

The Bible Unearthed

An Introduction to Biblical Archaeology
for the Disciple in the U.K.



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The Bible Unearthed:
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Why disciples need to know about biblical archaeology . . .

It is one of the main areas of evidence we can use to support the reliability of the Bible. This strengthens our own faith and gives us added conviction in a world which seems to believe increasingly that Bible-believers are people who ignore facts and science. In this paper are facts which you can master and use to help your friends find hope in Jesus.

What is biblical archaeology?

Put simply, it is archaeology that relates to the Bible.

What then is archaeology?¹ It is the study of discovered ancient findings; a) *antiquities* - ancient man-made relics, and, b) *fossil bones*. Archaeology is not an exact science, and when reading journals and books you will find that many discoveries undergo subjective analysis and interpretation. Archaeologists sometimes do not produce sufficient final reports of excavations, and this hinders true identification of discoveries. This makes it difficult to prove with exactness whether specific findings do actually support the Bible. The reader is cautioned that with the discipline of Biblical archaeology sometimes “a little knowledge is dangerous”. In-depth study and research is normally needed to establish whether findings do support the Bible; this was certainly the case with the fallen walls at Jericho.² However, this article aims to “clear away all the rubble” and direct the reader straight to the important issues which help to prove the reliability of the Bible.

What does a disciple need to know about biblical archaeology?

It is up to you how deep you want to go! If you are reading this, then you already have some interest. This paper is intended as an introduction to get you started in the various areas and give you ways of doing your own research. It will also introduce you as a U.K. disciple to the wonderful resource of the British Museum. These are the areas covered:

- Page 3* *Inscriptions.* Without understanding what is written on ancient discoveries, it is extremely difficult to identify what has actually been found.
- Page 8* *The Ancient Flood.* The ancient epic is confirmed by other ancient texts.
- Page 9* *Manuscript Evidence and Ancient Writings.* The most important of all discoveries in this field, the Dead Sea Scrolls (DSS) have proved the accuracy of our Bible and the reliability of key prophecies about Jesus.
- Page 11* *Coins.* Coins are extremely useful archaeological findings, because they offer an exact date of the excavated site and confirm the dates of biblical events.
- Page 12* *Discovered Biblical Cities.* There have been many cities found that were thriving during Biblical times. It would be useful for the reader to view a map of the Holy Land when considering this section.

*What Indiana Jones never told you about. . .
inscriptions*

a) **What am I looking at? The types of inscription**

Ancient Inscriptions are unreadable for us! They normally fall into three main categories; a) *pictographic* (hieroglyphic) - mainly used by the Egyptians showing animals, implements, and other symbols; b) *cuneiform* - written with wedged shaped characters, and originated in Mesopotamia, the area of Babylonia and Assyria. It continued to be used into the first century AD. The Egyptian hieroglyphs and cuneiform scripts originated around 3000BC; and c), *alphabetic* - originated after 3000BC, the original being the Canaanite alphabet. All alphabets originate from the Canaanite alphabet which comprised of twenty two letters. The alphabet is a

¹ See also, Oakes, J. M., Reasons For Belief: A Handbook of Christian Evidence, GCI, 2001

² See below. Also, for the enthusiastic reader further study is recommended - Dr. Douglas Jacoby and Dr. Steve Kinnard's articles on www.acesonline.org are very informative, and it is great to read a disciple's opinion of archaeological discoveries.

more comprehensive form of writing than the pictographic or cuneiform texts. As the alphabetic script evolved, more people began to learn how to read and write, and so literacy spread.³ This became the common script for many ancient peoples.⁴

**b) How did we learn to read these forgotten languages?
The translation of the inscriptions**

The discoveries and translations of the *Rosetta Stone* and the *Behistun Inscription*, has enabled Biblical archaeologists to read ancient inscriptions, and bring to light their significance for proving the Bible. The Rosetta Stone, was found in Rosetta, north Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte's men. In 1822, a French linguist, Jean-Francois Champollion published an interpretation of the three inscribed languages of Egyptian hieroglyphs, Egyptian demotic, and Greek uncial (capital) letters. You can see the Rosetta Stone in the British Museum. It is a very famous discovery and people flock from all over the world to see it. The Behistun Inscription is an outdoor relief, 350 feet above sea level, on a cliff-face in the Zagros mountains in Iran. It was inscribed by King Darius of Persia, who allowed the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The three languages inscribed are Old Persian cuneiform, Elamite and Babylonian cuneiform. Henry C. Rawlinson identified and translated the three languages.

**c) What inscriptions are useful for a disciple to know about?
i) Old Testament**

The oldest reference to "Israel". In 1896, a unique discovery provided extra-Biblical evidence that the people we know of as "Israel" existed. Sir Flinders Petrie, unearthed a 7 ½ foot-high black granite stele. It is known as the *Merneptah Stele*. Merneptah (1211-1202BC) was the successor of Ramesses II in the Egyptian Nineteenth Dynasty. It records the victories of Merneptah over Hatti, Canaan, Ashkelon, Gezer, Yanoam, Israel and Hurru. It reads, "*Israel is laid waste, its seed is not*" describing the Israelites as a "people" rather than land. This is the oldest inscription outside the Bible to indicate the existence of the ancient people of Israel. The stele records that the Israelites had gone out from Egypt, and so points to an Exodus as recorded in *Exodus 12: 31-51*. The stele is also significant because it implies that the Exodus happened during the reign of Ramesses II.

The oldest reference to an OT king – and even a picture! In the British Museum, rooms 6 & 8⁵ of the Ancient Near East, there stand two magnificent steles which both record the campaigns of the Assyrian King, Shalmaneser III, (857-824BC). The *Kurkh Stele of Shalmaneser III*, was discovered at Kurkh on the River Tigris in southern Turkey in 1861. It is a relief carving of Shalmaneser, including a cuneiform inscription recording his six military campaigns. It was inscribed in 853BC, and records the defeat of Israel. Adad-ibri is also included, and he appears in the Bible as Ben-Hadad in *2 Kings 6: 24 and 8: 7*.



Obelisk of Shalmaneser III
© British Museum

The *Obelisk of Shalmaneser III* was discovered in Calah (Nimrud) by Henry Layard in 1846. It is decorated with five rows of reliefs and four pictorial panels on each side of the four sides. It details Shalmaneser's victories from 853BC to 838BC. It is the most important of the discoveries at Calah. Inscribed are 31 campaigns, including campaigns against Adad-idri of Damascus (see *2 Kings 6: 24; 8: 7* for a reference to Adad-ibri) and his successor Hazael of Damascus (see *2 Kings 8: 7-15* for a reference to Hazael).

On the second series of reliefs, the Israelite King Jehu is recorded bringing tribute to Shalmaneser. The relief states, "Jehu the Israelite, son of Omri." Jehu was not the son of Omri, but the Assyrians may have used this as a shorter way of writing, "son of the house of Omri" or "Israel." Also, the Assyrians may have thought that Jehu was a member of the house of Omri - who ruled Israel from 885-



Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, Pictorial
Panel of Jehu © British Museum

³ Harris, R. L., Exploring the World of the Bible Lands, Thames & Hudson, 1991. The first time writing is encouraged, is in *Exodus 17: 14*.

⁴ Mitchell, T.C., The Bible in the British Museum, British Museum, 1991.

⁵ Please see the appendix: Bible Discoveries in the British Museum.

873BC. (see *1 Kings 16: 21-28*) Furthermore, the Bible does not record a story of Jehu bringing tribute to Shalmaneser, but the fact that the obelisk identifies the Hebrew King is useful for proving his existence. This is also the earliest picture of a Hebrew we have, so we can learn about their physical characteristics.⁶ The character carvings have been well preserved, and you can still see the detailed outline of the Israelite King.

Several names all together! The *Moabite Stone*, discovered in 1868, is also an excellent actual reference to Biblical names – Moab, Chemosh, Omri and Mesha. It was smashed by Arabs but fragments have been reassembled and can be seen in the Louvre, Paris. The text is of Mesha, King of Moab, and his war against Israel. (see *2 Kings 3: 4-27*.)

My personal favourite. The *Royal Steward Inscription*, was discovered in 1870 by C. Clermont Ganneau, in Silwan near Jerusalem.⁷ It is a seventh century Hebrew inscription located at the head of a rock-cut tomb. It says, “This is (the tomb of...) iah the Royal Steward.” The text in brackets was smashed from the rock, as a roof-beam was built into the rock. The position of royal steward was a senior title of the Israelite people during the times of Isaiah in the seventh century BC. He had the personal responsibility for the royal household, and was the most important official among the king’s staff in Judah and Israel. The royal steward recorded in Isaiah is named as ‘Shebna,’ and in *Isaiah 22: 14-25* a prophecy is given about Jerusalem, and Shebna the steward, who did not fulfill his obligations, cutting a grave stone for himself.



Royal Steward Inscription
© British Museum

The spellings of the names do not match. Isaiah uses the name ‘Shebna,’ and not ‘Shebaniah’ - which it would have to be to correspond with the tomb inscription. However, in *Nehemiah 9: 4* the name ‘Shebaniah’ is mentioned as one of the Levites. Shebaniah is generally recognised to be a fuller version of Shebna, it is the same name - as in ‘Jon’ shortened for ‘Jonathan.’ Another factor which suggests this is the tomb in Isaiah, is that there is only one royal steward at a time. In my mind, it is beyond reasonable doubt that this grave stone is the one God talked about in *Isaiah 22*. The first time I saw the Royal Steward Inscription it became my favourite archaeological finding to support the Bible. I was so impacted at looking at this specific grave, because God Himself probably spoke about it.

Another amazing archaeological finding which supports the Bible is the *Annals of Sennacherib* or *Taylor Prism*, found in Nineveh in 1830 by Colonel R. Taylor. The six sided prism describes the first eight military campaigns of Sennacherib, King of Assyria 705-681BC. He started his Judean campaign in 701BC. Sennacherib states that he laid siege to 46 cities in Judea, deported 200,150 people and also entrenched Hezekiah in Jerusalem. This event is recorded in *2 Kings 18: 13-19: 37*, *Isaiah 36-7* and *2 Chronicles 32*. In the Annals, Sennacherib states,



“As for Hezekiah, the Judean who did not submit to my yoke, I surrounded and conquered forty six of his strong walled towns...He himself I shut up in Jerusalem, his royal city, like a bird in a cage...The warriors and select troops he had brought in to strengthen his royal city of Jerusalem, did not fight...I reduced his country but still increased the tribute and the presents due to me as his overlord which I imposed upon beyond his former tribute to be delivered

vs have long robes. In *2 Kings 4: 29*, Elijah says to Gehezi, “Tuck your cloak into
f into your hand and run.”

: Tombs of Silwan, BAR May/June 1994, p. 47-50.

annually...Hezekiah did send me later to Nineveh...thirty talents of Gold, eight hundred talents of silver..."

According to the Bible, Sennacherib did threaten Jerusalem (*2 Kings 18: 17-37*) and the soldiers did not fight (*2 Kings 19: 9-13, 36*). Cities were besieged, but Jerusalem was not. Also, tribute was paid to Sennacherib (*2 Kings 18: 14-15*).⁸ This is remarkable consistency. Take some time to study these passages and get a sense of history by viewing the evidences supporting the existence of Sennacherib and Hezekiah, and you will be amazed at the accuracy of the Bible.

Taylor Prism
© British Museum

The Siege of Lachish Reliefs were discovered on the palace walls of King Sennacherib at Nineveh. In Palace Room 37 was the "Lachish Room." This military victory appears to have been the grandest in the mind of Sennacherib. The palace was destroyed in 612BC, and some of the reliefs have been damaged. Lachish was situated west of Jerusalem near the Mediterranean Sea. Joshua took the city (*Joshua 10: 32*) and King Rehoboam (930-913BC) fortified the city (*2 Chronicles 11: 9-12*). The inscription on the relief, above a seated Sennacherib, reads, "Sennacherib King of the universe, King of Assyria, sat upon a throne and reviewed the spoil of the city of Lachish." In *2 Chronicles 32: 9* Sennacherib laid siege to Lachish and from there he made his threatening claims to Hezekiah. The Lachish relief gives us a clear visual detail of what happened during the siege. If you have the opportunity to go to the British Museum, you can view the reliefs, and see the graphic details of the battle. It is like seeing a 'film-footage' of the capture of Lachish. It starts with the Assyrian advance, and ends with Sennacherib receiving reports of a successful capture. Forget Hollywood, this is the real thing!



Siege of Lachish Reliefs
© British Museum

And finally from the OT... The *Lachish Ostraca* or *Lachish Letters*, were found when the city of Lachish was discovered on an archaeological survey during 1932 to 1938. The Letters are twenty-one fragments not of paper but of pottery.⁹ They were written during the last years of Jeremiah, and they reflect an atmosphere of nervous tension during the early stages of the war, just before the fall of Lachish. In Letter 4, it states, "And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish according to all the indications which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah"

In *Jeremiah 6: 1* it states that they looked for signals, and in *Jeremiah 34: 7*, it reads, "...while the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and the other cities of Judah that were still holding out- Lachish and Azekah. These were the only fortified cities left in Judah." In Letter 4, it appears Azekah had already fallen, and Lachish was next.

ii) New Testament

Before 1961 the lack of archaeological evidence suggested that the Roman prefect of Judaea, Pontius Pilate, was



Pilate Inscription © Rex Geissler

⁸ See also the accounts in *Isaiah 36-7* and *2 Chronicles 32*.

⁹ The technical term for such a fragment of pottery which has been used as a sort of scrap paper for quick notes; a form of ancient

fictional, and not an historical figure. However, his existence was proved by an inscription discovered among old theatre blocks at Caesarea. The limestone block has the inscription Pontius Pilate, prefect of Judea. 'Prefect' was another name for 'governor.' This is a very important finding, as it is the only archaeological evidence outside scripture, for the existence of Pontius Pilate.



Ossuary found in Jerusalem © Rex Geissler

In 1990 an ossuary¹⁰ was discovered with the inscription of, 'Joseph, son of Caiaphas.' This is most probably the same person who is recorded in the Gospels as the Jewish High Priest who tried Jesus before the Sanhedrin. The Jewish historian *Josephus*¹¹ states that this was the full name of Caiaphas. In the ossuary are the bones of four children, one woman and one man. The man's bones are most likely to be those of the High Priest. Caiaphas was wrong when he accused Jesus of blasphemy during his trial before the Sanhedrin. Our Saviour's bones are nowhere to be seen, but Caiaphas' bones remain.

Some evidence of the resurrection itself? Housed in the *Cabinet de Medailles* at the Louve in Paris, is a marble tablet with an inscription by the Roman Emperor, Claudius. It reads;

"It is my pleasure that graves and tombs remain undisturbed in perpetuity for those who have made them for the cult of their ancestors, or children, or members of their house. If, however, any man lay information that another has either demolished them, or has in any other way extracted the buried, or has maliciously transferred them to other places in order to wrong them, or has displaced the sealing or other stones, against such a one I order that a trial be instituted, as in respect of the gods, so in regard to the cult of mortals. For it shall be much more obligatory to honour the buried. Let it be absolutely forbidden for anyone to disturb them. In the case of contravention I desire that the offender be sentenced to capital punishment on charge of violation of sepulture."¹²

The tablet was discovered in 1930 in Nazareth, and translated by Michel Rostovtzeff. The inscription makes it clear that if anybody disturbs the dead of the "cult," they will be sentenced to death. The Christian church was rapidly expanding throughout the Roman Empire, during the reign of Claudius (41-54 AD), and the "cult" is thought to be the Christian Church. It is very interesting that this stone was set up at Nazareth, the town from which Jesus came. Further, the Emperor was forced to take such drastic measures for non-compliance - the death penalty. The punishment was drastically out of proportion to the crime. Something had provoked the severe legal policy - perhaps the social impact of the resurrection of our Saviour, Jesus Christ?

The following inscriptions confirm Luke and Paul's firsthand knowledge of places and customs. In *Acts 18: 12-14* Gallio is recorded as being *proconsul* in Corinth, during the time Paul was there. An inscription has been found stating that the Emperor confirms Gallio's office and it has been dated to 51-52 or 52-53 AD. This is significant because we can now give a date as to when Paul was in Corinth. Also, this is an inscription which clearly confirms the accuracy of Luke's writings in the Book of Acts.

Another interesting finding associated with Paul is a stone altar which was found at Pergamum. On it is inscribed, "...to unknown Gods." In *Acts 17: 16-33* Paul was in Athens, and he 'enlightens' the Areopagus to the meaning of the inscription "To An Unknown God." The Pergamum inscription is not the one Paul preached about, but it reveals a common void in the understanding of Jesus and God during the first century.

In 1929, archaeologists from the American School of Classical Studies in Rome were excavating at Corinth and found a fragmented inscription which read; "Erastus, in return for his aedilship, laid (this pavement) at his own expense." In *Romans 16: 23* Paul writes of "...Erastus, who is the city's director of public works..." The name is the same but the job

¹⁰ An *ossuary* is a bone box or bone container.

¹¹ See below for ancient writings.

¹² Blaiklock, E. M., *The Archaeology of the New Testament*, Pickering & Inglis 1974, p. 80.

description is not. An 'aedile' is not a city director, but a city engineer. However, it is generally accepted that Erastus had got a job promotion by the time of Paul's writings. It is academically accepted to be the same Erastus.

A Greek inscription from a Roman gateway at Thessalonica has confirmed the technical wording by Luke in *Acts 17: 6, 8*. The inscription lists the officials of the town beginning with six *politarchs*. Politarch means "ruler of the city" and these are the people Luke talked about in Acts. Interestingly, Sosipatros is mentioned, and in *Romans 16: 21* Paul refers to a Sosipater - it is the same name. They are not the same person, but we can see the consistency in the name being used at the time of writing of Biblical scripture.

What Indiana Jones never told you about...
The Ancient Flood

The event of the flood recorded in the Bible is supported by convincing archaeological and geological evidence. Many of us will remember our childhood story of Noah's Ark, the flood and the animals going into the ark. As we began to believe in the Bible, we find out that the story is true. We will look at three accounts of the flood. In Genesis 6-8, the Bible recounts an ancient flood. In the *Atrakhasis* or *Atrahasis* and *Gilgamesh Epics* (both Mesopotamian texts) we find corroborative stories to the Biblical flood. A distinctive consistency is seen between the accounts. Wouldn't such a big event be recorded elsewhere than in the Bible? Of course. And that is what we find.¹³

The *Atrakhasis Epic* was found in Sippar (Adu Habba), and dates to around 1700BC. It is a fragmented stone of 22cm high. Atrakhasis is the hero in the tale. It tells of the creation of man to the time of a flood and the new society that was set up after it. The epic is significant because it reveals major similarities with the Biblical accounts of the creation of man and the flood. In Genesis 3: 19 God tells man he will return to the "dust" or "ground" from which he was formed, and in Leviticus 17: 11 God states that "the life of a creature is in the blood." In the epic, it states that man is made from clay and blood. Atrakhasis is warned by 'Enlil,' the god in the inscription, that a flood is coming. The warning happened seven days before the flood came. He tells him to build a boat and load possessions, animals and birds inside. In Genesis 6: 13-18 God warns Noah that a flood is coming and that he needs to build an ark. In Genesis 7: 1-4, God tells Noah to load on animals and birds of every kind, and that in seven days the flood would come.



The Gilgamesh Epic
 © British Museum

In another tablet inscription we find a similar story. The *Gilgamesh Epic* contains a finding of eleven tablets from 700BC in Nineveh. The author may have copied these tablets from originals around 1700BC. The story tells how the gods have become angry at the nuisance caused by man on earth, and how they plan to destroy man with a flood. In Genesis 6: 6-13 God was "grieved...and his heart was filled with pain...So God said to Noah, "I am going to put an end to all people, for the earth is full of violence because of them..." Gilgamesh travels to distant lands and finds an immortal man named Utnapishtim, the Babylonian Noah. He tells Gilgamesh about the flood to explain why the gods gave him his eternal life. After the rains stop, Utnapishtim sent out a dove, a swallow and a raven, only the raven did not return. In Genesis 8: 6-12 the Bible gives almost an identical account - even the birds used are the same. In the epic, Utnapishtim emerges from the boat onto dry land and he gave sacrifices to the gods. Sacrifices were also given by Moses

to God in Genesis 8: 18-21. The three accounts; Bible, Atrakhasis and Gilgamesh Epics reveal a distinctive consistency.

¹³ See Price, R, *The Stones Cry Out*, Harvest House, p.64. There has been academic argument about the origins of the three texts. However, this does not diminish the fact that they all point to the existence of an ancient flood.

What Indiana Jones never told you about. . .
Manuscript Evidence & Ancient Writings

We have thousands of manuscripts (MSS) of the Bible.¹⁴ There are no other texts from antiquity with a greater number of MSS than the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. One Scholar has noted,

"...in the case of the Bible there are hundreds of witnesses (MSS) to the text of the Old Testament and over 20,000 witnesses (MSS) to the text of the New Testament in their original languages and therefore it is safe to say that no documentation of ancient times have ever had such a full and impressive witness to the text as is found for the 66 books of the Bible."¹⁵

a) The question you were afraid to ask – what is a Manuscript anyway?

It simply means a handwritten document – from the Latin “manu” meaning by hand and “script” referring to writing.

b) Another question you didn’t want to ask – is it true we don’t have any of the originals?

It is true – we don’t! This is because they were written on perishable substances that had a short life expectancy. The originals are called “autographs.” We believe the originals, as written by John or Paul were inspired by the Holy Spirit, while later manuscripts may contain small copying errors made by man. There is a name for the science of determining the autograph from comparing the manuscripts - textual criticism. The results of such criticism in the case of the Bible are overwhelming, as the quote above shows.

c) What do they look like and can you see one today?

Ancient MSS were commonly written on three different types of materials. a) *Leather* - made from skins of animals; b) *Papyrus* - made from papyrus plants which grew in the rivers and marshes in Egypt. Texts can be written on papyrus sheets or rolls. I have seen the *John Rylands Papyrus*, and the *Jesus Papyrus*. When visiting Magdalen College, Oxford I held the *Jesus Papyrus* and I was enthralled as I viewed the Biblical text and wondered who the second century disciple would have been who owned the whole codex. By the second century, Christians used papyrus and stitched sheets together in a book-form; these are known as a *codex*, and, c) *Vellum* - animal skins that are not tanned. The majority of the early copies of the New Testament are on vellum.

The earliest MSS were often written without punctuation and no spaces between words. The chapters in our Bibles were introduced in the thirteenth century, and the verses were inserted in the sixteenth century.

d) What about the Dead Sea Scrolls?

The *Dead Sea Scrolls*, were discovered in Qumran by an Arab boy in 1947. Hundreds of scrolls have been discovered so far, and new scrolls are consistently being found.¹⁶ They are perhaps the greatest archaeological discovery in support of the Bible. The scrolls are of a collection of ancient Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek manuscripts which were found in the caves of the Essene community.¹⁷ Recorded on the scrolls are parts of every Old



Qumran ©
Rex Geissler

¹⁴ See, Jacoby, D.A., True and Reasonable, DPI 1999, p. 113-121. Dr. Jacoby also indicates where ancient manuscripts are located around the world.

¹⁵ Archer, G. L., A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Moody 1994, p. 25-27

¹⁶ See Dr. Jacoby’s notes on BAS FEST III (2000), Charlesworth, J, What is Challenging and New About the Dead Sea Scrolls.

¹⁷ Some scholars believe that it was not the library of the Essenes, but of the Sadducees. See, Wilson, I., The Bible is History, Weidenfeld & Nicolson 1999, p. 202-211.

Testament book (apart from Esther).¹⁸ Through these scrolls, Old Testament prophecies are confirmed showing that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Some of the most important prophecies are found in the Book of Isaiah, and there is a complete Isaiah scroll.

For more on the Dead Sea Scrolls, check out the excellent paper by Andrew Kitchen, the Teacher in the Sydney church, called Dead Sea Scrolls Q and A¹⁹

e) Britain has the earliest MSS of John, Matthew and the whole NT! The *John Rylands Papyrus* (P52), was purchased in the 1920s by Bernard Grenfell from Egyptian antiquity dealers. On the papyrus are extracts from *John 18: 31-4* and on the reverse *John 18: 37-8*. It formed part of a codex found in Egypt. It is the oldest Gospel fragment in the world - dated to 100-120AD. It is housed in the John Rylands Library in **Manchester**.

The *Jesus Papyrus* (P64), was given to Magdalen College, **Oxford** in 1901 by Reverend Charles Bousfield Huleatt. There are three fragments all of the Gospel of Matthew. A) *Matthew 26: 7,8* and reverse, *Matthew 26: 31*; B) *26: 10* and *26: 32,33*; C) *26: 14,15* and *26: 22,23*. They are dated to around 170AD.²⁰

The magnificent text of the *Codex Sinaiticus* was discovered by Constantin Tischendorf in 1844, in St. Catherine's Monastery at the base of Mount Sinai. It is now housed in the **British Library on the Euston Road, London**. It is dated to around 350AD and is the earliest manuscript of the complete New Testament²¹. The codex also includes portions of the Old Testament. The text is on pages 15x13 inches, and has four columns of writing on each page.



Scroll Jar © Rex Geissler

The *Codex Alexandrinus* dates to around 450AD and is also in the British Library. It contains most of the New Testament, but a vast amount of the Old Testament has now been lost. It is very valuable for proving the New Testament.

f) What is there outside the Bible to confirm Jesus' existence or what the early church was like?

There are many ancient writings which refer to "Jesus" and the "Christians." These texts can be used to confirm an historical fact that Jesus Christ, and that his followers, the "Christians," existed. These writings cannot be used to prove that Jesus is the Son of God. However, they are extremely useful for revealing the impact of Jesus and the Christians on the Roman and Jewish societies.

Flavius Josephus, (c.37-100AD) was a Jewish historian, and much of our understanding of the Jews (outside the Bible) comes from his writings. In his *Antiquities of the Jews* Jesus, Pilate and the Christians are all referred to. Read the following

"At about this time lived Jesus, a wise man, if indeed one might call him a man. For he was one who accomplished surprising feats and was a teacher of such people as are eager for novelties. He won over many of the Jews and of the Greeks. He was the Messiah. When Pilate, upon an indictment brought by the principle men among us, condemned him to the cross, those who had loved him from the very first did not cease to be attached to him. On the third day he appeared to them restored to life, for the holy prophets had foretold this and myriads of other

¹⁸ *Ibid*, note 18, Charlesworth, J, however, states that Esther is probably still buried and not yet discovered. Within the DSS similar writings to Esther have been found.

¹⁹ It can be found either on his personal website or on the Commonwealth Teaching Database under Archaeology or Evidences.

²⁰ See, Greig, J., *Jesus Papyrus Review*, 2000, www.icoc.org.uk.

²¹ The *Codex Vaticanus* is also dated to around 350AD. It is housed in the Vatican library in Rome and has been there since 1431. It contains most of the New Testament, and various Old Testament writings. It is considered equally with the *Codex Sinaiticus* as the most authoritative ancient source for the text of the New Testament.

marvels concerning him. And the tribe of the Christians, so called after him, has to this day still not disappeared."²²

It is so strongly pro-Christian that it has been suggested this reference to Jesus may have been inserted by Christians after the fifth century. When referring to Josephus' writing, neither Origen in the third century, nor Eusebius in the fourth century referred to Josephus' reference to Jesus, which they would have done had it been this strong.²³ The references to "if indeed one might call him a man", "He was the Messiah" and "on the third day he appeared to them restored to life" are considered likely to be Christian additions by scholars, but there is nothing to suggest the rest is not authentic historical insight into Jesus. Jesus was an historical figure.²⁴

Jesus and the Christians had disturbed the Romans enough for the great historian *Tacitus* to write about them. Tacitus was a first century Roman historian, and is considered one of the most accurate historians of the Roman world. He states,

*"Consequently, to get rid of the report, Nero fastened the guilt and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians, by the populace. 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 Pilate..."*²⁵

Pliny the Younger (real name, Gaius Plinius Caeilicus Secundus) born 61/62AD in writing to the Emperor Trajan stated,

*"...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 honour it: after which it was their custom to separate, and then to meet again to partake of food, but not of an ordinary and innocent kind..."*²⁶

There are many more historical texts referring to the "Christians" and treatment of them by the Romans, and their way of life and worship. These ancient writings are not inspired texts, but they certainly do point to the fact that Jesus existed, and that the "Christians" were a living community during the times of the Roman empire. We can rely on the texts for *historical* proof. Certainly, the writers believed that Jesus had had such a profound impact on the first century society that they needed to write about it and publish their writings for the ancient audiences.

²² *Josephus*, Antiquities of the Jews 18.63, Loeb Edition, vol. 9 translated by L.H. Feldman, Harvard 1963.

²³ Barrett, C. K., *The New Testament Background: Selected Documents*, SPCK 1987, p. 276-9.

²⁴ We can rely on Josephus for historical references for Judaism and if you would like to further study the reliability of Josephus see, Mason, S., *Will the Real Josephus Please Stand Up*, BAR September/October 1997, p. 62-3.

²⁵ *Tacitus*, Annals 15.44, Loeb Edition, vol. 4, translated by J. Jackson, Harvard 1931.

²⁶ For Pliny's works see, Sherwin-White, A. N., *Fifty Letters of Pliny*, OUP 1967.

What Indiana Jones never told you about. . .

Coins

a) When the love of money is OK...Coins are extremely useful archaeological findings, because they can offer exact dates for the age of a city or building, and also, the dating of historical events recorded in the Bible. I have a Roman copper coin of Emperor Constantine (minted around 320AD), which I bought on holiday in Venice. It cost me about £25, and it is useful for illuminating Church History studies. You can pick up Roman coins in most coin shops and have a piece of history in your home. I often wonder whether this coin was used during the Council of Nicaea.

b) The “widow’s mite”. The *Lepton* and *Prutah* were the smallest value coin during the time of Jesus. They were a Jewish bronze coin, a little larger than the size of an English one pence coin. They were usually irregular in shape; not perfectly round, and had an anchor or star or small Hebrew lettering on them. The coins were mostly minted under the reign of the Jewish King Alexander Jannaeus (103-76BC), but were still in circulation during the time of Jesus. In *Mark 12: 41-44*, the widow offered two leptons into the temple treasury.

c) Show me the money. In *Mark 12: 15-17* the story is recorded of Jesus demanding “show me a denarius” and referring to “Caesar” on the coin. The Caesar was Tiberius in the story - see *Luke 3: 1*. The *silver denarius* of Tiberius Caesar Augustus or *tribute penny* would have been the coin that Jesus referred to. If you can find one, maybe you can hold the coin Jesus did! A denarius was an average day’s wage for a labourer. Tiberius ruled from 14 to 37AD, and Pontius Pilate was governor of Judea and Herod was tetrarch of Galilee.

d) Pilate’s personal coin. The *Pontius Pilate Prutah* reveals a very interesting insight into the character of Pilate. Procurators were authorised to only issue coins in the name of the Roman Emperor, and so there are no coins with Pilate’s name on them. However, Pilate chose a “lituus” (Roman ritual staff to summon Roman gods) which is curved in the shape of a “P,” thus putting his identity on the coin. The lituus was also a pagan symbol, and so would have upset the Christians of the day. The dates on the coins correspond with the procurator governing during the reign of Tiberius - that was Pilate. He minted them in Jerusalem, between 29 and 31AD.²⁷ See *Luke 3: 1*.

e) Other facts. Herod the Great was the King of Judea installed by the Romans who reigned from 37 to 4BC. On his coins he omits Hebrew inscriptions (his native language) and uses Greek, thus revealing a reduction in the power of the Jews over their own country. The emperor Augustus Gaius Julius Caesar, reigned 27BC to 14AD. He was the first Roman emperor following the republic, which had been destroyed by Julius Caesar. Many bronze coins and silver denarii have been found bearing his portrait and inscription. See *Luke 2: 1*

²⁷ Blaiklock, E. M., The Archaeology of the New Testament, Pickering & Inglis 1974 p. 69.

What Indiana Jones never told you about. . .
Discovered Cities

The following are just a few of the Biblical cities we have excavated. The walls, buildings, houses, treaties, coins, pottery, ornaments and other articles, help reveal life in Biblical times.

Athens is still the thriving capital of Greece today. On the hill called the Areopagus or Mars Hill, you can still see the remains of the Parthenon where the apostle Paul preached in [Acts 17: 16-34](#). You can see the grandeur of the Parthenon frieze in the British Museum.

Babylon was situated between the Rivers Euphrates and Tigris to the north of the Persian Gulf. It was largely built by Hammurabi (1728-1686 BC) and Nebuchadnessar II (604-562 BC). It was the capital of the Babylonians. A foundational outline has been discovered, which are believed to be the ruins of the Tower of Babel in [Genesis 11: 1-9](#). Tablets have been found recording workmen who lived in and around Babylon. Jehoiachin is mentioned. In [2 Kings 24:8-17](#), the Bible recounts how Nebuchadnezzar, "advanced on Jerusalem and laid siege to it." v. 10. In v. 15, Jehoiachin is taken captive to Babylon.



Ivory Sphinx
 © British Museum

Bethlehem, the town where Jesus was born, [Luke 2: 4-7](#) is a real city often in the news today.

Bethsaida is a town that is mentioned many times in the gospels, but it was not discovered until 1987. [Luke 9: 10-12](#) records how the 5,000 were fed near Bethsaida; [Mark 8: 22](#) records how Jesus healed a blind man in the town.²⁸

Calah, (Nimrud) discovered in 1845 by Austin Henry Layard. It is situated 20 miles south of Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, on the west bank of the River Tigris - now, modern day Iraq. The remains of the palaces of three kings were discovered, including Shalmaneser III (860-825BC). See above for his campaigns inscribed on the 'Black Obelisk' - recorded in [2 Kings 17](#). A sculpture was found recording the victories of Tiglath-Pileser III. This is recorded in [2 Kings 15: 19](#) - see footnote in the Bible on Pul King of Assyria.

Ebla, nearly 2000 tablets discovered. Tablet No. 1860 mentions the cities, Sodom, Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim and Bela (or Zoar). This is in the same order as in [Genesis 14: 2](#). This was the first time that these cities were found to be recorded outside the Bible.

Ecbatana, (capital of the Medes) now called Hamadan. In [Ezra 6: 2](#) King Cyrus' scroll was found in Ecbatana. The modern city of Hamadan in Iran, is now built over it.

Hattusha is the capital city of the Hittites. It is situated near Boghazkoy in Turkey. In 1876, A. H. Sayce discovered writings on a stone block reused in medieval buildings which were related to the Hittite people. Documents were found detailing a treaty between Babylon, Rameses II and the Hittite king - confirming that the Hittites were a powerful nation. In the Bible, the Arameans were afraid of the Hittite king in [2 Kings 7: 6](#).

Jericho is situated east of Jerusalem. Excavated by Charles Warren (1868), Ernst Sellin (1907-11), John Garstang (1929-36) and Kathleen Kenyon (1952-58). Captured when the walls fell down - see [Joshua 5: 13-6: 27](#). Until recently, it was not certain whether the discovered ruins were of the city in the Bible. Kenyon stated that the ruins were not, because they were 1000 years older than the Biblical event. Garstang thought the ruins were of the Biblical city. Recently, the discoveries have been further investigated, and the ruins are almost certainly those of the city of Jericho in the Bible.²⁹



Fallen walls at
 Jericho © Rex
 Geissler

²⁸ See, Greig, J., The Long Lost City of Bethsaida, 2000, www.icoc.org.uk.



Jerusalem, © Rex Geissler

Jerusalem, today the capital of Israel. Pilgrims and tourists regularly visit the city. Many go to walk the streets Jesus once trod upon. In 1880 a boy noticed some writing on the wall of the tunnel leading water into Jerusalem from the Gibon spring. It was a Hebrew inscription similar to the style from the exile. It is called the *Siloam Inscription* and it reports how two teams of men dug a tunnel under Jerusalem. The Bible records that Hezekiah built the water tunnel - in [2 Kings 20: 20](#), and [2 Chronicles 32: 3-8, 30](#). It is generally accepted that this is Hezekiah's tunnel. There are many books and articles written on the excavations at Jerusalem.

Khorsabad, capital city of Sargon, King of Assyria. It is located 10 miles north of Nineveh. In the annals of Sargon, it is described how he captured the city of Ashdod. In [Isaiah 20: 1](#), it reads, "In the year that the supreme commander, sent by Sargon king of Assyria, came to ashdod and attacked and captured it." It was argued that Sargon did not exist, until this finding confirmed the Biblical record.

Lachish is situated south-west of Jerusalem near Gath. Joshua captured the city in [Joshua 10: 32](#). King Rehoboam fortified the city in [2 Chronicles 11: 9-12](#). Some of the most astute evidence for confirming Biblical records mention the city of Lachish. See above for the convincing inscription evidence of the *Lachish Letters* and *Siege of Lachish Reliefs*.

Nineveh, capital of the Assyrian empire. Situated 280 miles from Babylon on the River Tigris. Known as the "robber city" because of its thieving ventures to other countries and cities. At the gateway, two winged lions were found with Sennacherib's inscription. Sennacherib's campaigns were inscribed on the walls of the city, with a complete account of his 8 campaigns, including the capture of Babylon in 689BC, and the siege of Jerusalem. The account is consistent with [2 Kings 18: 13-19](#), [2 Chronicles 32](#) and [Isaiah 36-7](#). See above for the *Siege of Lachish Reliefs*, and the *Taylor Prism*.



Winged Bull
© British Museum



Bull-headed Lyre
© British Museum

Ur, discovered in 1923 by Sir Leonard Woolley. He discovered a golden headdress, harp and a figure of a goat. Also, the *Royal Game of Ur* was found which can be seen in the British Museum. In [Genesis 11: 28](#) Haran, Abram's brother died in Ur.

Conclusion

This article only represents the "surface of the top-soil." We have not begun to get the spades out yet. There are many more findings which support the Bible. The five areas of *Inscriptions, The Ancient Flood, Manuscript Evidence and Ancient Writings, Coins, and Discovered Biblical Cities* introduce some broad topics within Biblical Archaeology. Please feel free to dig deeper - the more we understand about the Bible, the stronger faith we will have. Lastly, thank you to James Greig for his help in how to present this information

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Birmingham, UK

March 2002

The Bible Unearthed

Biblical Discoveries in the British Museum

If you have any questions or want any information, you can contact the British Museum on +44 (0) 20 7323 8299, e-mail; information@thebritishmuseum.ac.uk, or visit their excellent web

²⁹ See, Wood, B. G., Did the Israelites Conquer Jericho; A New Look at the Archaeological Evidence, BAR vol. 16 March/April 1990, p. 44-58; Jerusalem Christian Review, vol. 12 Issue 1, p. 7.

site at www.thebritishmuseum.ac.uk. For any disciple visiting London, the British Museum should certainly be on your list of sites to see.

a) Ancient Near East

Hittite Empire
Top of East Stairs

Kurk Stela of Shalmaneser III (853BC)
Room 6

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (841BC)
Room 8

Siege of Lachish Reliefs (701BC)
Room 10

Hezekiah Tribute Inscription (693-2BC)
(Inscribed under an Assyrian Winged Bull)
Room 10

Cyrus Cylinder (6th C, BC)
Room 52, case 6

Brick Inscription of King Cyrus
Room 52, case 6

Darius I Egyptian Shrine (521-486 BC)
Room 52, case 6

Trilingual Inscription Jar (485-465 BC)
Room 52

Gilgamesh Epic (7th C, BC)
Room 55, case 10

Temptation Seal (23rd C, BC)
Room 56, case 21

Atrahasis Epic (17th C, BC)
Room 56, case 25

Royal Game and other artifacts of Ur (2500 BC)
Room 56

Royal Steward Inscription (7th C, BC)
Room 57

Royal Stamped Jar Handles (8th C, BC)
Room 57, case 10

Annals of Sennacherib (691-689 BC)
Room 55, case 11

Samaria Ivories (8th C, BC)
Room 57, case 10

b) Egyptian Antiquities

Statute of Ramesses II (1250 BC)
Room 4

Rosetta Stone (196 BC)
Room 4

See Room 4 for Egyptian sculpture and
Rooms 60-66 for Egyptian Funerary

c) Roman Antiquity

Bust of Tiberius Caesar (14-37 AD)
Room 70

Head of Augustus Caesar (27 BC-14 AD)
Room 70, case 1

Head of Claudius Caesar (41-52 AD)
Room 70

Politarch Inscription (2nd C, AD)
Room 85

d) Greek

Parthenon Galleries
Room 18

e) Coins

See the Department of Coins and Medals

Jewish Coins
Gallery 70, case 27

Roman Coins
Galleries, 49, 50, 65, 69, 70

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See also, www.acesonline.org for Dr. Steve Kinnard and Dr. Douglas Jacoby's articles on Biblical archaeological topics.

The Bible Unearthed
British Museum Tour Sheet

Please write notes in the spaces provided.
(Pictures obtained under copyright permission of the British Museum – not for reproduction)

1) Hittite Empire

Top of East Stairs

2) Egyptian Antiquities

Statute of Ramesses II (1250 BC)

Room 4

Rosetta Stone (196 BC)

Room 4

See Room 4 for Egyptian Sculpture and Rooms 60-66 for Egyptian Funerary

3) Ancient Near East

Kurk Stela of Shalmaneser III (853BC)

Room 6

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (841BC)

Room 8



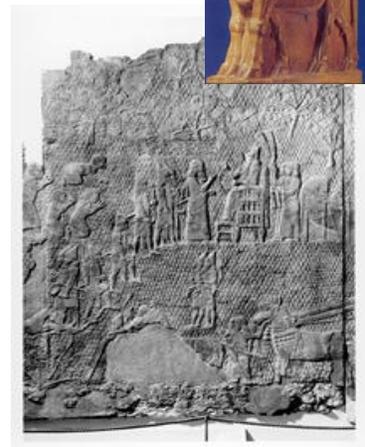
Assyrian Winged Bull (865 BC)

Room 10



Siege of Lachish Reliefs (701BC)

Room 10



**Hezekiah Tribute Inscription (693-2BC)
(Inscribed under an Assyrian Winged Bull)**

Room 10

Cyrus Cylinder (6th C, BC)

Room 52, case 6

Brick Inscription of King Cyrus

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Darius I Egyptian Shrine (521-486 BC)

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Trilingual Inscription Jar (485-465 BC)

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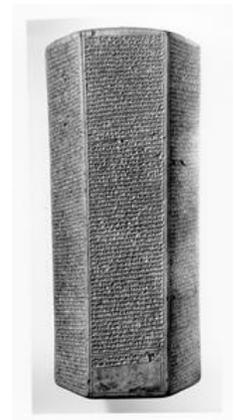
Gilgamesh Epic (7th C, BC)

Room 55, case 10



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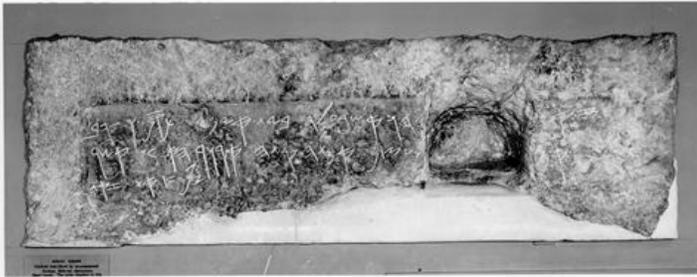
Royal Game and other artifacts of Ur (2500 BC)

Room 56



Royal Steward Inscription (7th C, BC)

Room 57



Royal Stamped Jar Handles (8th C, BC)

Room 57, case 10

Samaria Ivories

Room 57, Case 10



4) Greek Antiquity

Parthenon Galleries

Room 18

5) Roman Antiquity

Bust of Tiberias Caesar (14-37 AD)

Room 70

Head of Augustus Caesar (27BC – 14 AD)

Room 70, Case 1

Head of Claudius Caesar (41-52 AD)

Room 70

Politrarch Inscription (2nd c, AD)

Room 85

6) Coins

Jewish Coins

Gallery 70, case 27

Roman Coins

Galleries, 49, 50, 65, 69, 70