing that he had done wrong and offering to pay whatever tribute Sennacherib imposed. Sennacherib demanded 300 talents of silver and 30 talents of gold, a talent being roughly 75 pounds, and Hezekiah sent all that he could come up with from the temple and the palace (18:14-16). Sennacherib apparently was not satisfied and sent envoys to Hezekiah urging the people to surrender the city or else face destruction (18:17-35). After another threat from Sennacherib in 2 Ki. 19:8-13, Isaiah assured Hezekiah (19:32-34) that Sennacherib would not lay siege to Jerusalem but would leave because God was going to defend the city. And that night, an angel of the Lord killed 185,000 Assyrians (see also 2 Chronicles 32).

In 1830 British Colonel R. Taylor discovered a six-sided inscribed pillar in Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, which is now known as the Taylor Prism. It is an account of Sennacherib's invasion of Judah and his taking of the fortified cities, thus confirming the report in Scripture. Other copies of this prism have since been found which are known as the Nimrud Prism and the Oriental Institute Prism.

Sennacherib refers to "Hezekiah, the Jew" and declares that he made him a prisoner in Jerusalem, "like a bird in a cage," having surrounded him with "earthworks [watch-towers] in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate." What is striking, however, is that he makes no claim actually to have laid siege to the city or to have captured it. Given the usual boasting done in royal records, you can be sure that if Sennacherib had captured Jerusalem he would have bragged about it. And you can be equally sure that if he had suffered a humiliating defeat, he

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<sup>9</sup> A bulla is a clay blob that sealed a document and into which was impressed the seal of the owner or writer of the document. They would harden from air drying, but on those occasions in which the building housing the documents was burned they would be fired like pottery becoming almost indestructible.

would turn that sow's ear into a silk purse or not report it at all.<sup>10</sup>

It seems clear from various chronological links that this campaign by Sennacherib was waged in 701 B.C. This date appears to conflict with certain chronological information in Scripture relating to the reigns of various Judean kings. It is quite possible, however, that Hezekiah's reign began in 715 B.C. in the sense of his beginning to rule alone.<sup>11</sup> In that case, 701 B.C. would be the fourteenth year of his reign as indicated in 2 Ki. 18:13.

Interestingly, Sennacherib claims to have received from Hezekiah 30 talents of gold, which is the precise amount that Scripture reports he demanded from Hezekiah. Sennacherib also states, however, that Hezekiah sent to him (at Nineveh) "800 talents of silver, precious stones, antimony, large cuts of red stone, couches (inlaid) with ivory, ni,medu-chairs (inlaid) with ivory, elephant-hides, ebony-wood, boxwood (and) all kinds of valuable treasures, . . ." (ANET, 288). One possible solution to the difference between the 300 talents of silver demanded and the 800 talents mentioned in Sennacherib's record is that the 800 talents refers not just to the silver but to the amount of all goods delivered in addition to the gold. Perhaps Hezekiah piled on tons of additional valuables to offset a shortage of silver (Scripture does not identify the amounts actually given) but to no avail. Of course, Sennacherib's 800 talents could refer to the amount of silver given and simply be some kind of error in transmission.

Sennacherib also refers here to "Hezekiah, the Jew" in recounting that King Padi of Ekron was deposed by his subjects because he was loyal to Assyria. He says they "handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (and) he held him in prison, unlawfully."

B. Lachish Reliefs – 2 Kings 18:14 indicates that Sennacherib had captured the fortified city of Lachish; otherwise Hezekiah would not have sent word to him there. In the mid-nineteenth century, Layard discovered stone reliefs from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depicting the conquest of Lachish during this campaign. The reliefs reveal details of the siege techniques and various military trap-pings. They portray some captives stripped naked and

impaled on stakes, and others departing the city in carts or on foot. The fact there was no relief relating to Jerusalem, the capital, confirms that there was nothing to brag about there.

C. Hezekiah's Tunnel and Siloam Inscription – 2 Kings 20:20 and 2 Chron. 32:3-4, 30 reveal that Hezekiah prepared for the anticipated siege of Jerusalem by Sennacherib by blocking up the water sources outside the city, so they would not be available to the Assyrians, and creating a tunnel to bring water into the city (see also Isa. 22:9-11). 2 Chronicles 32:30 specifies that he directed the waters of the Gihon Spring to the west side of the "city of David."

Hezekiah's tunnel was discovered in 1838 by an American scholar named Edward Robinson. It runs in a southwestern direction from the Gihon Spring just outside of Hezekiah's eastern city wall to the Pool of Siloam in the southwestern corner of the "city of David," meaning the oldest area within the larger city of Jerusalem (i.e., the southeastern hill). The tunnel winds its way for 1,750 feet (a direct route of about 1,090 feet) with an average height of about six feet.

In 1880 an inscription of six lines written in Hebrew dating from the eighth century B.C. was discovered inside the tunnel by some Arab boys. It is known as the Siloam Inscription, and it explains how the tunnel was dug. It states (*ABD*, VI:24):

[ ] the tunneling, and this was how the tunneling was completed: as [the stonecutters wielded] their picks, each crew toward the other, and while there were still three cubits to g[o], the voices of the men calling each other [could be heard], since there was an increase (in sound) on the right [and left]. The day the breach was made, the stonecutters hacked toward each other, pick against pick, and the water flowed from the source to the pool [twel]ve hundred cubits, even though the height of the rock above the heads of the stonecutter[rs] was a hundred cubits!

Fortunately, several casts were made of the inscription because it was later chiseled from the wall in the dead of night. The inscription was recovered, but it was broken.

D. Hezekiah's Broad Wall – 2 Chronicles 32:5 and Isa. 22:9-10 reveal that Hezekiah's preparations in anticipation of an assault by Sennacherib included building up the breaks in the city wall and building an additional wall outside of it. This additional wall probably was built to enclose the "Second Quarter" (2 Ki. 22:14), the area to the west of the walled city that had become occupied during the population explosion following the collapse of Samaria over a century earlier.

<sup>10</sup> Regarding 2 Ki. 19:35-37, Paul House writes in *1, 2 Kings*, New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2001), 371: "No other ancient texts record [the Lord's killing of 185,000 Assyrian soldiers], which is not surprising in view of their consistently positive viewpoint. Normally only victories were recorded. Assyrian texts do refer to Sennacherib's return to Nineveh, and Herodotus [a fifth-century B.C. Greek historian] shows that there was in Egypt the memory of an Assyrian retreat following a divine intervention." Though that memory placed the event at the Egyptian-Palestinian border and attributed the deliverance to an Egyptian god, it possibly is a warped recollection of this miraculous deliverance.

<sup>11</sup> See Merrill, 402-405, 410; Kaiser, 346.

In excavations begun in 1969, Nahman Avigad discovered a section of a massive wall on the north side of the "Second Quarter" that is dated by associated pottery to the late eighth century B.C. It is called the "Broad Wall" because the lengthy section that was uncovered (over 200 feet) is 23 feet wide. The remains of private dwellings were found under the wall, presumably an ancient form of eminent domain, which reminds one of Isa. 22:10.

E. Hezekiah Seals – A seal (actually a bulla) from a private collection was published in 1999 by Frank Moore Cross with an inscription "Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) Ahaz, king of Judah." By 2002 there were six known bullae with the same two-winged scarab image and the identical inscription, "Belonging to Hezekiah son of Ahaz, King of Judah."<sup>12</sup>

F. Babylonian Chronicle – In the late seventh-century B.C., the Babylonians replaced the Assyrians as the dominant power in the Ancient Near East. In 605 and 597 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah and deported some of its inhabitants. In 597 he took king Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) to Babylon and put his uncle Zedekiah (Mattaniah) on the throne in his place (2 Ki. 24:11-17; Jer. 24:1, 37:1).

Shortly after World War II, the curator of the British Museum, an Assyriologist named Donald Wiseman, discovered that tablets sitting in the museum since the nineteenth century were a history of events in the southern part of Mesopotamia from around 2350 B.C. down to the sixth century B.C. They are known as the Babylonian Chronicle. It is thought this was compiled to inform the Persian kings of the history of the area prior to their conquest of it in 539 B.C. The Chronicle is not complete, but some information relating to the gaps is available from other sources. The entry for the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (597 B.C.) describes Nebuchadnezzar as capturing the king of Judah and installing a king of his choice.

G. Lachish Ostraca – In 587 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar came against Judah again, this time destroying Jerusalem. Jeremiah 34:7 refers to that final campaign and mentions that Lachish and Azekah were the only fortified cities in Judea other than Jerusalem still holding out against Nebuchadnezzar's assault. Azekah is 18 miles southwest of Jerusalem, and Lachish is 11 miles south of Azekah.

In 1935 and 1938, British excavator J. L. Starkey discovered in the ruins of Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) 21 ostraca, which are broken pieces of pottery. On some of these ostraca messages had been written during the time of Jer. 34:7 when Nebuchadnezzar's army was advancing on Jerusalem. Most of the Lachish letters appear to be dispatches from a Jewish subordinate named Hoshaiiah to his commander Yaush in Lachish (though there is some dis-

pute about his location). Hoshaiiah apparently was stationed at an outpost and was responsible for interpreting the fire signals from Azekah and Lachish during that time. Lachish Ostraca IV includes: "And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we do not see Azekah."

H. Nebo-Sarsekim Tablet – Jeremiah 39:3 is best translated as saying that Nebo-Sarsekim (NIV, TNIV, NET), a chief officer of Nebuchadnezzar, was present at the fall of Jerusalem.<sup>13</sup> In 2007 Michael Jursa, an associate professor at the University of Vienna, was searching in the British Museum for Babylonian financial accounts. He deciphered the cuneiform inscription on a small tablet that had been uncovered in the 1870s and acquired by the museum in 1920. It was a receipt dated to the 10<sup>th</sup> year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II, which makes it 595 B.C. The receipt was for a gift of gold made to a temple in Babylon, located about a mile from modern Baghdad. The donor identified in the receipt is Nebo-Sarsekim, Nebuchadnezzar's chief eunuch. The full translation of the tablet reads:

[Regarding] 1.5 minas [0.75 kg = 26.5 oz. = 1.6 lbs.] of gold, the property of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin [= Hebrew name translated Nebo-Sarsekim], the chief eunuch, which he sent via Arad-Banitu the eunuch to [the temple] Esangila. Arad-Banitu has delivered [it] to Esangila. In the presence of Bel-usat, son of Alpaya, the royal bodyguard, [and of] Nadin, son of Marduk-zer-ibni. Month XI, day 18, year 10 [of] Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon.

Dr. Irving Finkel, a British Museum expert, commented: "A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that it means that the whole narrative [of Jeremiah] takes on a new kind of power."<sup>14</sup>

I. Babylonian Prism – 2 Kings 25 and Jeremiah 39-41, 43, and 52 mention Nebuzaradan as the captain of the Babylonian guard. A prism found in Babylon and published by E. Unger in 1938 lists Nebuzaradan (Nebuzeriddinam) as a member of Nebuchadnezzar's court. The Hebrew term for the office he occupies is a loan word from Akkadian that literally means "cook," but in some contexts the activities of this person are the functions of a high state official, so something like "captain of the guard" is correct.

<sup>12</sup> See Robert Deutsch, "Lasting Impressions: New Bullae Reveal Egyptian-style Emblems on Judah's Royal Seals," *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Vol. 28, No. 4, July/August 2002), 42-51, 60.

<sup>13</sup> See comments in Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37-52*, Anchor Bible (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 84-85. This reading is confirmed by Jursa's discovery.

<sup>14</sup> Nigel Reynolds, "Tiny tablet provides proof for Old Testament" at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1557124/Tiny-tablet-provides-proof-for-Old-Testament.html>.

J. Gemariah Seal – Jeremiah 36:10-12, 25 mentions a governmental official named Gamariah son of Shaphan who was associated with the temple. In 1986 Yigdal Shiloh published bullae from his excavations in Jerusalem that date from the time of Jeremiah. One of them contains the inscription, "Gemariah, son of Shaphan." This is very likely the same person as in Jeremiah 36 because of the combination of names, the fact Shaphan is a relatively rare name, the fact the bulla was found near the locations mentioned in the biblical narrative, and the fact there are indications the seal owner was most likely a government official.<sup>15</sup>

K. Azariah Seal – 1 Chronicles 6:13, 9:11 and Ezra 7:1 reveal that the high priest Hilkiah (2 Ki. 22:4-14, 23:4) had a son named Azariah. Shiloh uncovered in his excavations in Jerusalem a seal bearing the inscription "Azariah, son of Hilkiah."

L. Baruch Seal – Baruch son of Neraiah is the person in Jeremiah 36 who wrote on a scroll the words Jeremiah dictated. He also is mentioned in Jeremiah 32, 43, and 45.

In the mid-1970s a hoard of over 250 bullae surfaced in the antiquities market in Jerusalem. It is thought that these bullae were taken by unauthorized diggers from a house in Jerusalem that had been burned during the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem in 587/586 B.C. In 1978 archaeologist Nahman Avigad published a "Burnt House" bulla bearing the inscription, "Berekhayahu [Baruch] son of Neriyahu [Neria] the scribe." The suffix on both names, *yahu*, is a shortened form of Yahweh, and their names in Scripture are shortened forms of those full names.<sup>16</sup>

M. Jerahmeel Seal – Jeremiah 36:26 mentions Jerahmeel the son of the king as one of the officials sent by king Jehoiakim to arrest Jeremiah and Baruch. It is not certain whether the title "son of the king" is literal or simply the title of an office. One of the "Burnt House" bullae published by Avigad has an inscription, "Jerahmeel, son of the king."

N. Elishama Seal – Jeremiah 36:12 mentions Elishama the secretary as one of the king's officials who heard the reading of Jeremiah's prophecy. One of the "Burnt House" bullae published by Avigad has an inscription, "Elishama, servant of the king."

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<sup>15</sup> For the references to people and events mentioned in Jeremiah, see especially Lester L. Grabbe, "The Lying Pen of the Scribes? Jeremiah and History" in Yairah Amit and others, eds., *Essays on Ancient Israel in Its Near Eastern Context* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 189-204.

<sup>16</sup> Despite the fact the names on the seal are in a different form from the names in Scripture, some still suspect this might be a clever forgery, but it is widely accepted as authentic.

## VIII. Babylonian Captivity (586 – 539 B.C.)

A. Babylonian Administrative Tablets – 2 Kings 24:8-17, 25:27-30 and Jer. 24:1, 37:1 reveal that the Judean king Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar. He remained in prison in Babylon until Nebuchadnezzar's death in 562 B.C. At that time, Evil-merodach, the new king of Babylon, released him from prison, allowed him to dine at the king's table, and provided him a living allowance (2 Ki. 25:27-30).

In 1939 Ernest Weidner published four Babylonian administrative tablets found near the Ishtar Gate in Babylon that date between 595-570 B.C. These texts include the food rations given to various foreign captives. One of the texts dated to 592 B.C. records the relatively large quantity of rations given to "Jehoiachin king of Judah" and his five sons.

B. Nabonidus Cylinder and Chronicle – Daniel 5 indicates that Belshazzar was the last Babylonian king. Since other sources said nothing about Belshazzar and presented Nabonidus as the last king, critics claimed this was a mistake in the Bible.

In 1854 a tiny, inscribed clay cylinder (actually four copies) was found by J. E. Taylor at Ur (Tell Muqqayyar in modern Iraq) which named Belshazzar as the eldest son of Nabonidus. The tablet of the Babylonian Chronicle (see above) describing events of Nabonidus's rule (555-539 B.C.) shows that Nabonidus entrusted the "army and the kingship" to Belshazzar during his lengthy absence (over ten years) at faraway Tema in northern Arabia. So Belshazzar was the *de facto* king. Daniel 5:7, 16, 29 contains a clue regarding Belshazzar's status in that he promises to elevate whoever can decipher the writing on the wall to the *third* position in the kingdom.

## IX. Return from Exile (539 – 430 B.C.)

A. Cyrus Cylinder – Ezra 1:1-4 and 2 Chron. 36:22-23 say that Cyrus allowed the Jews to return from exile after he conquered the Babylonians. This was considered false by critics because they doubted any sixth-century B.C. ruler would do such a thing.

In 1879 Hormuzd Rassam, an Iranian archaeologist working under the British Museum, discovered in Nineveh a clay cylinder that was inscribed at the direction of Cyrus. It is about ten inches long and five inches wide and is written in the Akkadian language. Cyrus does not specifically mention Judah, but he there reports how he returned cult images (idols) to their former sanctuaries, established permanent sanctuaries for them, and returned the former inhabitants to the lands of the various gods. Cyrus credits his god Marduk with selecting him and giving him the task of ruling the world, but he is, of course, God's instrument even though he does not know God (Isa. 44:28 – 45:6).<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> The use of Yahweh, God of heaven, and God of Israel

## X. Herod the Great (72 – 4 B.C.)

A. Herod Inscriptions – Herod the Great ruled Judea at the time of Jesus' birth. He is the one who summoned the wise men or magi after Christ's birth and the one who slaughtered the male children of Bethlehem when he realized he had been tricked by the wise men (Matthew 2).

In 1970 Ya'akov Meshorer published a limestone weight probably from Jerusalem bearing the Greek inscription "Year 32 of King Herod, pious and friend of Caesar, inspector of markets, three minas." In 1988 Ersie Mantzoulinou-Richards published a Greek inscription found in three fragments the first of which was found around 1874. The inscription is from a building, probably in Delos (though found in Syros), that Herod dedicated to the people. It states: "King Herod to the people of . . ." In 1995 Alla Kushnir-Stein published a lead weight from Ashdod bearing the Greek inscription "In the time of King Herod, pious and friend of Caesar."

Several inscriptions from the people of Athens to Herod have been found. They describe him as "friend of Romans" and "the pious king and friend of the Emperor." Coins minted by Herod have been found in Palestine with legends reading "of King Herod" and "King Herod."

B. Herod Ostraca – Yigdael Yadin's excavations of Masada in 1963-1965 uncovered some thirteen broken wine jugs that had been imported from Italy. These ostraca dated to 19 B.C. and have written on them in Latin "for Herod, king of the Jews"

C. Herod's Tomb – Josephus reported that Herod was buried at Herodium, an extravagant fortress and palace complex three miles southeast of Bethlehem. Herodium was first excavated by Virgilio Corbo from 1962-1967, but it was not until 2007 that Ehud Netzer discovered the long sought tomb.

## XI. Jesus (4 B.C. – A.D. 30)

A. Capernaum Synagogue – Jesus is mentioned as teaching in the synagogue in Capernaum in Mk. 1:21, Lk. 4:31-35, and Jn. 6:59. A large limestone synagogue was discovered in Capernaum that was thought to belong to the first century, but in the early 1970s it was determined that this structure dates from the fourth and fifth centuries.

In 1975 excavators discovered black basalt walls under all four corners of the limestone synagogue. Further work revealed that these walls are four feet thick, much too

thick for a private dwelling, and associated pottery demonstrates that the basalt structure was built in the first century. Recall from Lk. 7:1-5 that a centurion was praised for having built the synagogue in Capernaum. The underlying structure is the same size as the limestone synagogue and is laid out like that synagogue. These reasons and the tendency to build religious sites on existing ones have convinced many that the basalt structure is a first century synagogue on which the later synagogue was built. Archaeologist John McRay, for example, says it "is certainly the remains of the synagogue in which Jesus preached."<sup>18</sup> Others are not yet convinced it is a synagogue.

B. Peter's House – Matthew 8:14-15, Mk. 1:29-31, and Lk. 4:38-39 report that Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law while staying in Peter's house in Capernaum. That evening he healed the sick and demon-possessed who gathered at the door. This presumably is where he also healed the paralytic lowered through the roof as reported in Mk. 2:1-12.

In 1968 Virgilio Corbo and Stanislaw Loffreda began investigating a fifth-century octagonal church building located 84 feet south of the synagogue in Capernaum. During the Byzantine era, which includes the fifth century, octagonal churches were built over sacred sites in the Holy Land. Beneath this octagonal church was a fourth-century church, and beneath that church was a house dating to the mid-first century.

The walls of the house were narrow and would not support a masonry roof, meaning the roof would have been made of wooden branches covered with earth, like the one in Mk. 2:4. The walls, ceiling, and floor of the central room of the house had been plastered in the first century, as was done with public rooms that were used for special purposes. It is the only house known in Capernaum to have plastered walls, and the walls and floors had been replastered at least twice.

In the mid-first century there was a change in the pottery that was used in that room indicating a change from normal residential living. More than 150 inscriptions were scratched on the plaster walls in Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, Aramaic, and Latin beginning in the second century and perhaps even earlier. These include appeals to Christ for help, possible references to Peter, and various Christian symbols like crosses. Sometime after the first century the roof of the central room was raised, and the fifth-century octagonal chapel was centered on this room. This is the only house in this area of Galilee that has been identified by archaeologists, pilgrims, and ancient tradition as Peter's house.

Many scholars are persuaded by this evidence that this is indeed the house of Peter. James H. Charlesworth, for example, states:

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in the decree in Ezra 1:1-3 is explainable if the decree was in response to a petition by the Jews. It was Persian policy at that time to use the title of the god or gods recognized by the local population. See, e.g., H. G. M. Williamson, *Ezra, Nehemiah*, Word Biblical Commentary (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), 11-12. Using this terminology does not mean Cyrus was a convert.

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<sup>18</sup> John McRay, *Archaeology and the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 163-164.

Archaeological evidence is almost always hotly debated. What, then, is clear? The "house church" in Capernaum that is celebrated as Peter's house may well be the house in which Jesus taught. It is certainly not a "synagogue," but it seems to be Peter's house. Thus, I fully agree with J. Murphy-O'Connor, who is unusually well informed of data relating to Jesus and archaeology and astutely critical; notice his judgment: "The most reasonable assumption is the one attested by the Byzantine pilgrims, namely, that it was the house of Peter in which Jesus may have lodged (Mt 5:20 [sic]). Certainly, nothing in the excavations contradicts this identification."<sup>19</sup>

C. Jacob's Well – John 4:5-6 says that when Jesus was on his way to Galilee he came to Jacob's well at Sychar in Samaria near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph. Genesis 33:18-19 and Josh. 24:32 locate this field at Shechem. John 4:20 indicates they were at the foot of Mount Gerizim. There is no reference to a well being dug by or for Jacob in the Bible, but it no doubt was named Jacob's well because of its proximity to Jacob's field in Shechem. This is, of course, where Jesus conversed with the Samaritan woman.

A well located at the base of Mount Gerizim less than one-half mile southeast of ancient Shechem (Tell Balata, just east of modern Nablus) and about one-half mile south of the village of Askar, thought to be ancient Sychar, is accepted by Jews, Samaritans, Christians, and Muslims as Jacob's well. It is now located in a Greek Orthodox Church which has been under construction since the early twentieth century. This well was mentioned in A.D. 333 by the Pilgrim of Bordeaux and in the mid-fourth century by Eusebius. Jerome indicated in A.D. 380 that a church had been built on the site. That church was destroyed in the seventh century and replaced by another church in the twelfth century. The Greek Orthodox Church bought the well and the surrounding property in 1885.

In 1881 C. W. Barclay published dimensions of the well. The opening was 17.5 inches, the width of the well shaft was 7 feet six inches, and the depth of the well was 67 feet. The depth apparently has fluctuated as a man named Claude Conder found the depth in 1875 to be 75 feet.

D. Pool of Bethesda – John 5:2 mentions a pool in Jerusalem located near the Sheep Gate that in Aramaic is called Bethesda. John notes that it has five roofed colonnades.

The Sheep Gate is known to be located north of the Temple Mount. The Copper Scroll from Qumran, which dates prior to A.D. 70, refers to Beth Eshdathayin, which means "House of the Twin Pools." Eusebius also identifies the

Pool of Bethesda in Jerusalem as having twin pools, as does the Pilgrim of Bordeaux, and alludes to it being in proximity to the Temple area. This fits with five roofed colonnades in that there was one on each of the four sides around the perimeter of the two pools and one running between the two pools.

Shortly after the turn of the twentieth century, two large pools were found north of the north wall of the Temple Mount. They had been cut into rock and plastered. Many fragments of column bases, capitals, and drums were found which, in John McRay's words, "probably belonged to the five porches (i.e. porticoes or colonnaded walkways) of the pool John mentions."<sup>20</sup>

E. Pool of Siloam – In Jn. 9:1-7 Jesus heals a blind man by having him go and wash in the pool of Siloam. The healed man also mentions the pool by name in 9:11 when recounting his healing to others (see also Neh. 3:15).

The site commonly thought to be the pool of Siloam was discovered at the end of the nineteenth century by Blis Vediki. In its present form, the pool dates to the fifth century when a church was constructed at the site. The original size and shape of the pool is unknown.

In 2004 a large pool was discovered by archaeologist Eli Shukrun near the south side of the traditional pool of Siloam. It is about 165 feet long, is lined with stone, and has steps leading into it from all sides. There is an elaborately paved assembly area adjacent to the pool. The pool apparently was constructed in at least two phases, the first in the first century B.C. and the second in the late 60s A.D. Many are confident that this new pool is the actual pool of Siloam of John 9, but the relationship between the two pools and to the Gihon Spring awaits further discovery. In any event, John's information is corroborated.

F. Pilate Inscription – All four Gospels record that Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea who handed Jesus over to be crucified. His role in that event is noted in several places in Acts and by Paul in 1 Tim. 6:13.

In 1961 Antonio Frova discovered in Caesarea Maritima an inscription in Latin mentioning Pontius Pilate. The left hand side of the inscription was chipped away, presumably to make the stone fit better in its secondary usage, but restoration of the second and third lines is clear: "Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea." The entire inscription may have read, "To the people of Caesarea Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea, has given the Tiberieum" (perhaps a temple dedicated to the Emperor Tiberius).

G. Tomb of Annas – Annas is mentioned in Lk. 3:2, Jn. 18:13, 24, and Acts 4:6. He was high priest from A.D. 6-15. Annas is called high priest after the time of his officially serving in that capacity presumably in a way similar to our continuing to refer to former presidents as president. He no doubt continued to wield power and influence, as

<sup>19</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 50.

<sup>20</sup> McRay, 187.

indicated by the fact his son-in-law Caiaphas served as high priest (A.D. 18-36/37) as did five of his sons.

In 1994 archaeologists Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer made a strong case that the first-century burial tombs just south of the Temple Mount near the juncture of the Hinnom and Kidron valleys, in the area popularly known as Akeldama, include the tomb of Annas the high priest. Rather than being a poor person's burial ground, this is an area of elegant and elegantly decorated burial tombs.

There are no identifying inscriptions, but three lines of evidence link the tomb with Annas. As summarized by the Ritmeyers, "The tombs of Akeldama are too elaborate to have been anything but burial places for Jerusalem's prominent citizens; their decoration echoes that of the Temple Mount, where the priests served; and Josephus places the tomb of Annas in the area of Akeldama."<sup>21</sup>

H. Caiaphas Ossuary – Caiaphas served as high priest from A.D. 18-36/37. He was involved in the plot to arrest and kill Jesus (Mat. 26:3-4; see also, Jn. 11:49), and Jesus was brought before him to stand trial (Mat. 26:57; John 18).

In 1990 an ornate ossuary (burial bone box) was discovered in Peace Forest south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem by workers who were building a water park. It dates to the first century and has two inscriptions, one in Aramaic and one in Hebrew, which may be translated "Caiaphas" and "Joseph, son of Caiaphas." Josephus gives Caiaphas's full name as "Joseph, who is called Caiaphas of the high priesthood." Inside the ossuary were the bones of six people, including one 60-year-old man, which was about Caiaphas's age when he died.

Many scholars are convinced this is indeed the ossuary of Caiaphas the high priest. Jonathan Reed and John Dominic Crossan declare, "There should be no doubt that the chamber was the resting place of the family of the high priest Caiaphas named in the gospels for his role in the crucifixion, and it's very likely that the elderly man's bones were those of Caiaphas himself."<sup>22</sup> Others, however, are not convinced that "Caiaphas" is the correct translation of the inscriptions.<sup>23</sup>

I. Alexander Ossuary – Mark 15:21 reveals that Simon of Cyrene, the father of Alexander and Rufus, was compelled to carry Jesus' cross. He probably mentions Alexander and Rufus because they were known to his audience.

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<sup>21</sup> Leen and Kathleen Ritmeyer, "Akeldama: Potter's Field or High Priest's Tomb?" *Biblical Archaeology Review* 20 (Nov-Dec 1994), 34.

<sup>22</sup> John Dominic Crossan and Jonathan L. Reed, *Excavating Jesus* (San Francisco: HarperCollin, 2001), 241.

<sup>23</sup> See the summary of objections in Craig A. Evans, *Jesus and the Ossuaries* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2003), 107-108.

In 1941 Eleazar Sukenik and Nahman Avigad found a first-century ossuary in the Kidron Valley. Its lid had the name "Alexander" inscribed in Greek and "Alexander" inscribed in Hebrew, but the Hebrew name was followed by a word that probably is an adjective form of Cyrene, i.e., Cyrenite. "Alexander (son) of Simon" also was written in Greek in a green chalky substance on the front and scratched on the back (after an initial incorrect start). Another ossuary in the tomb is inscribed "Sara (daughter) of Simon of Ptolemais," probably referring to Ptolemais in Cyrenica. Jack Finegan states:

Thus we have here a family burial at least to the extent of two children of a certain Simon, and their place of origin was probably Cyrene. From Ac 6:9 we know that there was a synagogue of Cyrenians in Jerusalem, and in Mk 15:21 it was Simon of Cyrene . . . the father of Alexander and Rufus, who was compelled to carry the cross of Jesus. It is surely a real possibility that this unostentatious tomb was the last resting place of the bones of at least two members of the family of this very Simon.<sup>24</sup>

J. Christ's Tomb – Matthew, Mark, and John all record that Jesus was crucified at a place known in Aramaic as Golgotha, which means "Place of a Skull" (Mat. 27:33; Mk. 15:22; Jn. 19:17). Luke simply states that he was crucified at the place called "The Skull" (Lk. 23:33). John 19:41 says there was a garden at the place where Jesus was crucified and that in the garden was a new tomb, and Jn. 19:42 says the tomb was near where Jesus was crucified. Matthew, Mark, and Luke all state the tomb was cut out of rock, and Matthew and Mark specify that the entrance to the tomb was covered by a rolling rock (Mat. 27:59-60; Mk. 15:46; Lk. 23:53; Jn. 19:40-42). Hebrews 13:12 states and Jn. 19:17, 41 imply that this site was outside the walls of Jerusalem.

There is broad ancient and modern agreement that the tomb of Christ is located at the site of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The so-called Garden Tomb that was championed by Charles Gordon in the nineteenth century has had its advocates, but archaeological evidence has refuted that claim. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is outside of the city walls as they existed at the time of Christ and is built over rock tombs that date to the first century.

After Emperor Hadrian crushed the Jewish revolt under Simon Bar Kokhba in A.D. 135, he banned Jews from Jerusalem, renamed the city Aelia Capitolina, and set out to make it a pagan city. This included erecting a temple of Jupiter and a shrine to Venus (Aphrodite) at the site that would later become the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

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<sup>24</sup> Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 362.

Eusebius, writing two centuries later, implies that Golgotha was inaccessible.

We know from Eusebius, a contemporary of the events, that after the Council of Nicea in A.D. 325 Emperor Constantine decided to construct a church on the site of Christ's resurrection. The fact he ordered the pagan temple torn down and a church erected in its place shows that Christians were confident the tomb was under that temple. Eusebius reports joyfully that the excavations at that time revealed the holy tomb. In A.D. 1009 Constantine's church was destroyed by the Egyptian Caliph Hakim, and in 1048 a new church was built over the tomb. There were further destructions, repairs, and construction, and in 1959 the church underwent a major repair program.

## XII. Early Church (A.D. 30 – 100)

A. Gentile Temple Warning – In Acts 21:27-31 Paul is accused of bringing a Greek into the temple and defiling that holy place. That was such a serious offense that the people were seeking to kill him.

In 1871 Charles Clermont-Ganneau found a limestone block (about 33 inches long, 22 inches high, and 14 inches thick) on which was inscribed in Greek a warning to Gentiles to stay out of the perimeter surrounding the temple. It states: "Let no Gentile [lit. other race] enter within the partition and barrier surrounding the temple; whosoever is caught shall be responsible for his subsequent death." A fragment of a second inscription was found in 1935 outside the wall around Jerusalem's Old City. The inscribed letters originally were painted red. The partial inscription closely matches the wording and layout of the full inscription.

B. Ananias Ostrakon – Ananias served as high priest from A.D. 47-59. In Acts 23:2-3 he commanded that Paul be struck on the mouth, and in Acts 24:1 he went to Caesarea with Tertullus to make the case against Paul to the governor.

In 1989 a partially restored ostrakon from Masada was published by Yigael Yadin, Joseph Naveh, and Ya'akov Meshorer. It reads, "A[nani]as the high priest and Aqaviah his son."

C. Erastus Inscription – Rom. 16:23 has a greeting from Erastus, who in the later letter of 2 Timothy (4:20) is said to have stayed in Corinth. Paul describes him as the "treasurer" of the city.

In 1929 a paving stone was found near a theater in Corinth. It was published by John Kent in 1966 and bears the following inscription in Latin: "Erastus, who in return for his aedileship, laid [the pavement] at his own expense." An "aedile" is a commissioner of public works, which is why NIV and TNIV translate "treasurer" in Rom. 16:23 as "director of public works." The Greek term rendered "treasurer" may be broad enough to refer to the Latin of-

fice "aedile," or Erastus may have moved up to that position Romans was written.

D. Gallio Inscription – Acts 18:12 reveals that Paul was brought before the tribunal or judgment seat in Corinth "when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia." Gallio was the brother of the famous Roman philosopher Seneca.

In 1905 four fragments of an inscription were found and published by French archaeologist Emile Bourguet. He found three additional fragments in 1910, which were published in 1913 by A. Brassac, but these were ignored until 1967 when Andre Plassart added two additional fragments and demonstrated that they all belonged to the same inscription. Plassart officially published the nine fragments in 1970.

The inscription is a copy of a letter from Emperor Claudius to the city of Delphi naming Gallio as friend of Claudius and proconsul of Achaia that was once attached to the outer wall of a temple. Its real significance is that, when combined with other information, it permits Gallio's year of service as proconsul to be dated to either A.D. 50-51 or 51-52, the latter being more likely. This is an important chronological anchor for dating Paul's activities.

E. Judgment Seat (be,ma) at Corinth – The tribunal or judgment seat (Greek be,ma) before which Paul was brought in Acts 18:12 refers to a speaker's platform where proclamations were read and citizens appeared before government officials. Pilate sat on the be,ma as he judged Christ, as did Herod in Acts 12:21 and Festus in Acts 25. Paul says that we will all stand before the judgment seat of God (Rom. 14:10), which he also calls the judgment seat of Christ (2 Cor. 5:10).

The be,ma at Corinth was discovered in 1935 and identified by Oscar Broneer in 1937. It was described in detail in later excavation reports, so one can know with confidence the place where Paul stood before Gallio. An inscription was found in the vicinity of the be,ma identifying it as a *Rostra*, which is the official Latin name for this structure. Based on the style of letters in this inscription, John Kent dates the construction of the Corinthian be,ma to A.D. 25-50.

F. Galilean Boat ("Jesus Boat") – This is not a direct connection with Scripture, but I wanted to mention it anyway. Jesus on several occasions was in a boat with his disciples on the Sea of Galilee (Mat. 8:23, 14:32-33, 16:5; Mk. 4:36, 6:51, 8:14; Lk. 8:22; Jn. 6:21). This is where he calmed the storm and met them walking on the water.

In 1986 Moshe and Yuval Lufan found in the mud of the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee a wooden boat dating to the first-century. It was 26 feet long and 8 feet wide, large enough to hold thirteen people, which makes it similar to the boats in which Jesus and the disciples would have traveled. One notable feature is how low it would have sat in the water.

G. James Ossuary (possible forgery) – One of Jesus' brothers was named James (Mat. 13:55; Mk. 6:3; Gal. 1:19). He became a leader of the church in Jerusalem and was the author of the Letter of James. Josephus reports that he was stoned to death in Jerusalem A.D. 62 as a "breaker of the law," a charge no doubt having to do with his Christian faith.

In 2002 *Biblical Archaeology Review* published an ossuary with an inscription in Aramaic reading, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." Before he published the find, Hershel Shanks, the editor of the magazine, had the inscription authenticated by two leading epigraphers and the ossuary authenticated by the Geological Survey of Israel. Nevertheless, controversy rages over the find. Its owner, Oded Golan, an antiquities dealer in Tel Aviv, was on trial for years for forgery in relation to the ossuary. The verdict is due at any time.

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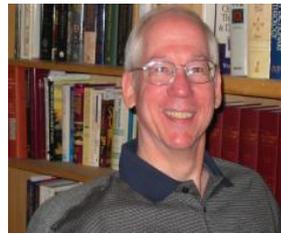
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