Dug Up and Written Down

Volume Two

Names, Places, and the First Christians in the Ground

Andrew Dominguez

Dug Up and Written Down, Volume Two: Names, Places, and the First Christians in the Ground

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A Note on the Bible Translation Used in This Book

My preferred Bible for personal study, teaching, and research is the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). I chose it because it is a word-for-word translation in today's language, built on the ancient Scripture sources: the Hebrew and Aramaic of the Old Testament and the Greek of the New Testament. I prepared the SLB myself, and the Scripture in this book is taken from it.

Where a literal phrase would mislead an English reader, the SLB gives the writer's meaning in plain words. Words added for sense are set in bold italics so you can see what is in the original and what is not.

The complete Steadfast Literal Bible is free to read, search, download, and print at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb. If you want to check a verse in its full setting or read the translation's preface and principles, that is the place to go.

Above all, my desire is not to promote one translation over another, but to faithfully teach the Word of God, encourage careful examination of the Scriptures, and help readers grow in their knowledge, understanding, and relationship with the Lord.

May every page of this book direct attention not to the translation itself, but to the truth of God's Word and the One whom it reveals.

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Before You Begin

When I finished Dug Up and Written Down, I thought I was done with the subject. I wasn't. Every chapter in that book left a dozen things on the cutting room floor. A king named on a clay prism. A Philistine temple with a dedication stone. A cartoon scratched on a wall in Rome making fun of a Christian. A floor in a prison yard in Israel that calls Jesus God, written about two hundred years after He walked out of His tomb. I kept a list, and the list got long enough to be a book.

This is that book. You don't need to have read Volume One first, but it helps. Volume One covers the big questions: how archaeology works, how we know the Bible we hold is the Bible that was written, and the major finds from the Flood to the empty tomb. When this book touches something Volume One already covered, I'll say so in a line and point you back to it, so you don't pay twice for the same story.

What This Volume Does Differently

Volume One walked through the Bible in order. This one comes at the evidence from three other directions.

Part One is about people. Since the 1800s, scholars have found the names of dozens of men and women from the Bible written in stone, clay and ink by people who lived at the same time. I'll show you how a careful scholar decides whether the name on a seal belongs to the same man in the Bible, and then walk through the kings, foreign rulers, scribes, priests and Roman officials who have turned up.

Part Two is about places. We'll walk the land: the Philistine cities where Goliath came from, the forts and shrines of Judah, Jerusalem layer by layer, the towns around the Sea of Galilee, and the cities on Paul's road.

Part Three is new ground for me. It is about the church in the ground, the physical traces of the first Christians after the New Testament was written. Graffiti, house churches, a mosaic floor, tombs, and the places where tradition says the apostles were laid to rest. This is the part of the story most believers never hear, and I think it will encourage you.

Part Four closes with two short chapters on how to handle the next "Bible proven true" headline you see, and what evidence can and cannot do for faith.

How I Rate the Evidence

I use the same scale I used in Volume One. At the end of each find you'll see an evidence check:

- **Confirmed.** Nearly all scholars who work on it agree on what it is and what it says.
- **Strong.** Most scholars agree, but some details are still argued.
- **Debated.** Good scholars disagree, and the question is open.
- **Not supported.** The claim doesn't hold up, or the evidence is missing.

You'll notice I use "Debated" and "Not supported" more than some Christian books do. That's on purpose. If I oversell one find, you have every reason to doubt me on the next one. The Bible doesn't need my help. It needs me to be honest.

I learned to work this way writing the Fact Check Series, eighteen short books that grade claims True, Partly true, False or Inconclusive, with sources a reader can check for himself. The hardest grade to give is Inconclusive, because everybody wants an answer. But a confident wrong answer does more damage than an honest "I don't know." I'd rather tell you a find is debated than have you repeat it to a skeptic and get burned.

A Word About Names

Ancient people didn't spell names the way we do, and they didn't always use the same name for the same person. The Assyrians called Jehu "Yaua." The Babylonians called Jehoiachin "Ya'u-kinu." The Bible calls the Assyrian king Tiglath-pileser "Pul" in one verse. When I give you the name as it appears on the object, I'll put it next to the familiar English form so you can follow along.

The Scripture in This Book

All Scripture is quoted from the Steadfast Literal Bible (SLB). Words added for sense are set in bold italics, so you can see what is in the original and what isn't. Measurements in the SLB are given in modern units with the ancient measure in parentheses.

You might ask, "Why should I care about any of this? I already believe." That's a fair question. Here's my answer. Faith isn't built on archaeology. It's built on the God who acted in history and on the Word He gave us. But the Bible keeps pointing at real places, real kings and real dates. When the ground keeps agreeing with the Book, it tells you that the people who wrote it were telling the truth about the things we can check. That makes it easier to trust them about the things we can't.

Let's go dig.

Part One: Names in Clay and Stone

Chapter 1: How to Tell It's the Same Person

> *it seemed good to me also, having followed all things carefully from the first, to write to you in order, most excellent Theophilus,*
>
> **Luke 1:3 (SLB)**

Here's a problem you run into the first time you read about a "Bible name" found on a seal. Names repeat. There were a lot of men named Jeremiah in ancient Judah. There were a lot of men named John in my high school. If an archaeologist finds a clay seal impression with the name Jeremiah on it, that doesn't mean he has found the prophet. It means he has found a Jeremiah.

So how does a careful scholar decide that the name on an object belongs to the same person named in the Bible? That's the question for this chapter, and it matters, because the rest of Part One stands on it.

The Purdue Method

The clearest answer I know comes from Lawrence Mykytiuk, a professor and librarian at Purdue University. He wrote his doctoral work on exactly this problem and published it as a book in 2004, Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200-539 B.C.E. Later he wrote a series of articles for Biblical Archaeology Review that put his findings in plain language. His count for the Old Testament, as of his 2017 update, is fifty-three people confirmed in inscriptions written during the time the Bible describes. Appendix A lists every one of them.

His method boils down to three questions.

First, is the inscription real? If an object was bought on the antiquities market with no record of where it came from, it might be a forgery, and some very good ones have been made. Mykytiuk gives the most weight to objects found in a proper excavation, where the dig team recorded the layer and the spot.

Second, do the time and place match? A seal from the 900s B.C. can't belong to a man who lived in the 600s B.C. A Judean official's seal found in Judah fits better than one found in Egypt.

Third, are there enough identifying marks? One name isn't enough. A name plus a father's name is better. A name plus a father's name plus a title is better still. A king's name with the word "king" next to it, in the right century, in the right country, is about as strong as it gets.

When an inscription passes all three tests, Mykytiuk counts it as a match. When it passes two, he calls it reasonable but not certain. When the name is just a name, he leaves it off the list, no matter how much he might like to include it.

I appreciate that. It's the same rule I try to follow in this book.

A Strong Example: The Seal of Shema

In 1904, a German team digging at Megiddo, in northern Israel, found a large oval seal made of jasper. Carved on it was a roaring lion, and above and below the lion an inscription in old Hebrew letters: "Belonging to Shema, servant of Jeroboam."

The phrase "servant of" on a seal like this is a title. It means a high royal official, the king's man. There were two kings named Jeroboam in the northern kingdom of Israel, and most scholars date the style of the letters and the lion to the 700s B.C., which is the reign of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-29). Megiddo was one of his royal cities.

Here's the sad part. The original seal was sent to the sultan in Istanbul and has been lost. What we have today is a bronze cast made before it left, along with photographs. That's enough for scholars to study the letters, and the find was recorded in a proper dig, so it still counts.

Notice what the seal does not say. It doesn't say Shema was a good man or a bad one. It doesn't tell us a single thing Jeroboam II did. What it does is confirm that a king named Jeroboam ruled Israel, with officials who used his name as a mark of authority, at the time the Bible says he did.

Evidence check: *Strong. Confirmed as a genuine seal; nearly all scholars connect it with Jeroboam II.*

Another Strong Example: The King's Servants

Two other seals from the 700s B.C. carry the name of King Uzziah of Judah, who is also called Azariah in the Bible (2 Kings 15:1-7; 2 Chronicles 26). One reads "Belonging to Abiyaw, servant of Uzziyaw." The other reads "Belonging to Shubnayaw, servant of Uzziyaw." Both use the same title we saw on the Shema seal.

Uzziah reigned a long time, and the Bible says he became a leper late in life and lived apart while his son Jotham ran the government (2 Chronicles 26:21). There is also a stone plaque, found in 1931 in a collection on the Mount of Olives, that reads in Aramaic, "Here were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Judah. Do not open." It was carved around the time of Jesus, about seven hundred years after Uzziah died, when his bones were apparently moved to a new tomb. It shows that people in Jerusalem still honored his memory. But the two seals are earlier and better. They come from his own lifetime.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

A Case That Fails the Test: The Baruch Bulla

Now let me show you one that doesn't make the list, even though I'd love it to.

A **bulla** (BULL-uh; plural bullae, BULL-ee) is a small lump of clay pressed onto the string that tied a rolled document closed, then stamped with a seal. When the document was opened, the bulla was broken off and often thrown away. When a building burned, the fire baked those lumps of clay hard, and they survived even when the papyrus documents they sealed turned to ash.

In the 1970s, a bulla surfaced on the antiquities market that reads "Belonging to Berekyahu, son of Neriyahu, the scribe." Berekyahu is the long form of Baruch. Jeremiah's scribe was "Baruch the son of Neriah" (Jeremiah 36:4). Name, father's name and title all match. It looks perfect.

So why doesn't Mykytiuk count it? Because nobody knows where it came from. It was bought, not dug. And in the years since, scholars have shown that forgers were making fake bullae for that same market, some of them very good. The Baruch bulla may be genuine. Some experts think it is. But without a findspot, it can't carry weight, and I won't ask it to.

Evidence check: *Debated. Possibly genuine, but unprovenanced, so not counted.*

A Case That's Still Open: The Isaiah Bulla

In 2018, the late Eilat Mazar of the Hebrew University announced a bulla found in a proper excavation at the Ophel, the area just south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. It was found about ten feet from a bulla of King Hezekiah, in the same layer. The first line reads "Belonging to Yesha'yahu," which is Isaiah. The second line is damaged. It has the letters n-v-y, and the end of the line is broken off.

If the broken word was nvy', with one more letter, it would read "the prophet." That would make this the seal of Isaiah the prophet, Hezekiah's close adviser (2 Kings 19 and 20; Isaiah 37 to 39). If the broken word was a place or a family name, it would be some other Isaiah.

Mazar herself was careful. She said the reading "the prophet" was possible, not certain. That's the honest answer, and it's where I'll leave it.

Evidence check: *Debated. A real find from a real dig, near Hezekiah's bulla, but the key word is broken.*

Why the Standard Matters

You might ask, "Isn't this too strict? Wouldn't a looser standard give us more evidence?" It would give us more names, but not more evidence. A list padded with maybes is only as strong as its weakest entry, and a skeptic will always go after the weakest one first.

I spent about 35 years at a public utility, starting in the field in 1987 and ending up running its technical training programs. One thing that kind of work teaches you is that close enough is not a match. A record either ties to the thing in front of you or it doesn't. That's all the Purdue method is. It refuses to call two names the same person until the record ties.

What impresses me about the list in Appendix A isn't just its length. It's that it was built by someone who threw out everything he couldn't defend. Fifty-three people from the Old Testament, plus around thirty from the New Testament when you count writers like Josephus alongside inscriptions and coins, all identified by name, family and title in sources from their own time.

Luke said he had "followed all things carefully from the first" before he wrote (Luke 1:3). That's the spirit I want in this book. In the next four chapters, we'll go through those names, group by group, and you can judge for yourself.

Study Questions

1. Why isn't a name alone enough to identify a person from the Bible?
2. What are the three questions Mykytiuk asks of every inscription?
3. What is a bulla, and why do so many of them survive when the documents they sealed did not?
4. Why isn't the Baruch bulla counted, even though its words match Jeremiah 36:4?
5. Read Luke 1:1-4. What does Luke's method have in common with a careful archaeologist's?

Chapter 2: Kings of Israel and Judah in Other Nations' Records

> *Pul the king of Assyria came against the land; and Menahem gave to Pul approximately 75,000 pounds (a thousand talents) of silver, for his hands to be with him, to strengthen the kingdom in his hand. And Menahem exacted the silver from Israel, from all the mighty men of wealth, to give to the king of Assyria, approximately 20 ounces (fifty shekels) of silver for each man. And the king of Assyria returned and did not remain there in the land.*
>
> **2 Kings 15:19-20 (SLB)**

The kings of Israel and Judah didn't leave many monuments of their own. Israel was a small country, squeezed between Egypt to the south and the great empires of Mesopotamia to the east, and its kings were not in the habit of carving their victories on mountainsides. The kings who did that kind of thing were the Assyrians and the Babylonians. Their scribes wrote down every city they took and every king who paid them, and they buried those records in the palaces of Nineveh, Calah and Babylon.

That turns out to be a gift. When an enemy writes down your name, nobody can say you made it up.

Volume One covered the most famous cases: David on the Tel Dan Stele, Ahab on the Kurkh Monolith, Jehu bowing on the Black Obelisk, Hezekiah shut up "like a bird in a cage" on Sennacherib's prism, and Jehoiachin's rations in Babylon. In this chapter I want to fill in the rest of the list, the kings who don't usually make the documentaries.

Omri: The King Who Named a Country

The Bible gives King Omri only fourteen verses (1 Kings 16:15-28), and most of what it says is that he "did the evil in the eyes of the LORD" (1 Kings 16:25). It also says he bought a hill from a man named Shemer and built a new capital on it.

> *In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri became king over Israel, twelve years; in Tirzah he reigned six years. And he bought the hill Samaria from Shemer for approximately 150 pounds (two talents) of silver; and he built* ***on*** *the hill, and he called the name of the city which he built after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill, Samaria.* (1 Kings 16:23-24)

Here's what's remarkable. Omri may get a few verses in the Bible, but he got the attention of every empire around him. Mesha, king of Moab, set up his famous stone around 840 B.C. and wrote, "Omri was king of Israel, and he oppressed Moab many days." For more than a hundred years after Omri died, Assyrian scribes kept calling the northern kingdom Bit Humri, "the House of Omri," the way people sometimes still call a company by its founder's name long after he's gone. Shalmaneser III even calls Jehu, the man who wiped out Omri's family, "Jehu son of Omri."

Samaria, the city Omri built, has been excavated, and the royal buildings on the summit date to his time.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Joash: A King on a Stone in Iraq

In 1967, a British team digging at Tell al-Rimah in northern Iraq found a stone monument of the Assyrian king Adad-nirari III. In it he lists kings who paid him tribute around 796 B.C., and one of them is "Ia'asu the Samarian." That is Joash, also spelled Jehoash, king of Israel (2 Kings 13:10-13).

The stone shows that by about 800 B.C., Israel was paying off Assyria. It also explains something the Bible hints at. Second Kings 13:5 says the LORD gave Israel "a savior," and they went out from under the hand of Syria, the Bible's name for Aram, and Israel got some breathing room. Many scholars think Adad-nirari's campaigns against Damascus around this time were part of how that happened. The Assyrians weren't doing Israel a favor. They were busy beating Israel's enemy.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Menahem: Paying for Protection

Read the verse at the top of this chapter again. Menahem, king of Israel, paid "Pul the king of Assyria" a thousand talents of silver, about 75,000 pounds, and raised the money by taxing every wealthy man in the country fifty shekels.

For a long time, readers didn't know who Pul was. Then Assyrian records showed that Tiglath-pileser III, one of the strongest kings Assyria ever had, also used the name Pulu when he ruled Babylon. First Chronicles 5:26 puts both names side by side. And Tiglath-pileser's own annals, carved on the walls of his palace at Calah, list "Menahem of Samaria" among the kings who paid him tribute.

The Bible and the Assyrian record are telling the same story from opposite sides of the table.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Pekah and Hoshea: A Coup, Told Twice

Second Kings 15:30 says Hoshea son of Elah conspired against Pekah, king of Israel, killed him, and took the throne. Second Kings 17:3 says Hoshea then became a vassal of Assyria and paid tribute.

Tiglath-pileser III tells the same story in a stone text scholars call Summary Inscription 4: "They overthrew Pekah their king, and I placed Hoshea as king over them." He also boasts that he took tribute from Hoshea in gold and silver.

Notice that the Assyrian king claims credit for putting Hoshea on the throne. The Bible says Hoshea did it himself. That's not a contradiction so much as two points of view. Hoshea pulled the trigger. Assyria approved the result. Kings have always taken credit for things like that.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Ahaz: The King Who Called for Help

When the kings of Israel and Damascus marched on Jerusalem, King Ahaz of Judah didn't trust the LORD, even though Isaiah told him to (Isaiah 7). Instead he sent silver and gold from the temple to Tiglath-pileser and said, "I ***am*** your servant and your son. Come up and save me" (2 Kings 16:7).

Tiglath-pileser came. And in another stone text, Summary Inscription 7, he lists the kings who paid him tribute, including "Jehoahaz of Judah." Jehoahaz is the full form of the name Ahaz. The Bible's writers seem to have dropped the first part, the part that honored the LORD, from the name of a king who turned away from Him.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Manasseh: One of Twenty-Two Kings

Manasseh, Hezekiah's son, reigned fifty-five years, longer than any other king of Judah, and the Bible says he was the worst of them (2 Kings 21). Second Chronicles adds that the Assyrians took him in chains to Babylon, where he humbled himself before God and was brought back (2 Chronicles 33:11-13).

Two Assyrian kings name him. Esarhaddon, on a clay prism from Nineveh, lists twenty-two kings he forced to send building materials for his palace, and second on the list is "Manasseh, king of Judah." His son Ashurbanipal lists Manasseh again among the kings who supported his campaign against Egypt.

The Assyrian texts don't mention Manasseh's captivity. That doesn't mean it didn't happen. It means Assyrian kings didn't write about every vassal they summoned and sent home. But it is worth noting that Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal both had dealings with Babylon, which fits the Chronicler's detail that Manasseh was taken there and not to Nineveh.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Manasseh as king and vassal. The captivity in Babylon is not mentioned outside the Bible.*

What About the Ones Who Are Missing?

Mykytiuk's list includes eight kings of the northern kingdom of Israel and fourteen people from Judah, David among them. You might ask, "Then where are Saul and Solomon? Where are Asa and Jehoshaphat and Josiah?"

It's a fair question, and the answer is mostly about where people dug and what survived.

Solomon lived in the 900s B.C., before Assyria started writing down the names of Israel's kings. Egypt's records from that century are thin. Jerusalem has been lived in, torn down and rebuilt for three thousand years, and much of the city from his time lies under houses, streets and holy sites where nobody can dig. Josiah ruled in the years when Assyria was collapsing and before Babylon took over, so neither empire had much reason to write about him.

Absence of evidence isn't evidence of absence, as the saying goes. But I'll be honest with you. It isn't evidence of presence either. For the kings who aren't on the list, we take the Bible's word for it, the

same way we take the word of most ancient historians for most ancient kings. What the list shows is that where we can check, the Bible's kings are real men, in the right order, in the right century.

Putting It Together

Line up the names in this chapter and in Volume One and you get something like a family album: David, Omri, Ahab, Jehu, Joash, Jeroboam II, Menahem, Pekah, Hoshea in the north; Uzziah, Ahaz, Hezekiah, Manasseh and Jehoiachin in the south. Most of them were recorded by people who had no interest in making Israel look good, and several were recorded by people who hated Israel.

That matters, because one of the oldest claims against the Bible is that the books of Kings were written centuries later by men who invented a glorious past. Invented kings don't show up in the tax records of their enemies.

Study Questions

1. Why are Assyrian and Babylonian records especially useful for checking the Bible?

2. What does it tell you about Omri that the Assyrians kept calling Israel "the House of Omri" long after he died?

3. Compare 2 Kings 15:30 with Tiglath-pileser's Summary Inscription 4. How can both accounts be true?

4. Read Isaiah 7:1-12 and 2 Kings 16:7-8. What did Ahaz trust instead of God, and what did it cost him?

5. Why might some kings of Israel and Judah never show up in outside records?

Chapter 3: The Foreign Kings of the Bible

> *At that time Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River, and Shethar-bozenai and their associates came to them, and they were saying to them as follows: "Who made a decree for you to build this house and to finish this structure?"*
>
> **Ezra 5:3 (SLB)**

If the kings of Israel and Judah were small men on a big stage, the kings of Egypt, Aram, Assyria, Babylon and Persia owned the stage. They show up in the Bible as enemies, overlords, rescuers and sometimes, like Cyrus, as tools in God's hand. They also show up in their own records, usually bragging.

Thirty of the fifty-three Old Testament people on Mykytiuk's list are foreign kings and officials, and a thirty-first, Sanballat, was a governor of Samaria under the Persians. That's worth stopping on. The Bible's writers weren't living in a bubble. They knew the names of the kings in Memphis, Damascus, Nineveh, Babylon and Susa, and they got them right, often with details that only someone close to the events would know.

I won't walk through all of them. Appendix A lists them. Here are the ones with the best stories.

Egypt

Tirhakah. When Sennacherib's army was camped in Judah in 701 B.C., word came that "Tirhakah the king of Cush" was marching out to fight him (2 Kings 19:9). For a long time, critics pointed out that Taharqa, the Cushite pharaoh known from Egyptian records, didn't become king until 690 B.C. Was the Bible wrong?

The answer turned out to be simple. Taharqa's own inscriptions say he came north to Egypt as a young man, around age twenty, with his brother's army. He was a royal prince leading troops in 701 B.C., and he was king by the time the books of Kings were written down. A writer calling him "king" is like a historian today writing that "General Eisenhower" landed in Normandy, even though he wasn't President yet. Statues, stelae and temple walls with Taharqa's name are found from Egypt to Sudan, and Assyrian texts name him too.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Taharqa. Strong for the explanation of his title in 701 B.C.*

Hophra. Jeremiah warned the Jews who fled to Egypt that God would give "Pharaoh Hophra the king of Egypt" into to his enemies (Jeremiah 44:30). Hophra is Wahibre, known to the Greeks as Apries, who ruled from 589 to 570 B.C. His palace was excavated at Memphis, and Greek historians and Egyptian records agree that his own army turned on him and he was killed after a civil war. Jeremiah's warning came true in the man's own lifetime.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Aram (Syria)

Hazael. Elijah was told to anoint Hazael king over Syria, that is, Aram (1 Kings 19:15), and Elisha later wept because he knew what Hazael would do to Israel (2 Kings 8:12). Hazael was a usurper, a man who wasn't born a prince. The Assyrian king Shalmaneser III actually calls him "Hazael, son of a nobody," which is about the rudest thing an Assyrian scribe could say, and it fits the Bible's story that Hazael murdered his master to take the throne (2 Kings 8:15).

Hazael's name turns up in several places: on bronze horse fittings that read "that which Hadad gave to our lord Hazael," which were taken as war loot and ended up in Greek temples on the island of Samos and at Eretria, and on carved ivories found in Syria. Most scholars think the Tel Dan Stele, which Volume One covered for its mention of the "House of David," was set up by Hazael or his son.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Ben-hadad, son of Hazael. Second Kings 13:3 says the LORD gave Israel "into the hand of Hazael the king of Syria and into the hand of Ben-hadad the son of Hazael." (The SLB, like most English Bibles, calls Aram "Syria.") A stone from Syria called the Zakkur Stele, found in 1903, names "Bar-hadad son of Hazael, king of Aram" as the leader of a coalition of kings who besieged the city of Hazrach. Bar-hadad is the Aramaic form of Ben-hadad. Father and son, in the right order.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Rezin. Rezin of Damascus joined Pekah of Israel to attack Jerusalem in the days of Ahaz (2 Kings 16:5). Tiglath-pileser III's annals tell how he took tribute from "Rahianu of Damascus," then besieged Damascus, and the Bible says Tiglath-pileser captured the city and killed Rezin (2 Kings 16:9).

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Assyria

Volume One covered Sargon II, the king who was known only from one verse in Isaiah until his palace was found in 1843, and Sennacherib's siege of Lachish. Here are two more Assyrian stories.

Shalmaneser V. Second Kings 17:3 says "Shalmaneser the king of Assyria" came against Hoshea. He's the least-known Assyrian king of his century, because he reigned only five years and left very few inscriptions. But he's in the Babylonian Chronicle, which says he "ravaged Samaria." The Bible says the siege lasted three years and that "the king of Assyria" captured the city (2 Kings 17:5-6). Sargon II, who followed him, later claimed the victory for himself. Scholars still argue about which king actually finished the job. The Bible's wording, which just says "the king of Assyria," leaves room for both.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Shalmaneser V. Debated as to which king took Samaria.*

Sennacherib's murder. Second Kings 19:37 ends Sennacherib's story in a single verse. While he was worshiping in the house of his god, two of his sons, Adrammelech and Sharezer, struck him down with the sword, and another son, Esarhaddon, became king.

For a long time, the only outside sources were Babylonian chronicles that said Sennacherib was killed by "his son," without a name. Then in 1980 the Finnish scholar Simo Parpola studied a letter

written to Esarhaddon and found a man named Arda-Mulissu named as the plotter. Arda-Mulissu was one of Sennacherib's sons, and his name, passed through Hebrew spelling, comes out very close to Adrammelech. Most Assyriologists now accept the match.

Think about that. A detail in one verse of 2 Kings, a murderer's name, was confirmed by a private letter to the next king, written in Assyrian, that nobody could read for twenty-five centuries.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

Babylon

Merodach-baladan. When Hezekiah was sick, "Merodach-baladan the son of Baladan, the king of Babylon" sent him letters and a present (2 Kings 20:12). Hezekiah showed the envoys everything in his treasury, and Isaiah told him that one day Babylon would carry it all away.

Merodach-baladan is Marduk-apla-iddina II, a Chaldean chief who made himself king of Babylon twice and spent most of his life fighting Assyria. Sennacherib writes about chasing him through the marshes. It makes perfect sense that a man like that would send gifts to the king of Judah, another small king the Assyrians were leaning on. He was looking for allies. The Bible doesn't say so outright, but the history fills in the "why" behind the visit.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Nebuzaradan and Nergal-sharezer. When Jerusalem fell in 586 B.C., the Bible names the Babylonian officers who came in. Nebuzaradan was "the chief of the bodyguards" (2 Kings 25:8), and Nergal-sharezer sat in the Middle Gate (Jeremiah 39:3).

A clay prism of Nebuchadnezzar, now in Istanbul, lists the officials of his court. On it are Nabu-zer-iddin, the chief cook, a court title for a high officer, and Nergal-shar-usur, a prince who later became king himself. Volume One told you about a third man from Jeremiah 39:3, Nebo-sarsekim, whose name turned up on a receipt for gold in 2007. Three of the officials who walked through Jerusalem's gate on the day the city fell are in Babylonian records.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Evil-merodach. He's the king who let Jehoiachin out of prison and gave him a seat at his table (2 Kings 25:27-30). His Babylonian name was Amel-Marduk. He reigned only two years before he was killed and replaced by Nergal-shar-usur, the same man from Jeremiah 39:3. Several inscriptions bear his name, including a stone vase. The Bible records exactly one thing about him, an act of mercy, and that one thing fits the time and the man.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Persia

Tattenai. Look at the verse at the top of this chapter. When the Jews were rebuilding the temple, "Tattenai, governor of the region beyond the River" came and asked who had given them permission (Ezra 5:3). He wrote to King Darius, and Darius checked the royal archives, found the decree of Cyrus, and told Tattenai to stay out of the way and pay for the work from the royal taxes (Ezra 6).

Tattenai is a minor official. Nobody would remember him if he weren't in Ezra. But a Babylonian clay tablet dated to 502 B.C., the twentieth year of Darius, records a business deal witnessed by a servant of "Tattanni, governor of Across-the-River." Across-the-River was the Persian name for the province west of the Euphrates, which included Judah. The same title, the same region, the same reign.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Xerxes. The king in the book of Esther is called Ahasuerus. That's the Hebrew form of the Persian name Khshayarsha, which the Greeks wrote as Xerxes. His palace at Susa has been excavated, and the Greek historian Herodotus describes his court in ways that line up with Esther: the huge banquets, the royal couriers, the officials who could not enter the king's presence unless called. Esther 1:1 says he ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. Persian inscriptions list India and Cush at the edges of his empire.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Xerxes. The events of Esther are not recorded outside the Bible.*

What the Foreign Kings Show

Here's what strikes me after going through this list. The Bible's writers didn't just know the big names that everyone knew. They knew the minor officials, the usurpers, the short reigns, the murderers. They knew that the Assyrian king had two names, that the Cushite general was later king, that the Persian governor of the west was named Tattenai.

That's the kind of detail that people get right when they were there, or when they were working from records made by people who were there. It's hard to fake, and easy to get wrong. The Bible keeps getting it right.

Moses told Israel to "remember the days of old" (Deuteronomy 32:7). God gave His people a history, not a myth, and He put it in the middle of the real world, with real kings who left real stones.

Study Questions

1. Why is it significant that most of the people on Mykytiuk's Old Testament list are foreigners?
2. How can 2 Kings 19:9 call Tirhakah "king" in 701 B.C.?
3. How did a private letter to Esarhaddon help confirm 2 Kings 19:37?
4. Read Ezra 5:1-6:12. What role does a minor official like Tattenai play in God's plan?
5. Which story in this chapter surprised you most, and why?

Chapter 4: Scribes, Officials and Priests

> *And Baruch read aloud in the book the words of Jeremiah **in** the house of the LORD, in the chamber of Gemariah the son of Shaphan the scribe, in the upper court, **at** the entrance of the New Gate of the house of the LORD, in the ears of all the people.*
>
> **Jeremiah 36:10 (SLB)**

Kings get the monuments. The men who actually ran the kingdom get the bullae.

In Chapter 1, I explained that a bulla is a small lump of clay that sealed a rolled document, stamped with the owner's seal. Thousands of them have been found in Israel, most of them from the last century before Babylon destroyed Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Each one is a little calling card from a real person: a name, usually a father's name, and sometimes a title.

Volume One told you about three of the best: Gemariah son of Shaphan, the scribe whose room Baruch read Jeremiah's scroll in, and Jucal son of Shelemiah and Gedaliah son of Pashhur, two of the officials who threw Jeremiah into a cistern. In this chapter I want to introduce you to some of their colleagues.

The Burned House of the Bullae

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the Israeli archaeologist Yigal Shiloh dug on the eastern slope of the City of David, the oldest part of Jerusalem. In one building, burned in the Babylonian destruction, his team found fifty-one bullae in a single room. The fire that destroyed the documents baked the clay. Scholars think the room was some kind of record office.

Gemariah's bulla came from that room. So did another one that reads "Belonging to Azaryahu son of Hilqiyahu," that is, Azariah son of Hilkiah.

Hilkiah is the high priest who found the Book of the Law in the temple during King Josiah's repairs (2 Kings 22:8). First Chronicles 6:13 gives the line of high priests and says that Hilkiah fathered Azariah, and Azariah fathered Seraiah, the last high priest before the exile. The bulla has no title. But a seal from Jerusalem in the right decades, with that exact father and son, is a strong match, and Mykytiuk counts both men.

Think about where that puts us. The Bible says Shaphan the scribe and Hilkiah the high priest stood together when the Book of the Law was found and read to the king (2 Kings 22:8-10). The sons of both men turned up in the same burned room in the City of David.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

Shebna and the Tomb Isaiah Condemned

Isaiah 22 contains one of the strangest prophecies in the Bible. God tells Isaiah to go "to Shebna, who ***is*** over the house," the royal steward, and rebuke him for "cutting a dwelling for himself in the rock," a fancy tomb on the height (Isaiah 22:15-16). God says He will throw Shebna out of office and give his job to Eliakim.

In 1870, the French scholar Charles Clermont-Ganneau found an inscription over the door of a rock-cut tomb in the village of Silwan, across the Kidron Valley from the City of David. He couldn't read it well, and it was taken to the British Museum. In 1953, the Israeli scholar Nahman Avigad finally deciphered it: "This is the tomb of ...yahu, who is over the house. There is no silver or gold here, only his bones and the bones of his slave-wife with him. Cursed be the man who opens this."

The first part of the name is broken off. Shebna is probably a short form of Shebanyahu. The title "who is over the house" is the same one Isaiah uses. The date of the writing fits Hezekiah's reign. Many scholars think this is the very tomb Isaiah condemned. Others say the name is too broken to be sure, and they're right that we can't prove it.

What I find striking is that the Bible's charge against Shebna was vanity about his grave. And here is a royal steward of that era whose tomb was grand enough to carve a curse over the door.

Evidence check: *Debated for the identification with Shebna. Confirmed as a tomb of a royal steward from Isaiah's time.*

Nathan-melech, Servant of the King

In 2019, a team from the Israel Antiquities Authority and Tel Aviv University, digging in the Givati Parking Lot just outside the walls of the Old City, found a bulla in a large public building destroyed in 586 B.C. It reads "Belonging to Nathan-melech, servant of the king."

Nathan-melech is a rare name. It appears only once in the Bible. When Josiah cleaned out the temple, he removed the horses that the kings of Judah had dedicated to the sun, from the entrance of the temple "by the chamber of Nathan-melech the eunuch" (2 Kings 23:11). In the royal courts of the time, the word translated "eunuch" was often simply the title of a high court officer. The title on the bulla, "servant of the king," marks a high official, and the building is the right age.

The archaeologists were careful. They said the bulla may well belong to the man in 2 Kings, but there's no father's name to clinch it. I agree with them.

Evidence check: *Debated. A strong possible match.*

Gedaliah, Governor After the Fall

After Babylon destroyed Jerusalem, Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedaliah son of Ahikam to govern what was left of Judah from the town of Mizpah. Within a few months he was murdered (2 Kings 25:22-25; Jeremiah 40 and 41). His father Ahikam was the man who protected Jeremiah from being killed (Jeremiah 26:24), and his grandfather was Shaphan the scribe, the same Shaphan from 2 Kings 22.

At Lachish, in the 1930s, a British team found a bulla that reads "Belonging to Gedalyahu, who is over the house." That's the royal steward's title again. Some scholars think it's Gedaliah son of Ahikam, who may have held the steward's office before Babylon made him governor. There is no father's name, and Gedaliah was a common name. So it stays in the "possible" column.

Evidence check: *Debated.*

Sanballat's Partner: Geshem the Arab

Volume One told you how papyrus letters from Elephantine in Egypt name Sanballat, governor of Samaria, one of Nehemiah's enemies. Nehemiah had a second enemy who gets less attention: "Geshem the Arab" (Nehemiah 2:19; 6:1-6). Geshem mocked the wall-building and tried to lure Nehemiah into a trap.

In the 1940s, a set of silver bowls from a shrine at Tell el-Maskhuta, in the eastern Nile Delta of Egypt, came to light. One of them carries an Aramaic inscription: "Qaynu son of Gashmu, king of Qedar." Qedar was the most powerful Arab kingdom of the time, and it controlled the trade routes south of Judah. Most scholars date the bowl to around 400 B.C. and think Gashmu is the Geshem of Nehemiah, a generation earlier, now the father of the reigning king.

It makes sense. The governor of Samaria to the north and the king of the Arabs to the south both had reasons not to want a strong, walled Jerusalem between them. Nehemiah was boxed in, and the bowl shows us who was doing the boxing.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

Priests and Their Families

Several priestly families named in the Bible turn up in inscriptions too. At Arad, in the southern desert, a letter written on a broken piece of pottery mentions the "sons of Korah," the family the Bible names in the titles of eleven psalms (Psalms 42, 44 to 49, 84, 85, 87 and 88). Another piece names Pashhur, and another Meremoth, both priestly names that appear in Ezra, Nehemiah and Jeremiah. These aren't the same men, but they show that the families the Bible names were really serving in Judah's shrines and storehouses at the time.

In its early years, the Temple Mount Sifting Project found a small bulla that may read "Belonging to Gealyahu son of Immer." Immer was a priestly family; Pashhur son of Immer was the temple officer who beat Jeremiah and put him in stocks (Jeremiah 20:1-2). Gealyahu isn't in the Bible. If the reading is right, he may have been Pashhur's brother.

Evidence check: *Confirmed that these priestly family names were in use. The individual identifications are debated.*

Why These Small Finds Matter

None of these people are the stars of the Bible. A steward, a scribe's son, an officer whose name appears once, a governor who lasted a few months, a desert king who mocked a building project. That's exactly why they matter.

If someone centuries later had made up the history of Judah, he might have gotten the big names right. Big names get remembered. But who remembers the son of the high priest, or the name of an officer who had a room near the temple gate? Only people who were there, and the clerks who wrote it down.

When God told Jeremiah to buy a field from his cousin, Jeremiah had the deed signed, sealed and witnessed, and then put in a clay jar so it would last a long time (Jeremiah 32:10-14). He was planning for the future. I like to think that every bulla we pull out of the ground is a little reminder that God's people kept records because they believed their history mattered. It still does.

Study Questions

1. What was found in the burned room Yigal Shiloh excavated in the City of David?
2. Read 2 Kings 22:8-10. Which two men from that passage have sons whose names appear on bullae?
3. Read Isaiah 22:15-19. What was God's charge against Shebna? How does the Silwan tomb fit?
4. Why do archaeologists say the Nathan-melech bulla is a possible match, not a certain one?
5. Why can small names be stronger evidence than big ones?

Chapter 5: New Testament Names Outside the New Testament

> *For the king knows about these things, to whom also I speak with boldness; for I am not persuaded that any of these things escapes his notice, not one; for this has not been done in a corner.*
>
> **Acts 26:26 (SLB)**

The New Testament covers a much shorter stretch of time than the Old, about seventy years from the birth of Jesus to the last events in Acts. But it's crowded with rulers. Luke in particular loves to put his story on the map of the Roman world, with emperors, governors, kings and high priests all named and placed.

Paul said to King Agrippa, "this has not been done in a corner" (Acts 26:26). He was saying that the events of the gospel happened in public, in front of people whose names were known. So let's check those names.

Lawrence Mykytiuk, whose method I explained in Chapter 1, published two lists in Biblical Archaeology Review: twenty-three political figures in 2017, and seven religious figures in 2021, for a total of thirty people from the New Testament confirmed outside it. His sources here are a little different from the Old Testament list. Along with inscriptions, he uses coins, and he uses ancient writers like the Jewish historian Josephus and the Roman historian Tacitus, who wrote within living memory of the events.

Volume One already covered Pontius Pilate, Caiaphas, Gallio, Erastus and the emperors. Here are the rest of the stories worth telling.

The Herods

The Herod family is one of the most confusing parts of the New Testament, because there are at least five men called Herod. Here's the short version.

Herod the Great was king when Jesus was born (Matthew 2:1). He was a brilliant builder and a paranoid killer, which is exactly how Josephus describes him and exactly how Matthew describes him. His coins survive. In 2007, after searching for thirty-five years, the Israeli archaeologist Ehud Netzer found what he believed was Herod's tomb on the side of Herodium, the fortress-palace Herod built south of Bethlehem. The sarcophagus had been smashed to pieces in ancient times. Netzer died in a fall at the site in 2010. Some scholars question whether the tomb is Herod's, but Herod's palace, his harbor at Caesarea and the great platform of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem are all standing proof of the man.

Archelaus took over Judea after Herod died. Matthew says Joseph was afraid of him and took his family to Galilee instead (Matthew 2:22). Josephus says Archelaus was so brutal that the Romans removed him after about ten years. His coins survive.

Herod Antipas ruled Galilee during the whole ministry of Jesus. He's the one who beheaded John the Baptist, the one Jesus called "this fox" (Luke 13:32), and the one Pilate sent Jesus to during His trial (Luke 23:7-12). He built the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee and named it for the emperor. His coins carry his name and the name of the city.

Philip the Tetrarch ruled the area northeast of the Sea of Galilee (Luke 3:1). He was the first Jewish ruler to put the face of the Roman emperor on his coins, which tells you something about how far his part of the country was from Jerusalem, culturally. He rebuilt a town called Bethsaida and another he named Caesarea, which the Gospels call Caesarea Philippi. That's where Peter confessed that Jesus is the Christ (Matthew 16:13-16).

Evidence check: *Confirmed for all four.*

John the Baptist in Josephus

Josephus, writing in Rome in the 90s A.D., tells the story of Herod Antipas losing a war to King Aretas of Nabatea. Then he adds that some of the Jews thought the defeat was God's punishment for what Antipas had done to "John, who was called the Baptist." Josephus says John was a good man who called the Jews to live righteously and to come to baptism. Antipas feared that John's influence with the crowds might lead to a revolt, so he arrested him, sent him to the fortress of Machaerus east of the Dead Sea, and put him to death there (Antiquities 18.116-119).

The Gospels give a different reason for the arrest: John had told Antipas it was wrong to take his brother's wife Herodias (Mark 6:17-18). There's no real conflict. A ruler can have more than one reason to silence a preacher, and Josephus himself says elsewhere that the marriage to Herodias was what started the war with Aretas in the first place. Aretas's daughter had been married to Antipas, and he sent her home to marry Herodias.

What Josephus confirms is the man, his message of righteousness and baptism, his popularity, his arrest by Antipas and his execution. Scholars of every stripe accept this passage as genuine.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Herodias and Salome

Herodias appears in Josephus too, in detail, as the ambitious woman who married her husband's half-brother. Josephus also names her daughter, Salome. The Gospels never actually give the dancing girl's name. They call her "the daughter of Herodias" (Mark 6:22). The name comes from Josephus.

Salome later married Aristobulus, a minor king in what is now Lebanon and Syria, and their coins show her face with the inscription "Queen Salome." It is one of the few portraits we have of anyone named in the Gospels.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

The Death of Herod Agrippa I

This is my favorite example in the whole New Testament list, because two writers who had no connection to each other told the same strange story.

Herod Agrippa I was Herod the Great's grandson. Acts 12 says he had James the brother of John killed with the sword and arrested Peter. Then Luke tells how Agrippa died.

> *And on an appointed day Herod, having put on royal apparel and having sat on the judgment seat, was delivering a public address to them. And the populace was crying out, "**The** voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of **the** Lord struck him, because he did not give the glory to God; and having become eaten by worms, he breathed his last.* (Acts 12:21-23)

Now read Josephus. In Antiquities 19.343-350, he says that Agrippa went to Caesarea for a festival in honor of the emperor. On the second day he came into the theater at dawn wearing a robe woven of silver, which caught the morning sun and shone. His flatterers called out that he was a god and more than a man. He did not rebuke them. Soon after, he was seized with severe pains in his belly, was carried to the palace, and died five days later.

Same city. Same public appearance in royal clothes. Same crowd calling him a god. Same king who accepted the praise. Same sudden attack of pain in his body. Luke tells it as the hand of God. Josephus tells it as an omen and a tragedy. But they are clearly describing the same day. Agrippa's coins survive, and so does the date: A.D. 44.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Agrippa II, Bernice and Drusilla

When Paul made his defense in Acts 25 and 26, he spoke before Herod Agrippa II, the son of the man who died in Caesarea, and his sister Bernice. Josephus writes about both of them often, and not kindly; the rumors about their relationship were known all over the Roman world. An inscription from Beirut names Queen Berenice and King Agrippa together as the donors of a building. Agrippa II's coins survive.

Their younger sister Drusilla was the wife of the governor Felix. Acts 24:24 says she sat with Felix when he listened to Paul talk about righteousness, self-control and the judgment to come, and Felix got frightened and sent Paul away. Josephus tells how Felix had talked Drusilla into leaving her first husband to marry him. No wonder the subject of self-control made him nervous.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Felix and Festus

The two Roman governors who kept Paul in custody at Caesarea for more than two years, Antonius Felix and Porcius Festus (Acts 23 to 26), are both described by Josephus and by the Roman historian Tacitus, who says Felix "exercised the power of a king with the mind of a slave." Both governors minted coins in Judea. The change from Felix to Festus can be dated to around A.D. 59 or 60, which is one of the anchor points scholars use for the timeline of Paul's life.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Aretas IV and the Basket over the Wall

Paul tells the Corinthians a story that sounds almost comic. In Damascus, "the governor of Aretas the king" guarded the city to arrest him, and he escaped by being let down through a window in the wall in a basket (2 Corinthians 11:32-33).

Aretas IV was king of the Nabateans, the Arab people whose capital was Petra, the rose-red city carved into cliffs in what is now Jordan. He reigned from about 9 B.C. to A.D. 40. His name appears on inscriptions at Petra, at Avdat in the Negev, and even at Puteoli in Italy, and his coins survive in large numbers. He's the same Aretas whose daughter Herod Antipas sent home.

Whether Aretas actually controlled Damascus in the late 30s A.D. is still argued. Paul's Greek word for this governor is ethnarch, and some scholars think the ethnarch was the leader of the Nabatean community in the city, not its governor. Either way, the king is real and his reach was long enough to make a former Pharisee climb into a basket.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Aretas IV. Debated as to his control of Damascus.*

Quirinius and the Census

Luke 2:2 says the census that brought Joseph and Mary to Bethlehem happened while Quirinius was governing Syria. Quirinius is real. He's named in Josephus and Tacitus, and an inscription found in Venice, called the Lapis Venetus, mentions a census he ordered in Syria.

The hard part is the date. Josephus dates a census under Quirinius to A.D. 6, about ten years after Herod the Great died, and Matthew and Luke both put Jesus' birth while Herod was alive. Volume One listed this as one of the honest open questions, and it still is. Christian scholars have offered several possible answers, including a different translation of Luke's Greek, an earlier term of office for Quirinius, or an earlier registration that Luke is distinguishing from the famous one. None of them has won everyone over.

I'd rather tell you that plainly than pretend. Luke gets the other rulers in his opening chapters right, including some very minor ones (see Lysanias, below). That gives me reason to be patient with him on this one.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Quirinius. Debated for the date of the census.*

The Religious Leaders

Mykytiuk's second list adds seven religious figures, all named by Josephus: Jesus Himself, John the Baptist, James the brother of Jesus (Volume One, Chapter 12), the high priests Annas, Caiaphas and Ananias son of Nebedaeus, and Gamaliel, Paul's teacher (Acts 22:3).

Ananias is a good example of how well the details fit. Acts 23:2 says that when Paul began to speak before the council, the high priest Ananias ordered the men next to him to strike him on the mouth. Josephus describes the same Ananias as a greedy, violent man whose servants went to the threshing

floors and took the tithes that belonged to the poorer priests by force, beating anyone who resisted. Striking a prisoner on the mouth was in character.

Gamaliel shows up in the Mishnah, the collection of Jewish teaching written down around A.D. 200, as Rabban Gamaliel the Elder, one of the most respected teachers of his generation. The Mishnah says that when he died, "the glory of the Law ceased." Acts calls him "a teacher of the law honored by all the people" (Acts 5:34).

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Two Close Calls: Lysanias and the Egyptian

Luke 3:1 names Lysanias as tetrarch of Abilene in the fifteenth year of Tiberius. Critics once said Luke was wrong, because the only well-known Lysanias was a king who was executed in 36 B.C. Then an inscription was found at Abila, northwest of Damascus, dating to the reign of Tiberius, which mentions "Lysanias the tetrarch." There were two men named Lysanias, and Luke was talking about the second one. Mykytiuk calls this one "almost real," because the inscription mentions him in passing rather than naming him directly as its author. I'd call it a point in Luke's favor.

Acts 21:38 has a Roman officer ask Paul, "Are you not then the Egyptian who before these days stirred up a revolt and led out into the wilderness the four thousand men of the Assassins?" Josephus tells about this Egyptian too, a false prophet who gathered followers on the Mount of Olives and promised the walls of Jerusalem would fall at his command. Felix's soldiers scattered them, and the Egyptian disappeared. No wonder a Roman officer, seeing a riot around a stranger in the temple, thought he'd caught him.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

The Point

Luke didn't write in a corner. He wrote about kings who minted coins, governors whose terms can be dated, high priests whose crimes made the history books, and a ruler whose death in a silver robe was remembered by a historian who never read Acts. Where we can check him, he holds up remarkably well.

That's why Paul could stand in front of Agrippa II and say, "the king knows about these things." The gospel didn't need to hide from the people who were there. It still doesn't.

Study Questions

1. Why are coins and ancient historians useful evidence for New Testament people?

2. How do the Gospels and Josephus give different reasons for John the Baptist's arrest? Can both be true?

3. Compare Acts 12:21-23 with Josephus's account of Agrippa's death. What details are the same?

4. Read Acts 24:24-25. Why might Felix and Drusilla have been uncomfortable with Paul's message?

5. How does the Lysanias inscription show the value of patience with the Bible's details?

Part Two: Walking the Land

Chapter 6: Philistine Country

> *And the champion went out from the camps of the Philistines, his name **was** Goliath, from Gath; his height **was** approximately 9 feet 9 inches (six cubits and a span).*
>
> **1 Samuel 17:4 (SLB)**

Every kid who grew up in Sunday school knows the Philistines. They're the bad guys. Goliath was one, Delilah worked for them, and they took the ark of the covenant and regretted it. For a long time, that was about all anybody knew about them, because the only people writing about the Philistines were the people fighting them.

That changed over the last fifty years. Archaeologists have now dug four of the five Philistine capitals named in the Bible: Gath, Ekron, Ashkelon and Ashdod. (Gaza, the fifth, lies under a modern city and has barely been touched.) What they found is a people who were exactly as foreign to Israel as the Bible says they were, and a set of cities that line up with the Bible's story in some remarkable ways.

Where the Philistines Came From

The Bible says the Philistines came from Caphtor (Amos 9:7; Jeremiah 47:4), which most scholars identify with the island of Crete or the wider Aegean world. Egyptian records from the 1100s B.C. describe a wave of "Sea Peoples" who attacked Egypt by land and sea, and one group among them was the Peleset. Ramesses III carved the battle on the walls of his temple at Medinet Habu, with the Peleset wearing tall feathered headdresses.

When archaeologists dug the earliest Philistine layers, they found pottery decorated in an Aegean style, hearths and loom weights of Aegean types, and the bones of pigs and dogs that the Canaanites around them rarely ate. These were newcomers who cooked and built differently from their neighbors.

Then in 2019, a team led by scientists from the Max Planck Institute in Germany and the Leon Levy Expedition to Ashkelon published DNA from skeletons buried at Ashkelon. The earliest Philistines, from around 1100 B.C., carried a clear share of ancestry from southern Europe that the Canaanites before them did not have. Within a couple of centuries, that European signal was diluted as the newcomers married into the local population.

That's a striking result. The Bible says the Philistines came from across the sea. Their pots said so, their kitchens said so, and now their bones say so.

Evidence check: *Strong.*

Gath: Goliath's Hometown

Goliath was "from Gath" (1 Samuel 17:4). When David ran from Saul, he went to Achish king of Gath and pretended to be insane (1 Samuel 21:10-15), and later he lived there as a sort of mercenary (1 Samuel 27). For a long time, nobody was sure where Gath was.

Today almost all scholars agree that Gath is Tell es-Safi, a large mound in the low hills about halfway between Jerusalem and Ashkelon. Aren Maeir of Bar-Ilan University has been excavating there since 1996. Here's what his team found.

First, Gath was huge. In the 900s B.C., the time of David and Solomon, it was one of the largest cities in the land, far larger than Jerusalem. That fits the Bible's picture of Gath as the leading Philistine city of David's day.

Second, in 2005 the team found a small piece of pottery with two names scratched on it in early alphabetic letters, dated to around 950 to 900 B.C. The names were 'lwt and wlt. Neither one says Goliath. But both names are built the same way as Goliath, which in Hebrew is Golyat, and they are not Semitic names. They seem to come from the same family of Indo-European names the Philistines brought with them. Maeir was careful to say this is not Goliath's name tag. What it shows is that names like Goliath were in use at Gath in the century the Bible places him.

Third, around 830 B.C., Gath was besieged and destroyed. Maeir's team found a siege trench more than a mile and a half long dug around the city, the oldest siege works of their kind ever found, along with a thick burn layer full of smashed pots and arrowheads. The Bible says who did it.

> *Then Hazael the king of Syria went up and fought against Gath and captured it; and Hazael set his face to go up against Jerusalem.* (2 Kings 12:17)

Gath never recovered. A century later, the prophet Amos used it as a warning to Israel: look at Gath of the Philistines, which was once great (Amos 6:2). When Amos preached, people could see the ruins.

Evidence check: *Strong for the identification of Gath and the siege. The names on the sherd are confirmed; their link to the name Goliath is a matter of style, not identity.*

Ekron: Five Generations on One Stone

Ekron, today Tel Miqne, was dug by Trude Dothan and Seymour Gitin from 1981 to 1996. In the final season, in a large temple, they found a stone block with a five-line inscription. It's one of the most important finds ever made in Philistine country, because it names a king and his ancestors:

"The temple which Akhayus son of Padi, son of Ysd, son of Ada, son of Ya'ir, ruler of Ekron, built for Ptgyh his lady. May she bless him, and keep him, and lengthen his days, and bless his land."

This stone did three things at once. It settled where Ekron was; the city named itself. It named two kings, Padi and his son Akhayus, who both appear in Assyrian records. Sennacherib's annals say the people of Ekron handed Padi over to Hezekiah in Jerusalem in chains, and that Sennacherib forced Hezekiah to release him and put him back on his throne in 701 B.C. The Assyrian texts call his son Ikausu.

And the name Akhayus, Ikausu, is the same name as Achish, the king of Gath that David served three hundred years earlier. It may even mean "the Achaean," that is, "the Greek," which fits everything else we know about where the Philistines came from.

There's one more detail I love. The prayer on the stone asks the goddess to "bless him, and keep him." Volume One told you about the silver scrolls from Ketef Hinnom with the priestly blessing, "May the LORD bless you, and may He keep you" (Numbers 6:24). The Philistines and the Judeans were neighbors who spoke related languages and prayed in some of the same words, to very different gods.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Ashkelon: The Seaport

Ashkelon sits right on the Mediterranean coast. The Leon Levy Expedition, led first by Lawrence Stager of Harvard and then by Daniel Master of Wheaton College, dug there for more than thirty years. In 2016 they found the first Philistine cemetery ever excavated, with more than two hundred burials, which is where the DNA in the study above came from.

The most dramatic layer at Ashkelon is the last one of the Philistine city. Babylonian records say Nebuchadnezzar marched to Ashkelon in late 604 B.C., captured it, and turned it into a "ruin heap." The excavators found the city burned, the marketplace full of smashed jars, and a woman's skeleton lying where she fell. The prophet Jeremiah had warned that Ashkelon would be silenced (Jeremiah 47:5), and Zephaniah that it would become a desolation (Zephaniah 2:4).

> *For Gaza will be abandoned, and Ashkelon **will become** a desolation; Ashdod, at noon they will drive her out, and Ekron will be uprooted.* (Zephaniah 2:4)

Ashkelon was rebuilt later by others. But the Philistine city ended exactly the way the prophets said it would, at the hand of the king they named.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the destruction of 604 B.C.*

What the Philistine Cities Show

Put these four sites together and you have a people who arrived from the Aegean around the time the Bible puts them in the land, built big cities in exactly the places the Bible names, gave their children names like Goliath and Achish, worshiped gods Israel did not, and then faded out as the Assyrians and Babylonians swept through, again in the order the Bible gives.

The Bible's writers knew these people. They were next door. When the books of Samuel say Goliath came from Gath, they're naming the biggest city on the border in the very century when it was the biggest. That's not the kind of detail a writer gets right by accident.

Study Questions

1. What evidence suggests the Philistines came from the Aegean, as Amos 9:7 says?
2. Why did Aren Maeir say the Gath sherd is not Goliath's name tag? What does it show instead?
3. Read 2 Kings 12:17 and Amos 6:2. How does the siege trench at Gath connect the two?
4. Why was the Ekron inscription so important for identifying the city?

5. How did Ashkelon's end match the words of Jeremiah and Zephaniah?

Chapter 7: Forts and Shrines of Judah

> *And he brought all the priests from the cities of Judah, and he defiled the high places where the priests had burned incense, from Geba to Beersheba; and he tore down the high places of the gates that **were at** the entrance of the Gate of Joshua the governor of the city, which **were** on a man's left at the gate of the city.*
>
> **2 Kings 23:8 (SLB)**

If you drive south from Jerusalem into the Negev desert, you pass through the old frontier of the kingdom of Judah. This was the dry edge of the country, where the kings built forts to guard the roads and storehouses to feed their soldiers. It's also where some of the most interesting religious finds in all of Israel have come out of the ground, because out here, far from the temple in Jerusalem, people sometimes worshiped the way the prophets told them not to.

The Bible is blunt about this. Over and over, the books of Kings say that even good kings did not take away the "high places," the local shrines where people offered sacrifices outside Jerusalem (1 Kings 15:14; 2 Kings 12:3; 2 Kings 15:4). Two kings finally did: Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:4) and his great-grandson Josiah (2 Kings 23). The verse at the top of this chapter describes Josiah's sweep "from Geba to Beersheba," the old way of saying from the north end of Judah to the south.

Volume One told you about the gate shrine at Lachish, where a toilet was installed on an altar to make sure nobody used it again, and the standing stone at Tel Eton found in 2026. Here are three more places where the ground seems to remember those reforms.

Arad: A Temple in the Desert

Tel Arad sits on a hill in the northern Negev, about twenty miles east of Beersheba. In the 1960s, Yohanan Aharoni of Tel Aviv University excavated a royal fortress there, built and rebuilt over about three hundred years of Judah's history.

In one corner of the fort, he found something nobody expected: a small temple. It had a courtyard with an altar for burnt offerings, a main hall, and at the back, up three steps, a little niche that worked like a holy of holies. Inside the niche stood a carefully shaped standing stone, and on the steps in front of it were two stone incense altars, one larger than the other.

This was a shrine to the LORD, built in a royal fortress of Judah. The letters found at Arad make that clear. More than a hundred inscriptions on broken pottery, called ostraca (OSS-truh-kuh), turned up at the site, many of them part of the official records of a commander named Eliashib. One letter mentions "the house of YHWH," the LORD. Others mention priestly families, including the sons of Korah, whom we met in Chapter 4.

So what happened to it? Aharoni found that at some point the shrine was taken out of use. The incense altars were laid on their sides and covered over, and the standing stone was buried. He connected it with the reforms of Hezekiah or Josiah. Later scholars have argued about the exact dates of each layer, and the argument isn't settled. But the basic picture fits the Bible well: a local shrine of the LORD, used for a while, then deliberately shut down and buried.

In 2020, a team from the Israel Museum and the Hebrew University studied the black residue on top of the two incense altars. On the larger altar they found frankincense, burned with animal fat to help it smolder. Frankincense was imported from southern Arabia and was one of the ingredients God commanded for the incense in the tabernacle (Exodus 30:34). On the smaller altar they found cannabis, burned with animal dung to keep it hot.

That second finding made headlines, and some people laughed. I don't think it's funny. It's a picture of exactly what the prophets were fighting. The worshipers at Arad were mixing the LORD's incense with something else to get an experience, and in time the shrine was shut down.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the shrine and the residue. Debated for the exact date of its closing.*

Beersheba: The Horned Altar in the Wall

Beersheba, at the far south of Judah, is famous from the stories of Abraham and Isaac, who dug wells there (Genesis 21 and 26). The Iron Age city on the mound outside the modern town was also excavated by Aharoni, in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

In 1973, his team noticed something odd about the wall of a storehouse built in the 700s B.C. Some of its stones were finely cut sandstone blocks, unlike anything else in the building. When they pulled them out and fit them together, they had a large altar, about five feet high, with a horn carved on each of its four corners. One of the blocks had a snake carved on it.

The altar had been taken apart and its stones used as building material. That's not how you treat an altar you still respect. Aharoni linked it to Hezekiah's reform, when the king "removed the high places and broke the pillars" (2 Kings 18:4). As at Arad, other scholars debate the dating. But the altar itself is a beautiful example of what the Bible describes. Its four horns match the instructions for the altar of burnt offering in Exodus 27:2. And someone in authority decided it should no longer stand.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the altar and its reuse. Strong that its dismantling reflects a religious reform.*

Tel Motza: A Temple Outside Jerusalem

Motza is just a few miles west of Jerusalem, where the highway climbs up to the city. In 2012, during salvage digging ahead of road construction, a team from the Israel Antiquities Authority found the remains of a temple from the 900s or 800s B.C. It had an open courtyard with an altar, a pit full of offering vessels, and clay figurines of men and horses.

This was a large, official-looking temple about four miles from Solomon's. Some archaeologists see it as a royal shrine that ran alongside the temple in Jerusalem for a time. Others think it served the local farming district. Either way, it shows how close to the capital other places of worship could stand, and why the prophets kept warning that God had chosen one place for His name (Deuteronomy 12:5).

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the temple. Debated as to who used it and how long.*

Azekah and the Signal Fires

One more stop, because it ties two finds together. When Babylon invaded Judah in 588 B.C., Jeremiah says only three fortified cities were left: Jerusalem, Lachish and Azekah (Jeremiah 34:7). Volume One told you about the Lachish Letters, written by an officer at an outpost to his commander in Lachish. One of them ends: "We are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the signs which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah."

Azekah stands on a high hill overlooking the Elah Valley, where David fought Goliath. Since 2012, Tel Aviv University and the University of Heidelberg have been digging there. The site was massively fortified, and it was destroyed more than once by invading armies, including the Assyrians in 701 B.C. and the Babylonians at the end.

When I picture that soldier writing that he could no longer see Azekah's fire, I think about how fast things fell apart for Judah, exactly as Jeremiah had warned. The ground at Azekah, Lachish and Jerusalem all shows the same burned layer from the same war.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

What the Shrines Teach

The archaeology of Judah's shrines is a little uncomfortable for some readers. It shows that a lot of people in ancient Israel didn't worship the way the Law of Moses said they should. Some critics take that and say, "See? The Bible's picture of pure worship in Jerusalem is a later invention."

I'd say the opposite. The Bible never pretends Israel worshiped purely. The prophets spent centuries crying out against shrines, idols, standing stones and mixed worship. The books of Kings grade every king on whether he took the high places away. The archaeology is showing us the very problem the Bible says was there, and the very reforms the Bible says were made to fix it.

It's also a warning for us. The people at Arad didn't stop worshiping the LORD. They added something to it. That's usually how drift starts.

Study Questions

1. What were the "high places," and why did the prophets oppose them?
2. Describe the shrine at Arad. What did the 2020 residue study find on each altar?
3. Why does the reuse of the Beersheba altar in a storehouse wall suggest a deliberate decision?
4. Read Deuteronomy 12:5-14. How does this passage help explain why Hezekiah and Josiah shut down local shrines?
5. The worshipers at Arad added something to their worship of the LORD. What are some ways people do that today?

Chapter 8: Jerusalem, Layer by Layer

> *Go around Zion and circle her; count her towers. Set your heart on her rampart; walk through her citadels, so that you may recount **it** to a later generation.*
>
> **Psalms 48:12-13 (SLB)**

Jerusalem is the hardest city in the world to dig. It has been lived in for about five thousand years. It has been destroyed and rebuilt over and over. Its holiest places are holy to three religions, and the most important spot of all, the Temple Mount, can't be excavated. Houses, streets, churches, mosques and synagogues sit on top of the evidence.

And yet, little by little, by digging wherever they can, archaeologists have pieced together a picture of the city from the time of David to the time of Jesus. The psalmist told pilgrims to walk around Zion and count her towers so they could tell the next generation. That's what we're going to do in this chapter.

The Spring and the Water Shaft

Every city needs water, and Jerusalem's first water came from one place: the Gihon Spring, in the Kidron Valley at the foot of the hill called the City of David. That spring is why the city exists where it does.

When David took Jerusalem from the Jebusites, the Bible says something strange.

> *And the king and his men went **to** Jerusalem against the Jebusite, the inhabitant of the land; and he spoke to David, saying, "You will not come in here, but the blind and the lame will turn you away," saying, "David will not come in here." And David captured the stronghold of Zion; it **is** the city of David. And David said on that day, "Whoever strikes a Jebusite, let him reach by the water shaft the lame and the blind, who are hated by the soul of David." Therefore they say, "**The** blind and **the** lame will not come into the house."* (2 Samuel 5:6-8)

"The water shaft" translates a Hebrew word, tsinnor, that appears only twice in the Bible, and nobody is completely sure what it meant. In 1867, a British officer named Charles Warren found a long tunnel and a vertical shaft leading from inside the old city down toward the spring. For a century, many people thought Warren's Shaft was David's "water shaft," and that Joab climbed up it to get inside the walls.

Then from 1995 onward, Ronny Reich and Eli Shukron dug around the spring and found massive stone towers guarding it, and showed that the vertical shaft Warren found was a natural crack in the rock that the ancient people probably never used. The great towers were first dated to around 1700 B.C. In 2017, a radiocarbon study led by Johanna Regev of the Weizmann Institute dated material under part of the tower to the 800s B.C., much later than anyone thought. Other archaeologists disagree about what that sample really dates, and the debate goes on.

So where does that leave the "water shaft"? Honestly, unsolved. What's certain is that the Jebusite city was built around the Gihon Spring, that its people went to enormous effort to protect their

access to it, and that taking the water system was the key to taking the city. The Bible's story makes sense on the ground even if we can't point to the exact tunnel.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the spring and its fortifications. Debated for the dates and for which channel was David's "water shaft."*

The Broad Wall and the Torn-Down Houses

This one is one of my favorites, because a small detail in Isaiah turned out to be visible in stone.

After Israel's northern kingdom fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., refugees poured south into Judah, and Jerusalem grew fast. The city spread west, across the valley, onto the hill where the Jewish Quarter of the Old City stands today. Then in 701 B.C., Sennacherib came. Hezekiah had to get the new neighborhoods inside a wall, quickly.

> *And he strengthened himself, and he built all the wall that was broken down, and he raised **it** up on the towers, and outside another wall; and he strengthened the Millo **in** the city of David, and he made weapons in abundance, and shields.* (2 Chronicles 32:5)

Isaiah, who was there, adds a sharper detail. Speaking to the people of Jerusalem, he says:

> *And you counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you pulled down the houses to fortify the wall.* (Isaiah 22:10)

In 1970, after the Six-Day War, Nahman Avigad of the Hebrew University started digging in the ruined Jewish Quarter before it was rebuilt. He found a city wall about twenty-three feet thick, built in the late 700s B.C. And he found that the wall ran straight through the foundations of houses that had stood there a few years earlier. The builders had pulled the houses down and laid the wall right over them.

Nehemiah, rebuilding Jerusalem's walls three hundred years later, mentions workers repairing "as far as the Broad Wall" (Nehemiah 3:8). Most scholars think Avigad found that wall. You can stand next to it today in the Jewish Quarter, below street level, and see where the houses were cut.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the wall and the demolished houses. Strong for the identification with the Broad Wall of Nehemiah 3:8.*

The Temple Mount and Its Stones

The temple Jesus knew was the one Herod the Great rebuilt, starting around 20 B.C. Herod didn't just rebuild the temple. He doubled the size of the platform around it, building enormous retaining walls and filling the space inside. Those walls still stand. The Western Wall, where Jewish people pray today, is part of Herod's retaining wall.

Some of the stones in it are staggering. One stone in the Western Wall Tunnels, the long tunnel that runs north along the wall underground, is about forty-five feet long and is estimated to weigh hundreds of tons. When one of Jesus' disciples said, "Teacher, look, what stones and what buildings!" (Mark 13:1), he wasn't being a tourist. He was reacting to one of the great building projects of the ancient world.

Jesus answered him with a warning.

> *And Jesus, having gone out, was going from the temple; and His disciples came to **Him** to point out to Him the buildings of the temple. And Jesus said to them, "Do you not see all these things? Truly I say to you, there will by no means be left here stone upon stone which will not be thrown down."* (Matthew 24:1-2)

In A.D. 70, the Romans burned the temple. At the southwest corner of the Temple Mount, archaeologists led by Benjamin Mazar in the late 1960s and 1970s found the Herodian street at the foot of the wall buried under a huge pile of stones that had been pushed off the top of the wall. Many of them still lie there, where they fell, on top of a paved street that was laid in the first century. The street is cracked and pushed down under their weight. Visitors can walk the street today and see them.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

The Place of Trumpeting

In that same pile of fallen stones, Mazar's team found a large block that had once sat at the top of the southwest corner of the platform. It has a Hebrew inscription carved on it: "To the place of trumpeting to ..." The rest is broken off. Scholars think the last word was "to declare" or "to separate," as in, to separate the holy from the ordinary.

Josephus, describing the temple, says that at one corner a priest would stand at the top and blow a trumpet at the beginning of every Sabbath and again at its end, to tell the people below when to stop work and when to start again. The stone fell from just the right spot.

I like this one because it's so ordinary. It's a work sign. It told the priest where to stand. It's the kind of thing nobody would bother to invent, and it fits the Bible's world of trumpets and Sabbaths and priests at their posts (Numbers 10:10).

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the inscription. Strong for its connection to the Sabbath trumpet Josephus describes.*

Robinson's Arch and the Stairs to the Temple

In 1838, an American Bible scholar named Edward Robinson noticed a stub of an arch sticking out of the Western Wall near its south end. It's still called Robinson's Arch. Excavations showed it held up a huge staircase that turned a corner and climbed from the street below to the temple platform.

On the south side of the Temple Mount, Mazar's team and later digs uncovered broad stone steps leading up to the gates in the southern wall, and dozens of ritual baths cut into the rock nearby, where worshipers washed before going up. Those stairs are almost certainly the main way ordinary pilgrims walked into the temple courts in the first century. That means Jesus and His disciples almost certainly climbed them. Peter and John likely did too, on their way up "at the hour of prayer" (Acts 3:1).

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the staircase and the steps. The individual visits are a strong inference, not a find.*

Sifting the Temple Mount

There's one more Jerusalem story, and it started badly. In 1999, the Muslim authorities who control the Temple Mount dug a huge pit to build an entrance to an underground mosque. They hauled away about nine thousand tons of dirt by truck and dumped it in the Kidron Valley, without any archaeological supervision. Archaeologists were heartbroken. That dirt came from the one place nobody could dig.

In 2004, Gabriel Barkay and Zachi Dvira started the Temple Mount Sifting Project. They hauled the dumped soil to a park, and since then hundreds of thousands of volunteers, including families, school groups and church tour groups, have washed and sifted it by hand. They have found coins from every period, pieces of the colored stone floor tiles that likely paved the courts of Herod's temple, arrowheads, seals and bullae. Volume One told you about the bulla naming Asayahu, found by the project in 2025.

Because the soil was moved, none of these finds has an exact findspot, which lowers their value as evidence. But the project rescued what could be rescued from a terrible loss, and some of it is the only material we have from the Temple Mount itself.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the finds. Their exact original layers are unknown.*

Walking Around Zion

So what does Jerusalem's archaeology tell us, layer by layer? A Jebusite fortress built around a spring. A city that grew in the 700s B.C. and had to tear down its own houses to wall itself in, just as Isaiah said. A temple platform so grand that it left disciples speechless, and a pile of its stones still lying where the Romans threw them down, just as Jesus said. A trumpeter's corner. A staircase worn by pilgrims' feet.

You can count her towers. And you can tell the next generation.

Study Questions

1. Why is Jerusalem so hard to excavate?
2. Why is the location of David's "water shaft" still debated?
3. Read Isaiah 22:8-11. How did Avigad's discovery of the Broad Wall confirm what Isaiah saw?
4. Read Mark 13:1-2. What would the disciples have been looking at? What did Jesus predict?
5. What does the "place of trumpeting" inscription tell us about daily life at the temple?

Chapter 9: The North Country

> *And the king took counsel and made two calves of gold, and he said to them, "**It is too** much for you to go up to Jerusalem. Look, your gods, O Israel, which brought you up from the land of Egypt!" And he set the one in Bethel, and the other he put in Dan. And this thing became a sin; and the people went before the one as far as Dan.*
>
> **1 Kings 12:28-30 (SLB)**

Most of the famous finds in Bible archaeology come from Jerusalem and Judah in the south. The north gets less attention, partly because the northern kingdom of Israel was destroyed early, in 722 B.C., and partly because for the last century much of it has been hard to visit.

But some of the most interesting sites in the land are up there, where the hills turn green and the springs of the Jordan come out of the ground. In this chapter we'll visit four: Dan, at the top of the country; Samaria, the northern capital; Mount Gerizim, the mountain of the Samaritans; and Caesarea Philippi, where Peter made his great confession.

Dan: Where Jeroboam Set Up a Calf

When the kingdom split after Solomon's death, Jeroboam, the new king of the north, had a problem. The temple was in Jerusalem, in the other kingdom, and he was afraid that if his people kept going down there to worship, they would eventually go back to the king of Judah. So he made two golden calves and set one at Bethel, near his southern border, and one at Dan, at the far north (1 Kings 12:26-30).

Tel Dan is a beautiful site today, a nature reserve full of trees and running water at one of the main springs of the Jordan River. Avraham Biran of the Hebrew Union College dug there for more than thirty years, starting in 1966. Volume One told you about the most famous find, the Tel Dan Stele with the words "House of David." But Biran's team found something else that I think is just as important.

On the north side of the mound, near the spring, they found a large raised platform of finely cut stone, about sixty feet across, with a courtyard in front of it. In the courtyard were the remains of a large altar and, nearby, a small horned altar, iron shovels for carrying ashes, and an incense pan. The platform was built and rebuilt over the 900s and 800s B.C. Biran identified it as the sacred precinct where Jeroboam's calf stood. The calf itself, of course, was gold, and gold doesn't stay in the ground for long when armies come through.

A second inscription settled where we were. A stone carved in Greek and Aramaic, from around 200 B.C., reads "To the god who is in Dan." Mound, spring and shrine all line up with the city the Bible calls Dan, and with the earlier name Laish that Judges 18:29 says it had before the tribe of Dan took it.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Dan and its sacred precinct. Strong for the link to Jeroboam.*

Samaria: The Capital That Fell

In Chapter 2 we saw that Omri bought the hill of Samaria and built Israel's capital there. Harvard expeditions in 1908 to 1910 and a joint British, American and Jewish expedition in the 1930s dug the royal quarter on the summit. Volume One told you about the carved ivories they found, which fit Amos's warning against those who lay on "beds of ivory" (Amos 6:4).

Another find from Samaria gives us a look at the everyday paperwork of the northern kingdom. In 1910, the Harvard team found more than sixty pieces of broken pottery with ink writing on them, the Samaria Ostraca. They're shipping receipts for wine and oil sent to the palace from estates in the countryside, dated to the 700s B.C. Each one gives a year, a place and some names.

What makes them interesting for Bible readers is the names. Some of them are built with the name of the LORD, like Gaddiyau. Others are built with Baal, like Abibaal and Meribaal. In other words, a few decades after Elijah faced the prophets of Baal on Mount Carmel, people in Israel were still naming their children after Baal right alongside the LORD. That's exactly the split the prophets were fighting.

Samaria fell to Assyria in 722 B.C., just as 2 Kings 17 says, and was rebuilt by the Assyrians as the capital of a province. Much later, Herod the Great rebuilt it again and named it Sebaste, Greek for Augustus, and put a temple to the emperor on top. It was to "a city of Samaria" that Philip the evangelist went to preach Christ (Acts 8:5).

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Mount Gerizim and the Woman at the Well

John 4 tells of Jesus sitting by Jacob's well at a town called Sychar in Samaria, tired from walking, while His disciples went to buy food. A Samaritan woman came to draw water, and they talked. At one point she pointed up.

> *Our fathers worshiped on this mountain, and you say that in Jerusalem is the place where it is necessary to worship."* (John 4:20)

The mountain she meant was Mount Gerizim, which rises right over the valley. The Samaritans, descended in part from the people of the old northern kingdom, believed Gerizim, not Jerusalem, was the place God had chosen, and they still do. A small Samaritan community lives on the mountain to this day.

From 1983 to 2006, Yitzhak Magen of the Israel Antiquities Authority excavated the top of Gerizim and found the Samaritan temple and the walled town around it. The first temple was built in the mid-400s B.C., about the time of Nehemiah. It was destroyed around 110 B.C. by the Jewish ruler John Hyrcanus, who burned it, as Josephus reports. Magen's team found burned layers, coins and hundreds of inscriptions, many of them in Hebrew, some of them using the divine name.

So when the woman said "our fathers worshiped on this mountain," she was talking about a temple that had stood for more than three hundred years and had been destroyed by the Jews about a hundred and forty years before. You can feel the old wound in her words. Jesus didn't take sides in

the argument the way she expected. He told her the hour was coming when true worshipers would worship the Father in spirit and truth (John 4:21-24).

As for the well itself, a deep well at the foot of Gerizim near the ruins of ancient Shechem has been shown to visitors as Jacob's well since at least A.D. 333, when a pilgrim from Bordeaux wrote it down. It's inside a Greek Orthodox church today, and it's still deep, more than a hundred feet. The woman told Jesus, "the well is deep" (John 4:11). Few sites in the Holy Land have a stronger claim to being the actual spot.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the Samaritan temple on Gerizim. Strong for Jacob's well.*

Caesarea Philippi: The Rock and the Gates

At the foot of Mount Hermon, about twenty-five miles north of the Sea of Galilee, one of the main springs of the Jordan once poured out of a huge cave in a cliff. The Greeks who settled there after Alexander the Great dedicated the cave to their god Pan. The place was called Paneas, and it's still called Banias.

Herod the Great built a white marble temple to Augustus in front of the cave. His son Philip the Tetrarch made the town his capital and renamed it Caesarea, after the emperor. To tell it apart from the big Caesarea on the coast, people called it Caesarea of Philip, Caesarea Philippi.

Excavations since the 1980s have uncovered the temple platforms, carved niches in the cliff for statues of Pan, and later Roman shrines. You can stand there today and look at the cave and the rock face.

That's where Jesus took His disciples and asked, "Who do men say Me, the Son of Man, to be?" (Matthew 16:13). Peter answered that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. And Jesus answered:

> *And I also say to you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build My church, and **the** gates of Hades will not prevail against it.* (Matthew 16:18)

Many teachers have pointed out how fitting the setting is. Here was a pagan holy place, a cave that the locals thought of as an opening into the underworld, a cliff covered with shrines to Pan and to Caesar. And here Jesus spoke of a rock, and of a church that the gates of Hades would not stop. I don't want to say more than the text does. Matthew doesn't tell us Jesus pointed at the cliff. But the place is real, the shrines are real, and the disciples knew exactly where they were standing.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the site and its shrines.*

A Seat for Moses at Chorazin

One small stop on the way back. Jesus pronounced a woe on Chorazin, a town in the hills above Capernaum (Matthew 11:21). In 1926, in the ruins of Chorazin's synagogue, excavators found a carved basalt chair with a short inscription in Aramaic. Many think it was a "seat of Moses," the chair where a teacher sat to read and explain the Law. Jesus said, "The scribes and the Pharisees have sat down on the seat of Moses" (Matthew 23:2).

To be careful: the Chorazin synagogue and its chair are from a later period, probably two or three hundred years after Jesus. The seat doesn't come from His day. But it shows that "the seat of Moses" was a real piece of synagogue furniture, not just a figure of speech, and it helps us picture what His listeners pictured.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the chair. It is later than the time of Jesus.*

What the North Shows

The northern sites tell a story the Bible tells too. A king who split off from Jerusalem and set up his own shrines. A capital where Baal and the LORD were named in the same breath. A mountain where a rival temple stood and fell. And then, in the very region that had drifted farthest from Jerusalem, a Teacher who sat by a Samaritan well and stood under a pagan cliff and announced that His church would outlast all of it.

Study Questions

1. Read 1 Kings 12:26-30. Why did Jeroboam set up calves at Dan and Bethel? What did archaeologists find at Dan?
2. What do the names on the Samaria Ostraca tell us about religion in the northern kingdom?
3. Why would the Samaritan woman have felt strongly about Mount Gerizim?
4. Read John 4:19-24. How did Jesus answer the argument about the right mountain?
5. How does the setting of Caesarea Philippi help you read Matthew 16:13-18?

Chapter 10: On the Road With Paul

> *and from there to Philippi, which is a leading city of the district of Macedonia, a colony. And we were in this city, staying some days.*
>
> **Acts 16:12 (SLB)**

Volume One spent a chapter on Paul's world: the Gallio inscription that dates his stay in Corinth, the politarchs of Thessalonica, Erastus the city official, and the riot in the great theater of Ephesus. In this chapter I want to pick up the road where that chapter left it and walk with Paul through five more cities. In each one, a small detail in Acts lines up with what has been found on the ground.

Pisidian Antioch: Following the Governor's Family

After Paul and Barnabas left Cyprus, where the governor Sergius Paulus had believed (Acts 13:12), they did something that has puzzled readers. They sailed to the south coast of Turkey, landed at Perga, and then hiked more than a hundred miles inland, over the Taurus Mountains, to a city called Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:13-14). Why there?

The British scholar William Ramsay suggested an answer more than a century ago, and later finds have backed him up. Inscriptions found at Pisidian Antioch and in the country around it name members of the Sergius Paullus family, including a Lucius Sergius Paullus the younger and a woman named Sergia Paulla, who married into one of the leading families of Antioch. The family seems to have owned large estates in the area.

If the governor of Cyprus had just become a believer, it would make a lot of sense for him to say, "Go to Antioch. My family is there. Here's who to see." Luke doesn't tell us that, so I won't claim it. But the inscriptions show a real link between the governor's family and the very city Paul went to next, and that's the kind of connection that fits the story too well to ignore.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the Sergius Paullus family at Antioch. Their link to Paul's route is a reasonable inference, not a proof.*

Lystra: Zeus and Hermes Come to Town

At Lystra, Paul healed a man who had been lame from birth. The crowd's reaction is one of the oddest scenes in Acts.

> *And the crowds, having seen what Paul did, lifted up their voice in Lycaonian, saying, "The gods, having become like men, have come down to us!" And they were calling Barnabas Zeus, and Paul Hermes, because he was the leading speaker. And the priest of the Zeus who is before their city, having brought bulls and wreaths to the gates, was wanting to sacrifice with the crowds.*
> (Acts 14:11-13)

Why would a crowd in the middle of Turkey jump to the idea that Zeus and Hermes had come to visit? Two things help.

First, there was a local legend. The Roman poet Ovid, writing a few decades before Paul, tells the story of Baucis and Philemon, an old couple in this same region of Phrygia who took in two travelers when everyone else slammed the door. The travelers turned out to be Jupiter and Mercury, the Roman names for Zeus and Hermes, and the town that turned them away was destroyed. If you'd grown up on that story, you'd want to be very sure to welcome the next pair of strangers who did something miraculous.

Second, inscriptions. Lystra itself was lost for centuries until 1885, when the American scholar J. R. S. Sterrett found a Roman altar still standing on its hill that names the colony of Lustra. And in 1909, the British scholar William Calder found an inscription near Lystra that records the dedication of a statue of Hermes, along with a sundial, to Zeus. The two gods were worshiped together in that very area.

Luke even notes that the crowd shouted "in Lycaonian," their local language (Acts 14:11). That explains why Paul and Barnabas didn't realize at first what was going on until the priest showed up with bulls and wreaths. They didn't understand the language.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for Lystra and the local worship of Zeus and Hermes.*

Philippi: A Little Rome

Luke says Philippi was "a colony" (Acts 16:12). That word had a specific legal meaning. A Roman colony was a city settled by retired Roman soldiers, governed under Roman law, where the citizens were treated as if they lived in Italy. Philippi became a colony after the famous battle fought there in 42 B.C., and Augustus settled more veterans there after he defeated Antony and Cleopatra.

The ruins of Philippi, in northern Greece, show exactly that. Excavations by French and Greek teams have uncovered a forum laid out like a Roman town, and the inscriptions there are mostly in Latin, which is unusual for a Greek city. The Via Egnatia, the great Roman road across the Balkans, ran right through town.

That Roman character explains the whole story of Acts 16. When Paul and Silas were arrested, the charge was that they proclaimed customs which were not lawful for the people of the city to accept or practice, "being Romans" (Acts 16:21). The city's magistrates had attendants Luke calls "rod-bearers" (Acts 16:35), the lictors who carried bundles of rods as a sign of Roman authority, the same rods Paul and Silas had just been beaten with. And when Paul revealed the next morning that he and Silas were Roman citizens, beaten without a trial, the magistrates panicked. In a colony, of all places, that was a serious crime.

> *But Paul said to them, "Having beaten us publicly, uncondemned, men who are Romans, they threw **us** into prison; and now are they throwing us out secretly? No indeed! But having come themselves, let them bring us out."* (Acts 16:37)

There's one more Philippi detail. Lydia, Paul's first convert in Europe, was "a seller of purple of the city of Thyatira" (Acts 16:14). Inscriptions from Thyatira, in western Turkey, mention its guild of dyers more than once. Thyatira was famous for its dye trade. A businesswoman from there selling purple cloth in a Roman colony on a major road is just what you'd expect.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Athens: The Altar to an Unknown God

In Athens, Paul told the council on Mars' Hill that he had seen an altar inscribed "TO AN UNKNOWN GOD" (Acts 17:23), and he used it to introduce the God they did not know.

No altar with exactly those words, in the singular, has been found in Athens. But ancient writers mention such altars. Pausanias, a Greek travel writer of the second century, says that near Athens there were altars "of gods called Unknown." Philostratus, writing a little later, says the Athenians set up altars "even to unknown gods." And in 1909, at Pergamon in Turkey, German archaeologists found an altar dedicated, as most scholars read it, "to unknown gods."

A people who were "very religious in all things" (Acts 17:22), as Paul put it, and who wanted to make sure they hadn't offended any god they'd forgotten, would put up just that kind of altar. Paul didn't make up the custom. He found it and used it.

Evidence check: *Strong. The custom is confirmed; Paul's exact altar has not been found.*

Corinth: The Bema and the Meat Market

Volume One told you about the Gallio inscription and the Erastus pavement at Corinth. Here are two more Corinthian details.

When the Jews brought Paul before Gallio, they led him "to the judgment seat" (Acts 18:12). The Greek word is bema, a raised platform where officials heard cases in public. In the middle of the Corinthian forum, American excavators in the 1930s uncovered a large raised stone platform of exactly that kind, faced with marble, from the right period. Most scholars identify it as the bema where Gallio sat. You can stand in front of it today.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul answers a question that worried the church: could Christians eat meat that might have been offered to an idol? He tells them, "Eat everything that is sold in the meat market, asking no questions because of conscience" (1 Corinthians 10:25). The word he uses for meat market is makellon, borrowed from the Latin macellum. In Corinth, a Latin inscription has been found that mentions the city's macellum. Paul used the word the Corinthians would have seen on their own market building.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the bema and the macellum inscription. Strong that this bema is where Paul stood.*

The Road Itself

I want to close this chapter with something less dramatic than an inscription. Roads.

Paul traveled roughly ten thousand miles on his missionary journeys, much of it on foot. In Turkey and Greece, stretches of the Roman roads he would have used still survive, including parts of the Via Sebaste through Pisidia and the Via Egnatia through Philippi. You can walk on stones that were there when he passed.

Luke's travel notes in Acts are full of the right ports, the right roads, the right distances between towns, and the right days of sailing. William Ramsay started out in the late 1800s expecting to prove that Acts was a second-century invention. After years of walking those roads with Acts in his hand, he changed his mind and became one of Luke's strongest defenders. He said Luke should be placed among the very greatest of historians.

I'm not a historian of Ramsay's caliber. But I co-led mission trips to Baja, Mexico, five years in a row, with teams of 16 to 45 people, kids from 12 to 20 and up and the adults who came with them. Planning even a short trip like that means real roads, real towns, a real border and real distances, and you learn fast that the details either fit or they don't. Luke's details fit. You can't fake the feel of a trip you didn't take. Luke took it.

Study Questions

1. Why might Paul have headed inland to Pisidian Antioch after Cyprus?
2. How does Ovid's story of Baucis and Philemon help explain the crowd's reaction at Lystra?
3. Read Acts 16:19-39. What details in the story make more sense once you know Philippi was a Roman colony?
4. What evidence shows that Athenians set up altars to unknown gods? How did Paul use that custom?
5. What did William Ramsay set out to prove, and why did he change his mind?

Part Three: The Church in the Ground

Chapter 11: Mocked on a Wall

> *For the word of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is **the** power of God.*
>
> **1 Corinthians 1:18 (SLB)**

The New Testament ends around the close of the first century. What happened to the church after that? Most believers I know could tell you about the apostles, and then they could tell you about Martin Luther, and there's a fifteen-hundred-year blank in between.

Part Three of this book is about the first part of that blank, the two or three hundred years after the apostles, when Christianity was a small, illegal, often hated faith spreading across the Roman Empire. Those Christians left very few buildings, because they weren't allowed to own many. But they left traces: scratches on walls, a few rooms, painted tombs and carved stones. Some of the earliest traces weren't left by Christians at all. They were left by people making fun of them.

The Donkey on the Cross

In 1857, workers clearing a building on the Palatine Hill in Rome, the hill where the emperors had their palaces, found a drawing scratched into a plaster wall. The building had been a school for the pages and servants of the imperial household. The drawing is crude, the kind of thing a bored teenager carves into a desk.

It shows a man on a cross, seen from behind, with the head of a donkey. To the left, a young man stands with one hand raised, the way people saluted or worshiped a god in the Roman world. Under the picture, in clumsy Greek letters, someone wrote: "Alexamenos worships his god."

Scholars call it the Alexamenos graffito, and most date it to around A.D. 200. It's one of the oldest pictures of the crucifixion anywhere, and it was made to mock.

Here's what it tells us. First, there was a Christian named Alexamenos among the servants in the emperor's own household, about a hundred and fifty years after Paul sent greetings from "those of Caesar's household" (Philippians 4:22). Second, his classmates knew what he believed: that a crucified man was God. Third, they thought that was ridiculous. Pagan writers of the time repeated a slander that Christians worshiped a donkey's head, and the Christian writer Tertullian, around A.D. 197, complained about a picture going around Carthage with the same insult.

Paul said the message of a crucified Savior was "to Greeks foolishness" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Here it is, scratched on a wall by a Greek-speaking kid who thought it was foolishness.

There's a little more to the story. In another room of the same building, someone scratched a second line: "Alexamenos is faithful." Nobody knows who wrote it. I like to think it was Alexamenos himself, or a friend standing up for him.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

The Nazareth Inscription: A Case for Caution

In 1878, a German collector in Paris named Wilhelm Froehner bought a marble slab with a Greek inscription. His notes said it had been "sent from Nazareth." The inscription is a decree from a Roman emperor, called "Ordinance of Caesar," saying that graves and tombs must stay undisturbed forever, and that anyone who removes the bodies of the dead or moves them to another place should face the death penalty.

You can see why Christians got excited. A decree against stealing bodies from tombs, from Nazareth, in the first century. Some suggested an emperor, maybe Claudius, issued it in response to reports that Jesus' body had been taken from the tomb, which is what the chief priests told the guards to say (Matthew 28:11-15).

Then in 2020, a team led by Kyle Harper of the University of Oklahoma tested the marble itself. The chemistry of the stone matched marble from the Greek island of Kos, not from Galilee. The team suggested the slab was carved on Kos, possibly in connection with a known case there in the 30s B.C., when the tomb of a hated local ruler was broken open and his body thrown out. If that's right, the stone has nothing to do with Jesus. It may only have passed through Nazareth on its way to a dealer, or Froehner's note may simply have been wrong.

I'm including this one on purpose. It's a good example of something that looked like strong evidence and then wasn't. The empty tomb doesn't need it. The case for the resurrection rests on the eyewitnesses, the transformed disciples and the church that couldn't be stopped, which Volume One covered in its last chapter.

Evidence check: *Not supported as evidence related to the resurrection.*

The Word Square in Pompeii

The Romans loved word puzzles, and one of them has turned up all over the empire. It's a square of five Latin words, five letters each, that read the same forward, backward, up and down:

SATOR
AREPO
TENET
OPERA
ROTAS

Roughly, it means "The sower Arepo holds the wheels with effort," though nobody is quite sure what it was for.

In 1926, a scholar named Felix Grosser noticed something. If you take the twenty-five letters and rearrange them, you can make the words PATER NOSTER, "Our Father," twice, crossing at the N in the shape of a cross, with two A's and two O's left over. Alpha and Omega, the first and last letters of the Greek alphabet, are what Jesus calls Himself in Revelation (Revelation 1:8). That seemed too neat to be an accident, and many concluded the square was a hidden Christian sign.

Then two copies were found scratched on walls at Pompeii, the Roman town buried by Vesuvius in A.D. 79. If the square is Christian, it means there were believers in Pompeii before 79, using a secret code.

Is it? Scholars are honestly split. Some say the Pater Noster pattern is too perfect to be chance. Others point out that Latin-speaking Christians in Pompeii that early would be surprising, and that the square might have been a Jewish or pagan charm that Christians later adopted and reinterpreted. I don't know, and I don't think anyone does yet.

Evidence check: *Debated.*

What the Mockers Remind Us

I find the Alexamenos graffito oddly encouraging. Christians in the second and third centuries weren't respected. They weren't powerful. They were laughed at in schoolrooms, slandered in books, and every so often arrested and killed. They had no buildings to speak of and no political protection.

And the faith grew anyway. By the early 300s, perhaps one person in ten in the Roman Empire was a Christian. Tertullian, the same man who complained about the donkey cartoon, wrote that "the blood of Christians is seed." The more they were cut down, the more they spread.

When people today make fun of what we believe, we're in good company. The kid who scratched that donkey on the wall is forgotten. Alexamenos is remembered as a faithful man.

Study Questions

1. What does the Alexamenos graffito show about how Romans saw Christians around A.D. 200?
2. Read 1 Corinthians 1:18-25. How does the graffito illustrate what Paul wrote?
3. Why did the 2020 study change how scholars view the Nazareth Inscription?
4. Why is it important to be willing to drop evidence that turns out to be weak?
5. How can the example of second-century Christians help you when your faith is mocked?

Chapter 12: The First Places of Worship

and to Apphia the beloved, and to Archippus our fellow soldier, and to the church at your house:

Philemon 1:2 (SLB)

Where did the first Christians meet? The New Testament gives a clear answer. They met in homes. Paul greets "the church at their house" in Rome (Romans 16:5), "the church in his house" in Laodicea (Colossians 4:15), and "the church at your house" in Colossae (Philemon 1:2). For the first two hundred years or so, there were no church buildings as we think of them. There were living rooms and courtyards.

That makes the earliest Christian places hard to find. A house where believers met looks like any other house, unless someone changed it. This chapter is about the few places where someone did.

Dura-Europos: The Oldest House Church

Dura-Europos was a Roman frontier town on the Euphrates River in what is now eastern Syria. In A.D. 256, an army of the Sasanian Persians besieged it. To strengthen the walls, the Roman defenders packed the street along the western wall with dirt, burying the buildings there. The Persians took the city anyway, and Dura was abandoned. The buried buildings stayed buried, and dry, for almost seventeen hundred years.

In 1931 and 1932, a team from Yale University and the French Academy dug out that street. Among the buildings it found a synagogue with walls covered in paintings of Bible stories, a shrine to the Persian god Mithras, and an ordinary-looking house that had been remodeled. Two rooms had been knocked into one to make a meeting hall. Another room had a basin, like a small bathtub under an arched canopy, and its walls were painted.

The paintings tell you what the room was for. On the wall above the basin is the Good Shepherd carrying a sheep on His shoulders, with the flock around Him. Nearby are Adam and Eve. On the other walls are Jesus healing the paralyzed man, who is shown carrying his bed away; Jesus and Peter walking on the water; the woman at the well; and a procession of women carrying torches toward a large tomb, which most scholars read as the women coming to the empty tomb on Easter morning.

This was a baptistery. New believers went down into that basin under the picture of the Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

A scratched date on the plaster shows the house was remodeled around A.D. 232 or 233. It was buried in 256. That makes it the oldest securely dated Christian meeting place ever found. The paintings were moved to the Yale University Art Gallery, where you can see them today.

What strikes me most is the choice of pictures. A small church on the edge of the empire, a few years before a war swept it away, painted the Shepherd, the healing, the walking on water, the living water at the well, and the empty tomb. They knew what mattered.

I was baptized on October 19, 1995. It moves me that the oldest church room anyone has found was built around that same act: a new believer going down into the water, with the Good Shepherd on the wall above. Seventeen hundred years apart, it's the same confession.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Megiddo: "God Jesus Christ"

In 2005, inmates at an Israeli prison near Megiddo were digging to build a new wing when they hit a mosaic floor. Archaeologists from the Israel Antiquities Authority took over and uncovered a room about thirty by sixteen feet, with a decorated mosaic floor and three Greek inscriptions.

One names a Roman officer: "Gaianus, also called Porphyrius, centurion, our brother, has made the pavement at his own expense as an act of generosity." Another asks readers to remember four women by name. And the third, near a stone base in the middle of the room, reads: "The God-loving Akeptous has offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial."

The excavators dated the floor to around A.D. 230, before Christianity was legal. Some scholars put it somewhat later, in the late 200s. Either way, it is one of the oldest Christian places of worship ever found, and the inscription is one of the earliest pieces of archaeology anywhere that calls Jesus God, in those exact words.

The mosaic also has two fish at its center. The fish was an early symbol of Christ, and we'll come back to it in the next chapter.

Notice who's in that room. A Roman centurion called "our brother," paying for the floor. A woman named Akeptous giving a table for the Lord's Supper. Four women remembered by name. That's the same kind of mixed, surprising church we see in Acts, where a centurion named Cornelius was one of the first Gentile converts (Acts 10) and women like Lydia and Priscilla were central to the work.

For a while it wasn't clear what would happen to the floor, since it sits inside a working prison. Israel later agreed to lend it to the Museum of the Bible in Washington, D.C., where it went on display in July 2025. The museum lists it as on display through the end of 2026. If you want to see it, check with the museum before you go.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the mosaic and its inscriptions. Its exact date is debated within the 200s.*

Capernaum: From House to Church

Volume One told you about the house in Capernaum that tradition calls Peter's, where one room was plastered and set apart in the first century and later covered with an eight-sided church. I'll add only one thing here, because it fits this chapter.

A woman named Egeria, a pilgrim from Spain or southern France, traveled through the Holy Land in the early 380s and kept a travel diary. A later writer who used her diary quotes her as saying that in Capernaum "the house of the prince of the apostles has been made into a church, with its original

walls still standing." The excavations found exactly that: a first-century house whose walls were kept when it was enlarged into a church.

Whether it really was Peter's house, we can't prove. But it shows the same pattern as Dura: a home becoming a church, the way Christians had always done it.

Evidence check: *Strong for the house church. Debated for Peter's ownership.*

Aqaba: The Oldest Church Building?

One more site, with a question mark. In 1998, an American team led by Thomas Parker of North Carolina State University was digging at Aqaba, in southern Jordan, and found a mud-brick building that it identified as a church, built around A.D. 300, before Christianity was legal. If they're right, it would be the oldest building we know of that was built from the ground up as a church, rather than remodeled from a house.

Other scholars question both the date and whether the building was really a church. It's an important claim with a careful team behind it, but not settled.

Evidence check: *Debated.*

A Church Without Walls

Put these places together and you can watch the early church at worship. Believers meeting in a remodeled house on the Euphrates, baptizing new converts under a painting of the Good Shepherd. A centurion and a group of women in Galilee gathering around a table dedicated to "God Jesus Christ." A fisherman's house turned into a place of prayer.

I came to Christ that way myself, through a person, not a building. As a boy in Victorville in the 1970s, I mowed the lawn for a neighbor down the street, Pastor Jimmy Carter. He took an interest in me and, with my parents' permission, took me to church. Most of the early church grew the same way, one neighbor at a time.

For two hundred years, the church had almost no buildings, and it grew faster than any movement in the ancient world. Peter wrote that believers themselves are "living stones" being built into a spiritual house (1 Peter 2:5). The archaeology of the early church is mostly the archaeology of people, not buildings. That's just what Peter said it would be.

Study Questions

1. Read Romans 16:3-5 and Colossians 4:15. Where did the earliest churches meet?
2. Why did the house church at Dura-Europos survive so well?
3. What scenes were painted in the Dura baptistery, and why do you think those were chosen?
4. What does the Megiddo mosaic tell us about what Christians believed about Jesus around A.D. 230?
5. Read 1 Peter 2:4-5. What does it mean that believers are "living stones"?

Chapter 13: Hope Carved in the Dark

> *But I do not want you to be ignorant, brothers, concerning those who have fallen asleep, so that you may not grieve, just as also the rest who have no hope. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, so also God will bring with Him those who have fallen asleep through Jesus.*
>
> **1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 (SLB)**

If you want to know what people really believe, look at how they bury their dead. Burial is where hope or hopelessness shows. A Roman tombstone from the time of the apostles might carry a common motto so well known that it was often written with just its first letters: "I was not, I was, I am not, I care not." That's the voice of a world without hope.

The Christians buried their dead differently. And under the city of Rome, they left hundreds of miles of evidence.

The Catacombs

The catacombs are underground cemeteries carved into the soft volcanic rock around Rome. Roman law didn't allow burial inside the city, so cemeteries lined the roads outside the walls. Land was expensive, and digging down was cheaper than buying more ground. Over time, Christians, along with some Jews and pagans, dug long galleries with shelves cut into the walls, layer upon layer, sometimes four or five stories deep. There are more than sixty catacombs around Rome, with well over a hundred miles of tunnels.

A few myths need clearing up first. The catacombs were not secret hiding places where Christians lived during persecution. They were cemeteries, legally owned, and everyone knew where they were. Christians gathered there for funerals and to remember their dead, especially the martyrs, but they didn't live there.

The large Christian catacombs began around A.D. 200. One of the oldest is the Catacomb of Callixtus on the Appian Way. A church writer of the time says the bishop of Rome put a deacon named Callixtus in charge of a cemetery there, and Callixtus later became bishop himself. Several of the early bishops of Rome were buried in a crypt in that catacomb, and their names were carved on the stone slabs that closed their graves.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

What the Christians Painted

The walls and ceilings of the catacombs were painted, and the paintings show what those believers were thinking about when they laid their loved ones in the ground. The same scenes come back again and again:

- Jonah, thrown into the sea, swallowed and spat out alive. Jesus Himself used Jonah as a sign of His own burial and resurrection (Matthew 12:40).
- Daniel standing unharmed among the lions.

- The three young men in the fiery furnace.
- Noah in the ark, saved through the flood.
- Lazarus, wrapped in grave clothes, coming out of his tomb at Jesus' command.
- The Good Shepherd carrying a lamb on His shoulders.

Do you see the pattern? Every one of these is a rescue from death. The catacomb painters weren't decorating. They were preaching. Lazarus was a particular favorite, and you can see why. Standing at a grave, those believers remembered the words Jesus spoke at Lazarus's tomb.

> *Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. The **one** believing in Me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone living and believing in Me will certainly never die. Do you believe this?"* (John 11:25-26)

In the Catacomb of Priscilla, on the Via Salaria, there's a painting from the first half of the 200s of a woman holding a child on her lap, while a man beside her points up at a star. Most scholars think it shows Mary and the infant Jesus, with a prophet, probably Balaam, who foretold that "a star will march forth from Jacob" (Numbers 24:17). If that's right, it's the oldest known picture of Mary.

Evidence check: *Confirmed for the paintings. The identification of the Priscilla painting is strong but not certain.*

The Symbols

Alongside the paintings, early Christians used simple symbols that could be scratched into a grave slab.

The fish. The Greek word for fish is ichthys. Christians noticed that its five letters could stand for "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior" in Greek. The fish reminded them of that confession, of the loaves and fish, and of Jesus calling fishermen to be "fishers of men" (Matthew 4:19). We saw two fish on the floor at Megiddo in the last chapter.

The anchor. Hebrews calls our hope "an anchor of the soul, both sure and firm" (Hebrews 6:19). The anchor shows up on hundreds of early Christian graves, often with its crossbar making it look like a hidden cross.

The shepherd. The Good Shepherd, a young man carrying a sheep, is the most common picture of Jesus in early Christian art, long before artists painted Him on the cross.

The Chi-Rho. The first two letters of "Christ" in Greek, X and P, laid on top of each other. It became common in the 300s, after Constantine.

Words of hope. Grave inscriptions often say the believer "sleeps" or rests "in peace," and many add "in Christ" or "in God." The word cemetery itself comes from the Greek word for a sleeping place. Paul called the Christian dead "those who have fallen asleep" (1 Thessalonians 4:13). The catacombs are full of that language.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

The Epitaph of Abercius

One grave inscription deserves its own section. In 1883, the Scottish scholar William Ramsay, the same man we met on Paul's road in Chapter 10, found two pieces of a carved stone reused in a bathhouse wall near Hieropolis in Phrygia, in west-central Turkey (not the better-known Hierapolis we will visit in the next chapter). They matched a text that had been known from an old story about a bishop named Abercius. The stone was the real thing. Today it's in the Vatican Museums.

Abercius, a bishop, wrote his own epitaph before he died, sometime before A.D. 216. He says he was a disciple of the "holy Shepherd," that he traveled to Rome and east across the Euphrates, and that everywhere he went he found people of the same faith. Then he writes in a kind of code that only a believer would fully understand. Faith, he says, "set before me everywhere as food the Fish from the spring, very great and pure, whom a holy virgin caught, and gave this to friends to eat always, having good wine, giving the mixed cup with bread."

To an outsider, that's a strange poem about fishing. To a Christian, it's the virgin birth, Christ as the Fish, and the bread and cup of the Lord's Supper, shared by believers all across the known world around A.D. 200.

Evidence check: *Confirmed.*

Hope You Can See

I've walked through cemeteries where every stone says something about loss. The early Christians lost people too. They grieved. Paul never told them not to. He told them not to grieve "just as also the rest who have no hope" (1 Thessalonians 4:13).

The catacombs are what that looks like in stone and paint. Jonah spat out alive. Lazarus walking out. The Shepherd carrying the lamb home. A fish, an anchor, and the word "peace."

When I bury someone I love, I want my hope to look like that.

Study Questions

1. What were the catacombs, and what are some common myths about them?

2. Why do you think rescue stories like Jonah, Daniel and Lazarus were painted so often in the catacombs?

3. Read John 11:17-44. Why would this story mean so much to a family burying a loved one?

4. What do the fish and the anchor symbols mean? Where do they come from in the Bible?

5. How does the Abercius epitaph describe the Lord's Supper? Why do you think he wrote in a kind of code?

Chapter 14: Where the Apostles Were Laid

> *For I am already being poured out as a drink offering, and the time of my departure has come. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. From now on **there** is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me in that day, and not only to me but also to all who have loved His appearing.*
>
> **2 Timothy 4:6-8 (SLB)**

The New Testament tells us how one apostle died. James, the brother of John, was killed with the sword by Herod Agrippa I (Acts 12:2), the same king whose own death we read about in Chapter 5. For the rest, the New Testament gives hints. Jesus told Peter he would stretch out his hands and be led where he didn't want to go (John 21:18-19). Paul wrote from a Roman prison that he was already being poured out as a drink offering (2 Timothy 4:6).

Everything else comes from early church tradition and, in a few places, from the ground. This is the most uncertain chapter in the book, and I'll tell you up front: most of what follows is rated "Debated." But it's worth knowing what has been found and what hasn't, because these stories get told with a lot of confidence on both sides.

Peter Under the Vatican

From very early on, Christians said Peter was martyred in Rome under Nero and buried on the Vatican Hill, across the Tiber from the city. Around A.D. 200, a Roman church leader named Gaius wrote, in a passage the historian Eusebius later quoted: "I can show the trophies of the apostles. If you will go to the Vatican or to the Ostian Way, you will find the trophies of those who founded this church." By "trophies" he meant monuments over their graves.

When the emperor Constantine built the first St. Peter's Basilica in the 320s, he went to enormous trouble to put it in an awkward spot. He cut into the side of a hill and filled in a Roman cemetery that was still in use, so that the altar would sit exactly over one particular point. You don't do that unless you're sure what's under that point.

In 1939, under Pope Pius XII, excavations began under the floor of St. Peter's. Over the next ten years, the team uncovered a whole street of Roman tombs, mostly pagan, from the 100s and 200s. Directly under the high altar they found a small shrine built against a red-plastered wall, dated to around A.D. 160. Most scholars agree this is the "trophy" Gaius described. Next to it was a later wall covered with scratched prayers, including the names of Peter and Christ.

In 1950, Pius XII announced that the tomb of Peter had been found. The question of the bones is more complicated. Bones found near the shrine were studied for years. The scholar Margherita Guarducci argued that a set of bones from a cavity in the graffiti wall, along with a scratched Greek inscription she read as "Peter is within," belonged to Peter. In 1968, Pope Paul VI announced that the bones had been identified "in a way we can consider convincing." Many archaeologists, including some who worked on the dig, were not convinced, and the debate continues.

I should tell you where I'm coming from. My family attended a Catholic church when I was a boy, and at about eight I stopped going because its teaching never rang true for me. So I don't come to this question with any reason to want the Vatican tradition to be right. I've tried to give it a fair hearing anyway, because that's what the evidence deserves.

Here's where I come down. The evidence that Christians in Rome were honoring this exact spot as Peter's grave by around A.D. 160, within about a century of his death, is strong. Whether his bones are still there, I can't say.

Evidence check: *Strong for the second-century shrine at the traditional site. Debated for the bones.*

Paul on the Ostian Way

Gaius's "Ostian Way" trophy was Paul's. Tradition says Paul was beheaded outside Rome, which fits his status as a Roman citizen, since citizens were not crucified, and buried along the road to Ostia, the port of Rome. The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls stands there today.

From 2002 to 2006, Vatican archaeologist Giorgio Filippi dug beneath the main altar and uncovered a large marble sarcophagus that had been there since at least the late 300s, with a marble slab above it inscribed in Latin, "Paul, apostle, martyr." In 2009, Pope Benedict XVI announced that a small probe had been inserted into the sarcophagus. It found grains of incense, pieces of purple linen with gold sequins, a blue fabric, and tiny fragments of bone. Radiocarbon dating put the bone in the first or second century.

That tells us the sarcophagus held the remains of someone from roughly Paul's time, wrapped in costly cloth, at the spot the church honored as his grave by around A.D. 200. It doesn't prove the bones are Paul's. But it fits.

Evidence check: *Strong for the tradition and the sarcophagus. Debated for the remains.*

Philip at Hierapolis

Hierapolis, today Pamukkale in western Turkey, is famous for its white limestone terraces and hot springs. It's about six miles from Laodicea and not much farther from Colossae, so it was part of the cluster of churches Paul cared about (Colossians 4:13).

An early tradition says that a Philip was buried at Hierapolis, along with his daughters. Polycrates, the bishop of Ephesus, wrote around A.D. 190 that "Philip, one of the twelve apostles, who sleeps in Hierapolis," and two of his daughters were buried there. There's a puzzle in that, though. Acts mentions another Philip, "Philip the evangelist," who had four daughters who prophesied (Acts 21:8-9). Many scholars think the early writers mixed up the two Philips, and that the man buried at Hierapolis was the evangelist.

Italian archaeologists have dug at Hierapolis for decades. They long knew of a large eight-sided building on a hill above the city, built around A.D. 400 and called the Martyrium of St. Philip. In 2011, Francesco D'Andria's team found a church nearby, built around an older Roman tomb that seems to have been the focus of the whole complex. D'Andria believes this was the tomb pilgrims came to honor as Philip's.

So we likely know where the church of the 400s honored Philip. Which Philip, and whether his bones were ever there, is another question.

Evidence check: *Strong for the pilgrimage site. Debated as to which Philip, and whether it is his actual tomb.*

John at Ephesus

The early church remembered that the apostle John lived to old age in Ephesus. Irenaeus, who as a young man had heard Polycarp, John's disciple, wrote around A.D. 180 that John stayed in Ephesus until the time of Trajan. Polycrates, the same bishop who wrote about Philip, said John "sleeps at Ephesus."

On a hill near Ephesus, the emperor Justinian built a great basilica in the 500s over the place honored as John's grave, replacing an older church. The ruins are there today, with a marked tomb under the place of the altar. No remains have been identified.

John's Gospel ends with a strange note. A rumor had gone around that Jesus had said John wouldn't die, and John went out of his way to correct it (John 21:22-23). It's easy to see how that rumor might have started about a disciple who outlived all the others by decades.

Evidence check: *Strong for the early tradition of John at Ephesus. The tomb itself is not confirmed.*

Not Supported: James in Spain

For completeness, one more. A medieval tradition says the body of James, the brother of John, was carried by boat to Spain and buried at Santiago de Compostela, which became one of the great pilgrimage sites of Europe. Many people walk the Camino de Santiago today. But the tradition first appears about eight hundred years after James's death, and there's no early evidence for it. I respect the pilgrims. I wouldn't call it history.

Evidence check: *Not supported.*

Why This Chapter Matters

You might ask, "If most of these are debated, why include them?" Two reasons.

First, because you'll hear them, and you should know the difference between "the church has honored this spot since the second century" and "we found the apostle's bones." The first is often true. The second is almost never provable.

Second, because what is certain is impressive enough. Within a century or so of their deaths, believers in Rome were building shrines to Peter and Paul at the places they said they were buried, and believers in Asia were naming the towns where John and Philip lay. These were men people remembered, in places people could visit. The faith of the early church wasn't built around a legend from long ago and far away. It was built around men whose graves their grandchildren could point to, and whose testimony about the risen Jesus they died for.

Paul's last letter is the verse at the top of this chapter. He knew what was coming, and he was ready. Wherever his bones are, I believe he got his crown.

Study Questions

1. What did Gaius say about the "trophies" of Peter and Paul around A.D. 200?
2. Why is it significant that Constantine built St. Peter's Basilica on such an awkward spot?
3. What did the 2009 study of the sarcophagus at St. Paul Outside the Walls find?
4. Why do scholars think the Philip buried at Hierapolis may have been Philip the evangelist?
5. Read 2 Timothy 4:6-8. What gave Paul his confidence as he faced death?

Part Four: Holding It All Together

Chapter 15: A Field Guide to Bible News

> *The first in his case **is** righteous, and his neighbor comes and examines him.*
>
> **Proverbs 18:17 (SLB)**

Sooner or later, someone is going to send you a link. Maybe it'll say "Archaeologists Prove the Exodus!" Maybe it'll say "New Discovery Shows the Bible Got It Wrong." It might show up on your phone from a cousin, or in a church bulletin, or in a video with dramatic music.

What do you do with it?

Proverbs has the answer in one line, the verse at the top of this chapter. The first person to tell a story always sounds right, until somebody else comes along and asks questions. This chapter is a list of the questions. I use it myself every time a new find hits the news, and it has kept me from embarrassing myself more than once.

Question 1: Who Is Saying It?

Start with the source. A press release from a university or the Israel Antiquities Authority is a starting point. A peer-reviewed article in a journal is better. A news story quoting the archaeologist directly is fine. A website or video that doesn't name the archaeologist, the dig or the journal should make you suspicious right away.

Be just as suspicious of the headline on a good news site. Headlines are written by editors, not archaeologists, and their job is to get clicks. Read past the headline to what the actual scholar said. Very often the scholar said "this might fit" and the headline said "proof."

Question 2: Where Was It Found?

This is the provenance question from Chapter 1. Was the object found in a recorded excavation, in a known layer, by a professional team? Or did it come from the antiquities market, a private collection or "a dealer in Jerusalem"?

Objects without a findspot aren't automatically fake. But they can't carry much weight, because forgers have gotten very good. Volume One told you about the Museum of the Bible's Dead Sea Scroll fragments, all of which turned out to be modern forgeries. The rule I follow: no findspot, no foundation.

Question 3: What Does It Actually Say?

Ask to see the words. If it's an inscription, what letters are actually on the stone, and which ones are restored by the scholar? Remember the Isaiah bulla in Chapter 1. One broken letter is the difference between "Isaiah the prophet" and "some Isaiah." Good reports will tell you which letters are clear and which are guessed.

Question 4: How Is It Dated?

How do they know how old it is? By the layer it was found in? By the style of the pottery or the letters? By radiocarbon? Each method has its own margin of error. Radiocarbon dates come with a range, often fifty years or more on each side. A report that gives a single exact year for something dated by carbon is oversimplifying.

And watch for dates that change. The Gihon Spring tower in Chapter 8 was dated to around 1700 B.C. for twenty years, then a new study put part of it eight hundred years later. Science corrects itself. That's a strength, but it means today's date isn't always tomorrow's.

Question 5: Who Disagrees?

For almost every important find, someone qualified disagrees with the first interpretation. Find out who and why. If you can't find any disagreement, either the find is truly settled, or it's too new for anyone to have answered yet. A month-old discovery is not settled.

I make a point of reading the critics of finds I like. If the critics have a good argument, I want to know before I repeat the claim. If they don't, the find comes out stronger.

Question 6: Has It Been Retracted?

Sometimes a claim gets published and later pulled. The 2021 paper claiming an airburst destroyed Tall el-Hammam, which many Christian sites shared as proof of Sodom, was retracted by the journal in 2025, as Volume One reported. But the original stories are still out there, still being shared, with no correction attached. Before you pass something along, search for the claim with the word "retracted" or "debunked" after it. It takes thirty seconds.

Question 7: Does It Prove What They Say It Proves?

This is the most important question, and the one most often skipped. Even a real find, from a real dig, correctly dated, may not prove what the headline says.

A seal with the name Isaiah proves there was an Isaiah. A burned layer at Jericho proves Jericho burned. To connect them to the Bible's specific people and events takes another step of reasoning, and that step is where most of the arguing happens. Be honest with yourself about how big the step is.

This cuts both ways. A find that doesn't mention a Bible event doesn't disprove it. Most of what happened in the ancient world left no trace at all.

Question 8: Would I Believe This If It Pointed the Other Way?

This is the hardest one, and it's about me, not the evidence. If a find with exactly this quality of evidence seemed to contradict the Bible, would I accept it? Or would I start asking all the questions above?

If I'd ask the questions in that case, I should ask them in this one too. Paul said to test all things and hold fast what is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That includes the things we want to be true.

A Quick Card for Your Wallet

If you want the short version, here it is:

- Who said it, and did they name the dig and the scholar?
- Was it dug up, or bought?
- What does it actually say, and what's restored?
- How was it dated, and how sure?
- Who disagrees?
- Has it been retracted?
- Does it prove what the headline says?
- Would I accept this if I didn't like it?

Why This Matters for Christians

You might ask, "Isn't this a lot of work just to share a news story?" Maybe. But here's how I see it. Every time a Christian shares a hoax or an overblown claim, a skeptic somewhere files it away as proof that believers will swallow anything. And every time a Christian says, "That one doesn't hold up, but here's one that does," that skeptic has to think again.

The believers in Berea were called noble because they checked what even Paul told them against the Scriptures (Acts 17:11). We should be the most careful people in the room, not the least.

Study Questions

1. Read Proverbs 18:17. How does it apply to news about archaeology?
2. What is provenance, and why does it matter so much?
3. Why should you read past the headline of a news story about a find?
4. What happened to the Tall el-Hammam airburst paper, and what does that teach about sharing claims?
5. Read Acts 17:11. How can you follow the Bereans' example this week?

Chapter 16: What the Evidence Can and Cannot Do

> *For not having followed cleverly devised myths did we make known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but having become eyewitnesses of His majesty.*
>
> **2 Peter 1:16 (SLB)**

We've covered a lot of ground in two volumes: kings on Assyrian prisms, scribes on clay bullae, Philistine temples, burned forts, a donkey on a cross, a mosaic floor in a prison yard, painted tombs under Rome. I want to close by stepping back and asking a simple question. What does all of this actually do for faith?

My answer has two halves, and I think both matter.

What the Evidence Can Do

It can show that the Bible is the kind of book that can be checked. Most religious writings float above history. They describe heavenly realms, ancient ages before any records, or teachings that don't depend on any particular event. The Bible isn't like that. It names kings, dates events by their reigns, gives the names of officials and the distances between towns. It sticks its neck out, over and over. Peter said the apostles hadn't followed "cleverly devised myths" but were "eyewitnesses" (2 Peter 1:16). That's a claim about history, and history can be investigated.

It can show that where the Bible can be checked, it holds up. Not every question is settled. I've marked many things "Debated" in these books, and I've tried to be honest about the open problems, like the date of the Exodus and the census of Quirinius. But the overall pattern is hard to miss. Over two centuries of digging, the Bible's kings have turned up in the right order, its foreign rulers with the right names and titles, its cities in the right places, its local officials with the right titles. The more we learn, the more often the Bible's details turn out to be the details of people who were there.

It can remove obstacles. Some people won't even consider the claims of Christ because they've been told the Bible is a collection of myths made up centuries after the fact. When someone learns that a minor official like Tattenai or a murderer like Adrammelech turns up in ancient records, it can open a door that was stuck shut. I've seen it happen.

It can strengthen believers. Faith isn't the same as believing without reasons. The Bible never asks for that. Luke wrote so that Theophilus would "come to know the certainty" of what he'd been taught (Luke 1:4). John wrote down the signs Jesus did so that his readers would believe (John 20:31). Evidence isn't the enemy of faith. It's one of the gifts God gives to faith.

What the Evidence Cannot Do

It cannot prove the most important claims. No archaeologist will ever dig up proof that God spoke to Moses, that Isaiah's prophecies came from the LORD, or that Jesus' death paid for our sins. Archaeology can show that Jerusalem's temple stood where the Bible says. It can't show that God's presence filled it. It can show that a crucified man named Jesus had followers who proclaimed Him risen. It can't put the resurrection under a microscope.

The core of the Christian faith is a claim about what God has done. Evidence can support the reliability of the people who told us about it. It can't take the place of trusting the God they told us about.

It cannot settle every question. Some things will probably never be found. Papyrus rots. Cities get rebuilt on top of themselves. Gold gets melted down. Most of what happened in the ancient world, including most of what happened in the Bible, left no trace in the ground. If your faith depends on the next dig turning up the next proof, you will be waiting a long time, and you'll be shaken every time a headline goes the other way.

It cannot make anyone believe. I wish it could. But Jesus told a story about a rich man who wanted someone to come back from the dead to warn his brothers, and Abraham's answer was that if they wouldn't listen to Moses and the Prophets, they wouldn't be persuaded even if someone rose from the dead (Luke 16:31). Evidence can clear the path. It can't make anyone walk it. That's the work of the Holy Spirit through the Word of God (Romans 10:17).

Where That Leaves Us

Thomas wanted evidence. He said he wouldn't believe until he put his fingers in the nail marks. Jesus didn't scold him for wanting evidence. He gave it to him. He showed up, held out His hands, and said, "touch Me and see" in Luke's account and "Bring your finger here" in John's (Luke 24:39; John 20:27).

Then Jesus said this:

> *Jesus says to him, "Because you have seen Me, Thomas, you have believed. Blessed **are** those who have not seen and have believed."* (John 20:29)

That's us. We weren't there. We can't touch the nail marks. What we have is the testimony of the people who were there, written down and preserved, and a world full of stones and seals and potsherds that keep saying those people knew what they were talking about.

Evidence has limits in my own life too. I've believed in God as long as I can remember, and I still drifted from Him more than once through bad choices. Knowing the facts never kept me close. Walking with Christ does.

That's enough for me. Not because the ground proves everything, but because the ground keeps agreeing with the Book, and the Book points past itself to a Person. The archaeology is the scaffolding. Jesus is the building.

Paul put the whole thing on one hinge: "if Christ has not been raised, your faith ***is*** futile" (1 Corinthians 15:17). Everything in these two volumes is, in the end, background to that one question. Volume One closed with the evidence for the empty tomb. I'll close this one by saying that I believe He walked out of it. The stones agree. And I've staked my life on it.

Study Questions

1. In your own words, what can archaeology do for faith? What can't it do?

2. Read 2 Peter 1:16-18. Why does it matter that the apostles claimed to be eyewitnesses?

3. Read Luke 16:27-31. What does this passage say about the limits of evidence?

4. How did Jesus respond to Thomas's request for evidence? What does that tell you about how God views honest questions?

5. Read John 20:29-31. Why did John write his Gospel? How does that apply to you?

A Closing Word: The Stones Still Speak

> *And answering, He said to them, "I say to you that if these should be silent, the stones will cry out."*
>
> **Luke 19:40 (SLB)**

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem, the crowds shouted praise, and some of the Pharisees told Him to make them stop. He answered that if they were silent, the stones would cry out.

I've thought about that verse a lot while writing these two books. In a way, the stones have been crying out for two hundred years. A stone in Moab that names Omri. A stone in Syria that names Ben-hadad son of Hazael. A stone at Ekron that names Achish. A block from the top of the temple wall that marks where the trumpeter stood. A plaster wall on the Palatine Hill where a boy named Alexamenos was mocked for worshiping a crucified God. A floor in Galilee that says "God Jesus Christ."

None of those stones was made by someone trying to prove the Bible. Most were made by people who had never read it, and some by people who hated those who did. That's what makes their testimony so strong.

But I don't want to end with the stones. I want to end with the people. Behind every seal is a scribe who did his job. Behind every bulla is a clerk who kept his records. Behind every painted grave is a family that grieved with hope. Behind the house church at Dura is a little congregation on the edge of the empire that painted the empty tomb on its wall a few years before a war swept it away. They believed, and they left something behind so we would know.

That's my prayer for you as you close this book. Not that you'll remember every king and every inscription, but that you'll remember that the faith you hold was held by real people in real places, all the way back to the eyewitnesses. And that you'll leave something behind too.

The grass dries up and the flower withers. Stones crack, and clay crumbles, and digs close. But the word of our God will stand forever (Isaiah 40:8).

Appendix A: People of the Bible Confirmed Outside the Bible

These lists follow the method of Lawrence Mykytiuk of Purdue University (Chapter 1). The Old Testament list counts people named in inscriptions written during the period the Bible describes. The New Testament list adds coins and writers of the period, such as Josephus and Tacitus. The last column gives the chapter of this book that discusses each person; "Vol. 1" means Dug Up and Written Down, Volume One, and a dash means the person is listed here only.

The Old Testament: 53 People

Person	First named	Where named outside the Bible	Chapter
Shishak (Sheshonq I), king of Egypt	1 Kings 11:40	Karnak temple relief; stele fragment from Megiddo	Vol. 1
So (Osorkon IV), king of Egypt	2 Kings 17:4	Egyptian records (identification argued)	-
Tirhakah (Taharqa), king of Cush and Egypt	2 Kings 19:9	Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions	3
Necho II, king of Egypt	2 Chronicles 35:20	Assyrian and Babylonian records	Vol. 1
Hophra (Apries), king of Egypt	Jeremiah 44:30	Egyptian and Babylonian records	3
Mesha, king of Moab	2 Kings 3:4	The Mesha Stele, his own inscription	Vol. 1
Hadadezer, king of Aram	1 Kings 22:3	Inscriptions of Shalmaneser III	-
Ben-hadad son of Hadadezer, king of Aram	2 Kings 6:24	Melqart Stele	-
Hazael, king of Aram	1 Kings 19:15	Shalmaneser III; Zakkur Stele; bronze horse fittings; ivories	3
Ben-hadad son of Hazael, king of Aram	2 Kings 13:3	Zakkur Stele	3
Rezin, king of Aram	2 Kings 15:37	Annals of Tiglath-pileser III	3
Omri, king of Israel	1 Kings 16:16	Mesha Stele; Assyrian inscriptions	2
Ahab, king of Israel	1 Kings 16:28	Kurkh Monolith of Shalmaneser III	Vol. 1
Jehu, king of Israel	1 Kings 19:16	Black Obelisk and other texts of Shalmaneser III	Vol. 1
Joash (Jehoash), king of Israel	2 Kings 13:9	Tell al-Rimah Stele of Adad-nirari III	2
Jeroboam II, king of Israel	2 Kings 13:13	Seal of Shema, servant of Jeroboam, from Megiddo	1
Menahem, king of Israel	2 Kings 15:14	Annals of Tiglath-pileser III	2
Pekah, king of Israel	2 Kings 15:25	Summary Inscription 4 of Tiglath-pileser III	2
Hoshea, king of Israel	2 Kings 15:30	Summary Inscription 4 of Tiglath-pileser III	2
Sanballat, governor of Samaria	Nehemiah 2:10	Elephantine papyri	4; Vol. 1
David, king of Israel	1 Samuel 16:13	Tel Dan Stele ("House of David"); likely the Mesha Stele	Vol. 1
Uzziah (Azariah), king of Judah	2 Kings 14:21	Seals of his servants Abiyaw and Shubnayaw	1
Ahaz (Jehoahaz), king of Judah	2 Kings 15:38	Summary Inscription 7 of Tiglath-pileser III	2
Hezekiah, king of Judah	2 Kings 16:20	Sennacherib's annals; royal bulla	Vol. 1
Manasseh, king of Judah	2 Kings 20:21	Prisms of Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal	2
Hilkiah, high priest	2 Kings 22:4	City of David bulla of his son Azariah	4

Shaphan, scribe	2 Kings 22:3	City of David bulla of his son Gemariah	4; Vol. 1
Azariah son of Hilkiah, high priest	1 Chronicles 6:13	City of David bulla	4
Gemariah son of Shaphan, official	Jeremiah 36:10	City of David bulla	Vol. 1
Jehoiachin, king of Judah	2 Kings 24:6	Babylonian ration tablets	Vol. 1
Shelemiah, father of Jucal	Jeremiah 37:3	City of David bulla (2005)	Vol. 1
Jucal (Jehucal) son of Shelemiah, official	Jeremiah 37:3	City of David bulla (2005)	Vol. 1
Pashhur, father of Gedaliah	Jeremiah 38:1	City of David bulla (2008)	Vol. 1
Gedaliah son of Pashhur, official	Jeremiah 38:1	City of David bulla (2008)	Vol. 1
Tiglath-pileser III (Pul), king of Assyria	2 Kings 15:19	His own annals and many inscriptions	2; 3
Shalmaneser V, king of Assyria	2 Kings 17:3	Babylonian Chronicle; king lists	3
Sargon II, king of Assyria	Isaiah 20:1	His palace at Khorsabad and many inscriptions	Vol. 1
Sennacherib, king of Assyria	2 Kings 18:13	His own prisms and reliefs	Vol. 1
Adrammelech, son of Sennacherib	2 Kings 19:37	Letter to Esarhaddon (as Arda-Mulissu)	3
Esarhaddon, king of Assyria	2 Kings 19:37	His own prisms and inscriptions	2; 3
Merodach-baladan II, king of Babylon	2 Kings 20:12	Babylonian Chronicle; Sennacherib's annals	3
Nebuchadnezzar II, king of Babylon	2 Kings 24:1	His own inscriptions and many tablets	Vol. 1
Nebo-sarsekim, Babylonian official	Jeremiah 39:3	Babylonian tablet in the British Museum	3; Vol. 1
Nergal-sharezer (Neriglissar), Babylonian official and later king	Jeremiah 39:3	Prism of Nebuchadnezzar II	3
Nebuzaradan, captain of the bodyguard	2 Kings 25:8	Prism of Nebuchadnezzar II	3
Evil-merodach (Amel-Marduk), king of Babylon	2 Kings 25:27	Several inscriptions	3
Belshazzar, son of Nabonidus	Daniel 5:1	Babylonian documents; Nabonidus cylinders	Vol. 1
Cyrus II, king of Persia	2 Chronicles 36:22	Cyrus Cylinder and many inscriptions	Vol. 1
Darius I, king of Persia	Ezra 4:5	Behistun inscription and many others	-
Tattenai, governor beyond the River	Ezra 5:3	Babylonian tablet dated 502 B.C.	3
Xerxes I (Ahasuerus), king of Persia	Esther 1:1	His own inscriptions; dated documents	3
Artaxerxes I, king of Persia	Ezra 4:7	Inscriptions; dated documents	-
Darius II, king of Persia	Nehemiah 12:22	Inscriptions; dated documents	-

The New Testament: 30 People

Person	Named in	Where named outside the Bible	Chapter
Jesus	The Gospels	Josephus, Tacitus, Pliny the Younger, Lucian, Celsus	Vol. 1
John the Baptist	Mark 1:4	Josephus	5

James, brother of Jesus	Galatians 1:19	Josephus	5; Vol. 1
Gamaliel the Elder	Acts 5:34	Josephus; the Mishnah	5
Annas, high priest	Luke 3:2	Josephus	5
Caiaphas, high priest	Matthew 26:57	Josephus; family ossuary (possible)	Vol. 1
Ananias son of Nebedaeus, high priest	Acts 23:2	Josephus	5
Augustus, emperor	Luke 2:1	Many writers, inscriptions and coins	Vol. 1
Tiberius, emperor	Luke 3:1	Many writers, inscriptions and coins	Vol. 1
Claudius, emperor	Acts 18:2	Many writers, inscriptions and coins	Vol. 1
Nero, emperor	Acts 25:11	Many writers, inscriptions and coins	Vol. 1
Herod the Great	Matthew 2:1	Josephus; coins; his buildings	5
Herod Archelaus	Matthew 2:22	Josephus; coins	5
Herod Antipas	Luke 3:1	Josephus; coins	5
Herod Philip, first husband of Herodias	Mark 6:17	Josephus	5
Herodias	Mark 6:17	Josephus	5
Salome, daughter of Herodias	Mark 6:22	Josephus; coins with her portrait	5
Philip the Tetrarch	Luke 3:1	Josephus; coins	5
Herod Agrippa I	Acts 12:1	Josephus; coins	5
Herod Agrippa II	Acts 25:13	Josephus; coins	5
Bernice	Acts 25:13	Josephus; inscription from Beirut	5
Drusilla	Acts 24:24	Josephus	5
Quirinius, governor of Syria	Luke 2:2	Josephus; Lapis Venetus inscription	5
Pontius Pilate, governor of Judea	Luke 3:1	Josephus, Tacitus, Philo; Pilate Stone; coins	Vol. 1
Gallio, proconsul of Achaia	Acts 18:12	Seneca and others; Delphi inscription	Vol. 1
Antonius Felix, governor of Judea	Acts 23:24	Josephus, Tacitus; coins	5
Porcius Festus, governor of Judea	Acts 24:27	Josephus; coins	5
Aretas IV, king of the Nabateans	2 Corinthians 11:32	Josephus; inscriptions; coins	5
The Egyptian rebel	Acts 21:38	Josephus	5
Judas of Galilee	Acts 5:37	Josephus	5

Appendix B: Where to See the Evidence

Displays, opening hours and travel conditions change, so check with the museum or park before you go.

Israel Museum, Jerusalem: The Ekron royal dedicatory inscription and the "place of trumpeting" stone, along with many of the finds in Volume One.

City of David and the Jewish Quarter, Jerusalem: The Gihon Spring fortifications, and the Broad Wall, visible below street level in the Jewish Quarter.

Jerusalem Archaeological Park and the Davidson Center: Robinson's Arch, the fallen stones of A.D. 70 on the Herodian street, and the southern steps of the Temple Mount.

Tel Dan Nature Reserve, northern Israel: The sacred precinct with its platform and altar area, the city gates and the springs of the Jordan.

Banias (Caesarea Philippi), northern Israel: The cave of Pan and the shrine niches in the cliff, at the foot of Mount Hermon.

Tel Arad and Tel Beersheba National Parks, southern Israel: The fortress and shrine at Arad, and the Iron Age city at Beersheba with a replica of the horned altar. Both are UNESCO World Heritage sites.

Samaria (Sebaste): The royal acropolis of Omri and Ahab and Herod's later city. Check travel conditions before you go.

Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, Connecticut: The paintings from the Dura-Europos house church and its baptistery.

Museum of the Bible, Washington, D.C.: The Megiddo mosaic, listed as on display through December 31, 2026.

Palatine Museum, Rome: The Alexamenos graffito.

Vatican Museums and the Vatican Necropolis, Rome: The Abercius inscription, and guided tours of the excavations under St. Peter's Basilica, which must be booked well in advance.

Catacombs of Callixtus and Priscilla, Rome: Early Christian burial galleries, paintings and symbols. Visits are by guided tour.

Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls, Rome: The sarcophagus beneath the altar, partly visible through a window.

Pisidian Antioch, Philippi, Corinth and Ephesus: The cities on Paul's road, all open to visitors, with forums, roads, theaters and inscriptions.

Hierapolis (Pamukkale), Turkey: The Martyrium of St. Philip and the church found in 2011, above the white terraces.

Appendix C: Words to Know

Bema: A raised platform where Roman officials heard cases in public. The "judgment seat" of Acts 18:12.

Bulla (plural bullae): A small lump of clay pressed over the string of a rolled document and stamped with a seal.

Catacomb: An underground cemetery carved into rock, with burial shelves along long galleries.

Chi-Rho: A symbol made of the first two Greek letters of "Christ," X and P, laid over each other.

Colony (Roman): A city settled by Roman citizens, usually retired soldiers, and governed under Roman law, like Philippi.

Epitaph: Words written on a grave or tombstone.

Graffito (plural graffiti): Writing or a drawing scratched or painted on a wall.

High place: A local shrine or altar outside the temple in Jerusalem, often on a hill.

Ichthys: Greek for "fish." Its letters were read as "Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior."

Lictor: A Roman attendant who carried a bundle of rods as a sign of a magistrate's authority. The "rod-bearers" of Acts 16:35.

Martyrium: A church or shrine built over a martyr's grave or the place of his death.

Ostracon (plural ostraca): A piece of broken pottery used as cheap writing material.

Provenance: The record of where an object was found and who has owned it since.

Radiocarbon dating: A method of dating once-living material, like wood or bone, by measuring a form of carbon that decays at a known rate.

Sarcophagus: A stone coffin.

Stele (plural stelae): An upright stone slab carved with an inscription or picture.

Tetrarch: A ruler of part of a kingdom, like Herod Antipas or Philip.

Appendix D: Sources and Further Reading

These are the main published sources behind this book, grouped by subject. Ancient writers such as Josephus, Eusebius, Tacitus and Pausanias are available in several English translations, many of them free online.

Identifying People of the Bible

Lawrence Mykytiuk, Identifying Biblical Persons in Northwest Semitic Inscriptions of 1200-539 B.C.E. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2004).

Lawrence Mykytiuk, "Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible," Biblical Archaeology Review (March/April 2014), with later updates bringing the count to 53, published by the Biblical Archaeology Society.

Lawrence Mykytiuk, "New Testament Political Figures Confirmed," Biblical Archaeology Review (September/October 2017).

Lawrence Mykytiuk, "New Testament Religious Figures Confirmed," Biblical Archaeology Review (Summer 2021).

Simo Parpola, "The Murderer of Sennacherib," in Death in Mesopotamia, ed. Bendt Alster (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980).

Nahman Avigad, "The Epitaph of a Royal Steward from Siloam Village," Israel Exploration Journal 3 (1953).

Eilat Mazar, "Is This the Prophet Isaiah's Signature?" Biblical Archaeology Review (March/April-May/June 2018).

Philistine Country

Seymour Gitin, Trude Dothan and Joseph Naveh, "A Royal Dedicatory Inscription from Ekron," Israel Exploration Journal 47 (1997).

Aren M. Maeir and others, "A Late Iron Age I/Early Iron Age II Old Canaanite Inscription from Tell es-Safi/Gath," Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research 351 (2008).

Michal Feldman and others, "Ancient DNA Sheds Light on the Genetic Origins of Early Iron Age Philistines," Science Advances 5 (2019).

Lawrence E. Stager, Daniel M. Master and J. David Schloen, eds., Ashkelon 3: The Seventh Century B.C. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011).

Judah, Jerusalem and the North

Eran Arie, Baruch Rosen and Dvory Namdar, "Cannabis and Frankincense at the Judahite Shrine of Arad," Tel Aviv 47 (2020).

Yohanan Aharoni, "The Horned Altar of Beer-sheba," Biblical Archaeologist 37 (1974).

Nahman Avigad, Discovering Jerusalem (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1983).

Johanna Regev and others, "Absolute Dating of the Gihon Spring Fortifications, Jerusalem," Radiocarbon 59 (2017).

Benjamin Mazar, The Mountain of the Lord (Garden City: Doubleday, 1975).

Temple Mount Sifting Project, project reports at tmsifting.org.

Avraham Biran, Biblical Dan (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1994).

Yitzhak Magen, Mount Gerizim Excavations, volumes 1 and 2 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2004 and 2008).

Paul's Road

William M. Ramsay, St. Paul the Traveller and the Roman Citizen (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1895).

Colin J. Hemer, The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History (Tubingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1989).

W. M. Calder, "A Cult of the Homonades," Classical Review 24 (1910), on the Zeus and Hermes dedication near Lystra.

Ovid, Metamorphoses, book 8, the story of Baucis and Philemon.

Pausanias, Description of Greece 1.1.4, on altars to unknown gods.

The Early Church

Michael Peppard, The World's Oldest Church: Bible, Art, and Ritual at Dura-Europos, Syria (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2016).

Yotam Tepper and Leah Di Segni, A Christian Prayer Hall of the Third Century CE at Kefar Othnay (Legio) (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority, 2006).

Museum of the Bible, "The Megiddo Mosaic," exhibit page at museumofthebible.org.

Kyle Harper and others, "Isotopic Analysis of the Nazareth Inscription," Journal of Archaeological Science: Reports 30 (2020).

Eusebius, Church History 2.25 (Gaius on the trophies of the apostles) and 3.31 (Polycrates on Philip and John).

John Evangelist Walsh, The Bones of St. Peter (Garden City: Doubleday, 1982).

Francesco D'Andria, reports on the 2011 discoveries at Hierapolis, Italian Archaeological Mission at Hierapolis.

Robin M. Jensen, Understanding Early Christian Art (London: Routledge, 2000).

Appendix E: Scripture Index

Passages quoted in full in this book, with the chapter where each appears.

1 Samuel 17:4 *Chapter 6*
2 Samuel 5:6-8 *Chapter 8*
1 Kings 12:28-30 *Chapter 9*
1 Kings 16:23-24 *Chapter 2*
2 Kings 12:17 *Chapter 6*
2 Kings 15:19-20 *Chapter 2*
2 Kings 23:8 *Chapter 7*
2 Chronicles 32:5 *Chapter 8*
Ezra 5:3 *Chapter 3*
Psalms 48:12-13 *Chapter 8*
Proverbs 18:17 *Chapter 15*
Isaiah 22:10 *Chapter 8*
Jeremiah 36:10 *Chapter 4*
Zephaniah 2:4 *Chapter 6*
Matthew 16:18 *Chapter 9*
Matthew 24:1-2 *Chapter 8*
Luke 1:3 *Chapter 1*
Luke 19:40 *A Closing Word*
John 4:20 *Chapter 9*
John 11:25-26 *Chapter 13*
John 20:29 *Chapter 16*
Acts 12:21-23 *Chapter 5*
Acts 14:11-13 *Chapter 10*
Acts 16:12 *Chapter 10*
Acts 16:37 *Chapter 10*
Acts 26:26 *Chapter 5*
1 Corinthians 1:18 *Chapter 11*
1 Thessalonians 4:13-14 *Chapter 13*
2 Timothy 4:6-8 *Chapter 14*
Philemon 1:2 *Chapter 12*
2 Peter 1:16 *Chapter 16*

About This Book

Dug Up and Written Down, Volume Two picks up where the first volume left off, and comes at the evidence for the Bible from three new directions.

It starts with people. Using the careful method of Purdue scholar Lawrence Mykytiuk, it shows how to tell whether a name on a seal or a stone belongs to the same person named in the Bible, then walks through the kings of Israel and Judah in their enemies' records, the foreign kings of Egypt, Aram, Assyria, Babylon and Persia, the scribes and priests on clay bullae, and the Herods, governors and high priests of the New Testament.

Then it walks the land: Goliath's hometown of Gath and the Philistine cities, the shrines of Judah that were shut down in the reforms of Hezekiah and Josiah, Jerusalem layer by layer, the north country from Dan to Caesarea Philippi, and the cities on Paul's road.

Then it goes where most books stop: the church in the ground after the apostles. A Roman cartoon mocking a Christian for worshiping a crucified God. The oldest house church ever found. A mosaic floor that calls Jesus God around A.D. 230. The paintings and symbols of the catacombs. The places where tradition says Peter, Paul, Philip and John were laid to rest.

Every find carries an evidence check: confirmed, strong, debated, or not supported. The book closes with a field guide for judging the next headline about a Bible discovery, and an honest look at what evidence can and cannot do for faith. Every chapter has study questions for personal reading or a small group, and the appendices list every Bible person confirmed outside the Bible, places to see the finds, words to know and sources.

All Scripture quotations come from the Steadfast Literal Bible, which is free to read at trinfinityenterprises.com/slb.