

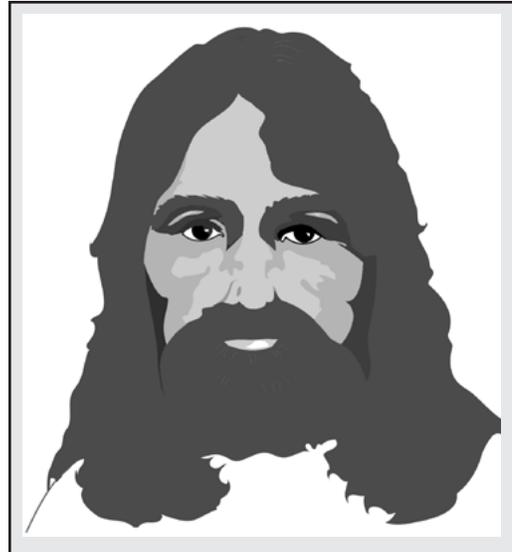
HISTORICAL & ARCHAEOLOGICAL CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE, DEATH AND RESURRECTION OF JESUS CHRIST

© 1995-2008 Roderick A. Graciano

Some writers may toy with the fancy of a ‘Christ-myth,’ but they do not do so on the ground of historical evidence. The historicity of Christ is as axiomatic for an unbiased historian as the historicity of Julius Caesar. It is not historians who propagate the ‘Christ-myth’ theories. —F. F. Bruce, quoted in McDowell (1), p. 83.

No serious scholar has ventured to postulate the non-historicity of Jesus. —Otto Betz, quoted in McDowell (1), p. 83.

While some believe that we know almost nothing about Jesus from ancient, non-New Testament sources, this plainly is not the case. Not only are there many such sources, but Jesus is one of the persons of ancient history concerning whom we have a significant amount of quality data. His is one of the most-mentioned and most-substantiated lives in ancient times. (Source: Habermas, p. 169.)



Artist's depiction of Jesus based on the image on the Shroud of Turin

A Christian may well ask, “Why should anyone have to *seek* historical evidence for the life of Jesus? Isn’t the New Testament on our coffee table the historical record of His life?”

Indeed, many believers need no more than the Bible to confirm their belief in Jesus Christ as a historical person. Not only does the Bible provide multiple witnesses to the life of Jesus, but it also provides the best explanation for the subsequent development of early Christianity. In the words of Peter Stuhlmacher of Tübingen University: “As a Western Scripture scholar, I am inclined to doubt these (Gospel) stories, but as a historian I am obliged to take them as reliable. The biblical texts as they stand are the best hypothesis we have until now to explain what really happened.” (Source: Richards.)

Nevertheless, while believers express their confidence in the historicity of the Gospels, the rest of the world persists in its skepticism. Ill-informed critics continue to dismiss the Biblical record of Christ’s life as mythical, and as a religious scam hoisted upon credulous peasants. Therefore, it is incumbent upon anyone who cares about the truth in these matters to both educate themselves and (as much as possible) those around them about the corroborating historical evidence for Christ’s life and work.

© 1997-2008. www.timothyministries.info

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

As we assemble the independent data that supports the Gospel record, we will discover the unreasonableness of skeptical arguments against these texts. If we are believers, the independent witnesses to the life and times of Jesus will not only encourage our faith, but will also provide us with insights for better understanding the Gospel texts.

Part 1: The Textual Evidence

Textual Witnesses to the Historical Existence of Jesus

First-Century Writers

Very few writings about *anything* survive from the first-century. It's amazing therefore, that several first-century, non-Christian writers do refer to Christ:

Josephus

The writings of the Jewish Pharisee, soldier and historian, Flavius Josephus (born AD 37), includes one of the most well known references to Christ:



Bust believed to be of
Flavius Josephus

Now, there was about this time **Jesus**, a wise man, if it be lawful to call him a man, for he was a doer of wonderful works—a teacher of such men as receive the truth with pleasure. He drew over to him both many of the Jews, and many of the Gentiles. **He was [the] Christ**; and when Pilate, at the suggestion of the principal men amongst us, had condemned him to the cross, those that loved him at the first did not forsake him, for he appeared to them alive again the third day, as the divine prophets had foretold these and ten thousand other wonderful things concerning him; and the tribe of Christians, so named from him, are not extinct at this day. (Source: *Josephus Antiquities* 18.33.)

This is such a *Christian-sounding* statement that critics have questioned its genuineness, even though it appears in every extant manuscript of Josephus and there is no decisive internal evidence that betrays tampering. Nevertheless, there is an Arabic version of this passage that sounds more objective and may be a more accurate transmission of Josephus' original wording. It reads as follows:

At this time there was a wise man who was called **Jesus**. And his conduct was good and (he) was known to be virtuous. And many people from among the Jews and other nations became his disciples. Pilate condemned him to be crucified and to die. And those who had become his disciples did not abandon his discipleship. They reported that he had appeared to them three days after his crucifixion and that he was alive; accordingly, he was perhaps **the messiah** concerning whom the prophets have recounted wonders.

Did later Christian copyists “strengthen” Josephus’ testimony about Jesus in the traditional version of this passage? Instead, did Arabic copyists preserve the passage more accurately? Or is it possible that the Arabs toned it down? It makes no difference to us because no one disputes this one fact: Josephus testified to the historical existence of Jesus Christ and his followers in the time of Pontius Pilate.

Josephus mentions Jesus again when he refers to the arrest of James:

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

...but this younger Ananus, who, as we have told you already, took the high priesthood, was a bold man in his temper, and very insolent; he was also of the sect of the Sadducees, who are very rigid in judging offenders, above all the rest of the Jews, as we have already observed; when, therefore, Ananus was of this disposition, he thought he had now a proper opportunity [to exercise his authority]. Festus was now dead, and Albinus was but upon the road; so he assembled the Sanhedrin of judges, and brought before them the brother of **Jesus, who was called Christ**, whose name was James, and some others, [or, some of his companions]; and when he had formed an accusation against them as breakers of the law, he delivered them to be stoned. (Source: *Antiquities* 20.9.1.)

Mara Bar-Serapion

F. F. Bruce, in *The Documents of the New Testament* (Intervarsity Press, 1972), describes the letter of Mara Bar-Serapion as a manuscript preserved in the British Museum and written some time after AD 73. The letter mentions the Jews' "wise King" whom they had executed and describes how the Jewish nation was ruined and driven from their land in consequence. While not explicitly naming Jesus, this early document seems to allude to no other.

Thallus

The history of the Samaritan-born Thallus, written in AD 52, has not survived except in fragments alluded to by other writers. Julius Africanus, writing around AD 221, mentions how Thallus tried to explain away the darkness that occurred at Christ's death. (Source: McDowell (2), p. 200, 201.)

Other Early Writers

Lucian of Samosata

Lucian, a second-century satirist, referred scornfully to Christ as:

...the man who was crucified in Palestine because He introduced this new cult into the world ... Furthermore, their first lawgiver persuaded them that they were all brothers one of another after they have transgressed once for all by denying the Greek gods and by worshipping that crucified sophist Himself and living under His laws. (Source: *The Passing Peregrinus*, quoted in McDowell (2), p. 198.)

Pliny

Pliny the Younger governed Bithynia in Asia Minor, one of the regions to which Peter addressed his first epistle. Pliny wrote to emperor Trajan in AD 112 to ask how he should deal with the Christians. He wrote that he was bring Christians to trial, but:

They affirmed, however, that the whole of their guilt, or their error, was that they were in the habit of meeting on a certain fixed day before it was light, when they sang in alternate verse a hymn to **Christ** as to a god, and bound themselves to a solemn oath, not to any wicked deeds, but never to commit any fraud, theft, adultery, never to falsify their word, not to deny a trust when they should be called upon to deliver it up. (Source: *Pliny Epistles* 10.96, quoted by McDowell (2), p. 200.)

Suetonius

Roman historian and court official under Hadrian, Suetonius (AD 69-140) wrote around AD 120: "As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of **Chrestus**, he expelled them from Rome." (Source: *Life of Claudius*, quoted in McDowell (2), p. 200.)

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Tacitus

Cornelius Tacitus governed Asia in AD 112. In his history, he described Nero's attempt to blame the Christians for the burning of Rome:

...But not all the relief that could come from man, not all the bounties that the prince could bestow, nor all the atonements which could be presented to the gods availed to relieve Nero from the infamy of being believed to have ordered the conflagration. Hence, to suppress the rumor, he falsely charged with the guilt and punished with the most exquisite tortures the persons commonly called **Christians**, who were hated for their enormities.

Christus, the founder of that name, was put to death as a criminal by Pontius Pilate, procurator of Judea, in the reign of Tiberius; but the pernicious superstition, repressed for a time, broke out again, not only through Judea, where the mischief originated, but through the city of Rome also, whither all things horrible and disgraceful flow from all quarters as to a common receptacle and where they are encouraged. Accordingly first those were seized who confessed they were Christians; next on their information a vast multitude were convicted, not so much on the charge of burning the city as of hating the human race. And in their deaths they were also made the subjects of sport, for they were covered with the hides of wild beasts, and worried to death by dogs, or nailed to crosses, or set fire to, and when day declined, burned to serve for nocturnal lights. Nero offered his own gardens for that spectacle, and exhibited a Circensien game, indiscriminately mingling with the common people in the habit of a charioteer, or else standing in his chariot. Whence a feeling of compassion arose toward the sufferers, though guilty and deserving to be made examples of by capital punishment, because they seemed not to be cut off for the public good, but victims to the ferocity of one man. (Source: Cornelius Tacitus *Annales* 15.44.)

Rabbinical Sources

While it is difficult to date the origins of rabbinical sayings, the ancient references to Jesus by his enemies are strong corroboration of His real existence:

Amoa "Ulla"

And do you suppose that for (Yeshu of Nazareth) there was any right of appeal? He was a beguiler, and the Merciful One hath said: "Thou shalt not spare neither shalt thou conceal him." It is otherwise with Yeshu, for he was near the civil authority. (Source: McDowell (2), p. 202.)

Baraita

He answered, Akiba, you have reminded me! Once I was walking along the upper market (*Tosefta* reads "street") of Sepphoris and found one [of the disciples of Jesus of Nazareth] and Jacob of Kefar Sekanya (*Tosefta* reads "Sakkanin") was his name. He said to me, It is written in your Law, "Thou shalt not bring the hire of a harlot, etc." What was to be done with it—a latrine for the high Priest? But I answered nothing. He said to me, so [Jesus of Nazareth] taught me (*Tosefta* reads, "Yeshu ben Pantere"): "For of the hire of a harlot hath she gathered them, and unto the hire of a harlot shall they return"; from the place of filth they come, and unto the place of filth they shall go. And the saying pleased me, and because of this I was arrested for *Minuth*. And I transgressed against what is written in the Law; "Keep thy way far from her"—that is *Minuth*; "and come not nigh the door of her house"—that is civil government. (Source: Klausner, Joseph. *Jesus of Nazareth* (Menorah Publishing, New York, 1925), quoted by McDowell (2), p. 203.)

Talmud

The following passage was incorporated into the Talmud during its earliest period of compilation, 70 to 200 AD, the so-called Tannaitic period:

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

On the eve of Passover they hanged Yeshu (of Nazareth) and the herald went before him for forty days saying (Yeshu of Nazareth) is going forth to be stoned in that he hath practiced sorcery and beguiled and led astray Israel. Let everyone knowing aught in His defense come and plead for Him. But they found in Him naught in His defense and hanged Him on the eve of Passover. (Sources: *Babylonian Talmud, Sanhedrin 43a*, quoted in McDowell (2), p. 202, discussed by Habermas, pp. 97, 98. Also, compare the Mishnah, *Sanhedrin 6.1.*)

Jewish-Christian Sources

The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha are a collection of Jewish and Jewish-Christian religious literature. There is no definitive list of the Pseudepigrapha, but the collection usually includes: the *Life of Adam and Eve (the Apocalypse of Moses)*; the *Letter of Aristeas*; *2 Baruch* (Syriac); the *Apocalypse of Elijah*; *3 and 4 Maccabees*; the *Testament (Assumption) of Moses*; and the *Testament of the Twelve Patriarchs*; among others. According to Charlesworth, “the oldest Jewish documents in the Pseudepigrapha date from the 3rd century BC” while others date to between AD 70 and 200, with the latest ones dating “sometime after the 4th or 5th centuries [AD].” Copies of the pseudepigraphal documents Jubilees, 1 Enoch and the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls, fixing the date of at least the original versions of these writings to before AD 70. “The Christian documents, or sections of them, in the Pseudepigrapha usually date from approximately [AD] 100 to about 400...”

One should not stumble over the Pseudepigrapha’s suspicious-sounding name. *Pseudepigrapha* is a Greek word meaning “false title” or “false superscription.” The word is applied to this body of literature because many of the individual works bear spurious titles that claim, or seem to claim, authority from the past or from particular individuals of the past. It is important to note, however, that the “false” titles did not necessarily originate from the authors of these works. Furthermore, whoever gave these works their present titles probably did not intend to deceive, but only to underscore the stylistic or thematic connection to earlier works or personages. Therefore, the pseudonyms attached to the pseudepigraphal documents need not cast doubt on the integrity of their content. In fact, Charlesworth claims that “many early Jews and many of the earliest Christians considered these documents infallible and full of divine revelation.”

Certainly the Pseudepigrapha are invaluable for “understanding and reconstructing the lives of Jews in Palestine and the Diaspora, especially before the destruction of [Jerusalem in AD] 70.” However, What seems to have been overlooked by evangelical apologists — probably because of our bias against apocryphal writings — is how the Pseudepigrapha also provide rich insight into the beliefs of earliest Christianity and a strong testimony to the early date of those beliefs.

The *Odes of Solomon*, for example, were probably composed around AD 100, in or near Edessa or Antioch-on-the-Orontes. They are 42 odes, and likely dedicated to Solomon rather than attributed to him by their Jewish-Christian author. Ode 3 speaks eloquently of becoming a son, i.e., being adopted, “because I love him that is the Son.” Ode 7 describes the Lord as having “diminished his grandeur” to become “like me ... in form,” i.e., the incarnation. In this same Ode the author says:

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

And I trembled not when I saw him,
because he was gracious to me.
Like my nature he became, that I might understand him.
And like my form, that I might not turn away from him.

Is this only poetic, or is the author claiming to have actually seen the Lord? Ode 08.05 speaks of the hope of resurrection based on the fact that our “Righteousness,” i.e., Jesus “has been raised.” Ode 17.14-17 echoes Paul’s teaching in Ephesians regarding the Messiah as “head” of the body of which we are “members.” In metaphors very foreign to Westerners, Ode 19 describes the Trinity as causing the virgin to conceive and bear the Son. Ode 24 describes the dove fluttering over the head of Messiah. In Ode 28 the Messiah describes his persecutors in phrases reminiscent of Psalm 22, but affirms his immortality, his unique birth, and his pre-existence.

If such beliefs were affirmed in Christian poetry by AD 100, it implies a historical origin for those beliefs well before that time. This is exactly what one would expect if the events of the NT occurred when they claim to have occurred, namely, in the first part of the first century AD. The NT Gospels and epistles did not pop out of thin air at the end of the first or beginning of the second centuries, as though invented by a committee of hoaxers; rather, they were well enough established by the last decades of the first century to have bred many derivative works!

While these early, derivative Christian works do not have the same corroborative value as *secular* testimony to the existence and actions of Jesus, they nevertheless support the historical setting, and particularly the chronological period, for the life of Christ presented in the canonical gospels. The same can be said for the New Testament Apocrypha and some of the related or included Gnostic literature of the Nag Hammadi manuscripts. The *Gospel of Thomas*, for example, a Gnostic sayings “gospel” found in the Nag Hammadi library, dates possibly to the early second century and is believed by scholars to contain an agraphon or two (an isolated saying of Jesus that was not preserved in the canonical gospels; see John 20.30 and 21.25). Whether or not that is true, The *Gospel of Thomas* records some of the canonical sayings of Jesus (or very close variants of them) that again lend credence to *the first-century origin* of the teachings of Jesus preserved in our NT.

Corroboration Of The New Testament Setting

The New Testament writers paint the setting for the life of Jesus by richly describing both the geographical and the political landscape of His time. The details thus provided help historians tremendously, not only to confirm the historicity of the gospels, but also to pinpoint the chronology of Christ’s earthly ministry and to dramatize it with archaeological findings.

Caiaphas

Caiaphas was the high priest who interrogated Jesus and then sent him to Pontius Pilate for condemnation (Matthew 26.57-66). Josephus mentions “Joseph, who was called Caiaphas” twice (*Antiquities* 18.2.35; 18.4.95), indicating that he was appointed

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

to the high priesthood by Valerius Gratus (the Roman procurator before Pilate) in AD 18, and then deposed in AD 37.

While the name *Caiaphas* appears both in the New Testament and in Josephus, along with a handful of rabbinical references, it had not been attested archaeologically until recently. Workers building a water park outside Jerusalem in November 1990 accidentally uncovered an ancient burial cave that turned out to belong to the Caiaphas family. Archaeologists discovered 12 ossuaries (limestone bone boxes) in the cave, one of which contained a coin minted by Herod Agrippa (AD



Ossuaries similar to this one were found in the Caiaphas family tomb. Photo by Roderick Graciano, Israel Museum, Jerusalem, October 14, 2008.

37-44). Two other ossuaries bear the name Caiaphas. The most elaborately decorated of the two bears two inscriptions reading: Joseph son of Qafa (or Qayafa, the Aramaic form of Caiaphas). While this evidence is inexplicit, as are most archaeological clues, the lavish decoration of this box strikes archaeologists as evidence that it could indeed have been used for the remains of an important person like a high priest. The bones inside may be the remains of the very man who pressed for Christ's condemnation. Whether or not this is so, the ossuary inscriptions and dating clues satisfy archaeologists that this burial cave and its contents were indeed owned by the family of the biblical Caiaphas. (Source: BAR 9209.)

The Herodian Dynasty

Keeping track of all the Herods in the New Testament can be confusing. The Abingdon Bible Dictionary summarizes the biblical roles of the men from this dynasty:

Readers of the NT may expect to meet no fewer than five people belonging to the generic family name of Herod, a powerful dynasty in Palestinian politics and religion from the middle of the first century B.C. to the end of the first century A.D.

Herod the Great is surnamed "king of the Jews" from 40 B.C. to A.D. 4, though he was only half Jewish. During the Roman occupation of Judea he played a significant role, aided the Romans, and was awarded an honorary title, "king." Never popular, he became obsessed with fear at losing his position and conducted a reign of terror against even his family, whom he regarded as rivals. He contributed much, however, to consolidating Israel through friendship with the Romans and magnificent building programs and expansion of his territory. He is the Herod referred to in Matthew 1 and 2, where the slaughter of the Bethlehem babies is at least "in character" with his morbid fears.

At his death in 4 B.C. the kingdom was divided. One son, [Herod] **Archelaus, known as the ethnarch** (Matt. 2:22), but not king, controlled Judea and Samaria (4 B.C. - A.D. 6). His repression of his people led to a revolt that was only averted by his being deposed and exiled, leaving Judea under direct Roman rule.

Herod the tetrarch (Luke 3:1, 19) is known as Antipas. Another son of Herod the Great, he was given Galilee as his domain in 4 B.C. This is the ruler whose role is seen in the imprisonment and death of John the Baptist (Matt. 14:1-12 and pars.), and in his encounter with Jesus, according to Luke 23:7-12. His character

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

may be judged from the description “that fox” (Luke 13:32); yet he was the most capable of all Herod’s sons, and built several important cities, for example, Tiberias on Lake Galilee. In A.D. 39 he was denounced to the emperor and banished from his realm.

Herod “the king” (Acts 12:1) carries the subtitle Agrippa; he was a grandson of Herod the Great. Already having been appointed the lands of northeast Palestine, he was awarded Antipas’ kingdom in A.D. 39, when the latter was exiled. To these Judea and Samaria were added in A.D. 41. Thus he ruled over a wide realm. Acts 12:19-23 dramatically records his horrible death, an account to be supplemented by Josephus. This was in A.D. 44.

His only son, also known as [Herod] **Agrippa**, was born in A.D. 27 and succeeded to his father’s position in later life, receiving more territorial power at the bequest of Nero in A.D. 56. He was king in Israel during the tempestuous years of A.D. 66 onward, when the Great Jewish rebellion against Rome occurred. He tried to prevent this, and was later rewarded by the Romans, surviving until A.D. 100. His meeting and dialogue with Paul is in Acts 25:13 - 26:32. (Source: *Abingdon Bible Dictionary*.)

Herod the Great

Josephus is the primary non-biblical source for information about the Herods. However, with regard to **Herod the Great** (73 BC to 4 BC) we can say that few personalities of antiquity have left more archaeological footsteps behind themselves than he. His architectural works include the Jerusalem temple (of which only the retaining wall of the esplanade remains), a Jerusalem palace, theater and amphitheater along with three towers (Phasael, Hippicus, and Mariamne) and the Antonia fortress. He also built Masada on the west of the Dead Sea and Machaerus on the east, as well as a palace at Jericho and the Herodium southeast of Bethlehem. He built a shrine above the Patriarchal Cave of Machpelah in Hebron, along with monuments in Damascus, Antioch and Byblos. Herod also built Caesarea, its artificial harbor and impressive aqueduct.

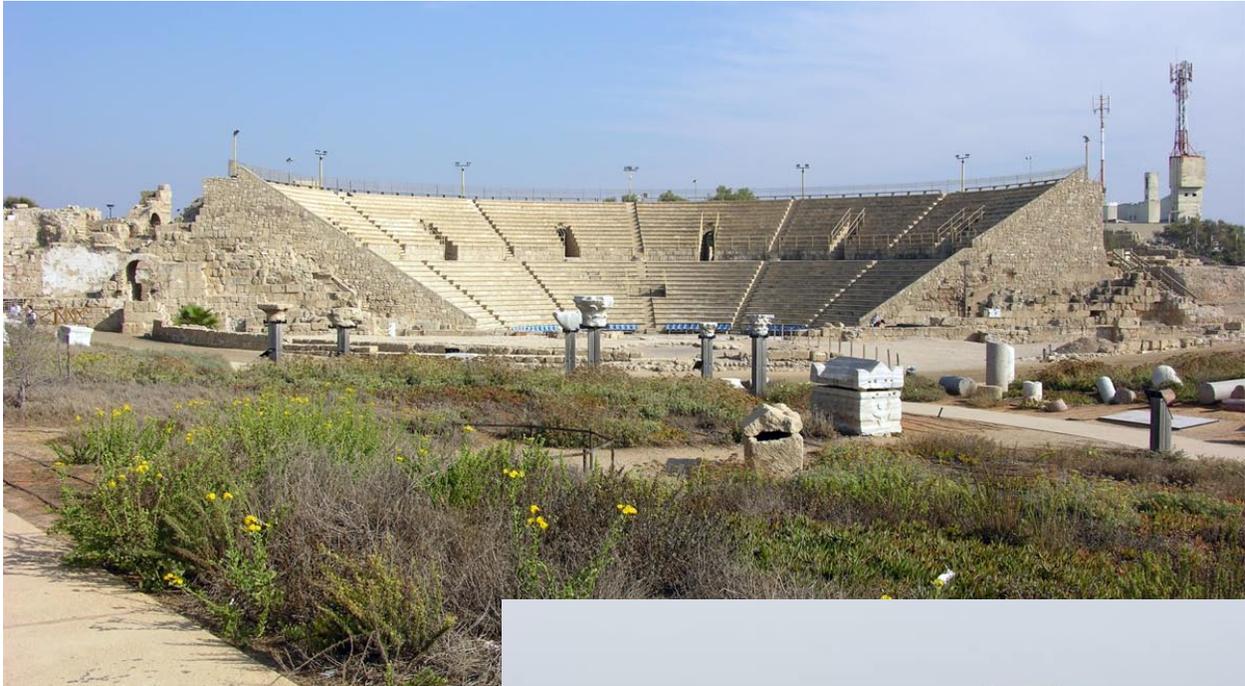
As to Herod’s well-known political career and final madness (during which the babies of Bethlehem were no doubt slain), Josephus documents it in detail in book 1 of his *Wars of the Jews*. **By dating the birth of Jesus to the days of Herod, Matthew pegs the life of Christ to the time of one of the most thoroughly attested personalities of history and archaeology.**



Artistic reconstruction of the the gorgeous harbor of Caesarea.

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST



Scenes of Caesarea, from above clockwise: Herod's partially restored theater; the modern restaurant on the south jetty of the once enclosed harbor (The underwater outline of the enclosed harbor is visible on Google Earth just west from the city at 32° 30.227'N, 34° 53.276'E.); Roderick and daughter Rachel walking the top of Herod's aqueduct.



© 1997-2008. www.timothyministries.info

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Herod “That Fox”

Herod Antipas, whom Jesus referred to as “that fox” (Luke 13.31,32) was the one who beheaded John the Baptist after his rash promise to Salome, the sensuous daughter of Herodias. This same Herod also came face to face with Jesus when Pilate sent Christ to him for judgment (Luke 23.7-12).

Another well attested personality from secular history, Herod Antipas may have had a greater impact of Christ’s early life than the gospels explicitly tell us. While Antipas was arguing for his royal inheritance in Rome in 4-3 BC, a Jewish rebellion arose in Galilee, centered in the city of Sepphoris. The Roman legate of Syria, Quintilius Varus, ordered the rebellion crushed, and that order resulted in the burning of Sepphoris and the selling of its inhabitants into slavery. When Antipas arrived in Galilee shortly thereafter to assume authority over the region, he chose the smoldering ruins of Sepphoris as the location for his new capital. He launched a vast construction project on the site that lasted throughout the lifetime of Jesus. The important thing for us to realize is that Sepphoris is only an hour’s walk from Nazareth, the city from where Herod would have hired his “carpenters.”

Pontius Pilate

We know Pontius Pilate from Tacitus, Josephus, and Philo as well as from the four Gospels and other NT books (Acts 3:13; 4:27; 13:28; I Timothy 6:13). The Latin name *Pilatus* means “pikeman” or “one armed with a *pilum*,” i.e. javelin.

He became the fifth prefect (probably not “procurator,” the term prevailing from the time of Claudius) of Judea in A.D. 26. He aggravated the Jews early on by trying to introduce Roman military standards with Caesar’s icon into the Antonia overlooking the temple, then again later by seeking to dedicate some golden shields in his Jerusalem residence (probably Herod’s palace). On both occasions he was forced to retract his actions. When he used Temple money to finance an aqueduct to bring water to Jerusalem, bloodshed ensued. Luke 13:1 alludes to the death of some Galileans that occurred under Pilate’s authority.

In A.D. 29 Pilate “minted bronze quadrans pieces embossed with the *simpulum*, a sacred ladle used for Roman sacrifices.” In the 17th year of Tiberius, A.D. 30-31, he issued a coin showing a “*lituus*, the curving, spiral-headed staff symbolizing the priestly-prophetic office of the Roman augur.” (Source: Maier, pp. 342,343)

Pilate built a basilica in Caesarea, naming it the Tiberium, and dedicating it with an inscription which was discovered in 1961 (photo at right).



SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

After the loss of his patron Sejanus in October A.D. 31, Pilate's political position weakened. He was finally ordered to Rome by the Roman legate of Syria, Vitellius, in 36 to answer for his bloody suppression of a Samaritan uprising. (Source: Brownrigg, p. 366 ff)

By placing the death and resurrection of Jesus during the governorship of Pilate, the gospel writers again peg the time of Christ to an unquestionably historical figure and to a well-known chronology. Early Christian writers made use of this fact and urged their critics to verify the events of the crucifixion by checking the reports of Pilate filed in the imperial archives of Rome (cf. Justin Martyr, *First Apology*, 35.7-9).

Quirinius

Skeptics have doubted Luke's description of the census at the time of Christ's birth (Luke 2.1-5), questioning whether Quirinius was governor of Syria at the time, and even whether such a census took place. However, as Gary Habermas reports:

It has been established that the taking of a census was quite common at about the time of Christ. An ancient Latin inscription called the *Titulus Venetus* indicates that a census took place in Syria and Judea about 5-6 AD and that this was typical of those held throughout the Roman empire from the time of Augustus (23 BC - 14 AD) until at least the third century AD. Indications are that this census took place every fourteen years. ... Concerning persons returning to their home city for the taxation-census, an Egyptian papyrus dating from 104 AD reports just such a practice. This rule was enforced, as well.

The Egyptian papyrus apparently indicates that the presence of the woman was also required to ascertain the number in each family. The papyrus reads in part:

Because of the approaching census it is necessary that all those residing for any cause away from their homes should at once prepare to return to their own governments in order that they may complete the family registration for the enrollment and that the tilled lands may retain those belonging to them.

(Sources: McDowell (2), p. 109; Brownrigg, p. 375.)

As to when Quirinius was governor of Syria, Josephus describes him as having been appointed to that post by Augustus, well after the birth of Christ in AD 6 (*Antiquities* 18.1.1). However, Habermas writes that "Archaeologist Sir William Ramsay discovered several inscriptions which indicated that Quirinius was governor of Syria on two occasions, the first time several years previous to this date. Within the cycle of taxation-censuses mentioned above, an earlier taxation would be dated from 10-5 BC." McDowell narrows the time of Luke's census to between 9 and 8 BC and adds:

...we find evidence that Quirinius was governor of Syria around 7 BC. This assumption is based on an inscription found in Antioch ascribing to Quirinius this post. As a result of this finding, it is now supposed that he was governor twice—once in 7 BC and the other time in 6 AD (the date ascribed by Josephus).

(Sources: Habermas, pp. 152, 153; McDowell (2), p. 109.)

The Mulckmukum Fragment

Imagine a future archaeologist finding a scrap of manuscript in a Pacific Northwest excavation that reads:

...years ago when trees still flew along the streets of the underground city of Mulckmukum, an intrepid woman named Unfug slew a man. When the other men of the place wished to punish her, she spoke powerful words that made them abandon their plans...

Would the archaeologist take this as an historical excerpt or as a fragment from a fantasy novel of the type so popular in the 20th century? Perhaps the latter, since he had never heard of a place named Mulckmukum and knew that trees don't fly. But as the excavation continued the archaeologist might find a well-preserved page from a book by William Speidel, explaining that Mulckmukum was an Indian name for the location where the important metropolis of Seattle was founded. At that point the archaeologist may decide that his first manuscript fragment was from a legend about Seattle's "prehistory" that contained a kernel of historical truth. A generation could go by before another archaeological excavation uncovered a buried government building with court records mentioning the name "Ursula Unfug." The scholarly world would then publish articles excitedly proclaiming the possible historicity of the mythical woman from the "Mulckmukum fragment" whose name had never been attested by archaeology until now. The articles would hasten to disclaim any belief in real "underground cities" or "flying trees" of course, but further excavations could reveal that during the 20th century an earlier city of Seattle, partially destroyed by fire, continued to exist largely intact *under* the later development of the metropolis! The news that an "underground city" had actually existed at Mulckmukum would electrify the archaeological world! Granted that by the time the newer city was built over the older one its Indian name had largely been forgotten. Nevertheless, the facts though telescoped together were essentially confirmed by archaeology. Writers of politically correct children's books would begin reconstructing the story of the "Mighty Ursula Unfug of Mulckmukum," weaving delightful tales of a brave mother defending her home and children against the marauding gang members and corrupt city governments of antiquity. Still, everyone would acknowledge that the Mulckmukum Fragment recorded a mixture of history and myth, because "flying trees" are just unscientific. Another generation could go by before a radical archaeologist published a monograph suggesting that at one time sawing down owl habitats was *actually legal* and while trees certainly don't fly, there is some evidence at the lower excavation levels of Mulckmukum/Seattle that trimmed logs may have at one time skidded very quickly down certain streets into the bay. "Is it possible," the monograph would ask, "that the author of the Mulckmukum fragment was speaking metaphorically, and simply meant that the trees were moving very quickly along certain streets before the old city was actually underground?" Suddenly, public opinion would turn, and if anyone spoke of the Mulckmukum "myth" they would be considered poorly educated and behind the times. No intelligent person would admit to doubting the historicity of that legendary woman, Ms. Unfug who single-handedly defended the habitat of the cross-eyed, laminate-eating, spotted fire-ant by killing a chainsaw-wielding logger with nothing but her bare hands and her knowledge of eastern martial arts. The historical fragment, once believed to be myth, was now confirmed as historical and would become part of the cultural literacy of the times. Before the fragment became entirely overlaid with speculative interpretation, however, another curious manuscript could be discovered by the now famous historian of antiquity, William Speidel, giving the complete story of Ursula Juanita Unfug, the prostitute who shot one of her clients in cold blood, but escaped prosecution by convincing the all-male jury that she had endured beatings and all manner of abuse but had drawn the line when her "lover" had tried to force her to use her charms to blackmail the leading men of the city, namely men like the very ones presently sitting on the jury. The jury had to agree that the dead man was indeed "vile" and let Miss Unfug go free. The scholarly world would now forget the Mulckmukum Fragment and turn its attention to William Speidel's combination tour-guide/history-book, *You Still Can't Eat Mt. Rainier*.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Part 2: The Places

We will continue our investigation with an examination of the historical locations that Jesus of Nazareth visited. But first, let's read the preceding page and pretend...

The point? Archaeology is indeed an *interpretive* science and ancient writings like the Bible, while often prematurely branded as myth and completely misunderstood, can just as often be proven historical and correctly interpreted once sufficient data becomes available. In the case of Jesus of Nazareth, demonstrating the real existence of the places mentioned in the gospels, and showing that the gospel descriptions of those places was accurate, supports the historicity of the gospel narratives, and thereby the historicity of the life and work of Jesus. The more we can archaeologically or historically confirm details from the gospels, the more difficult it becomes for skeptics to reject the overall message of the narratives.

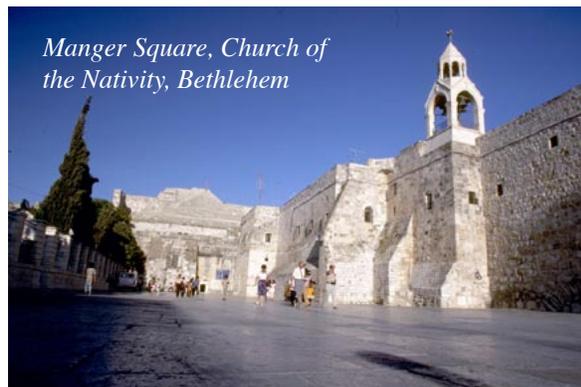
Bethlehem

The town of Bethlehem (*House of Bread*), lying about 6 miles south of Jerusalem in the Judean mountains, has a long history stretching back at least to the death of Rachel (Genesis 35:19). Ruth found her husband here. David was born here as was his descendant, Jesus (Luke 0204-07). The place of Christ's birth, possibly near the Inn of Chimham (cf. Jer. 41.17), was apparently a cave (grotto) where feed was stored in the rear of a hillside house. Cornfeld, apparently alluding to



The silver star marking the spot of Christ's birth in the grotto of the Church of the Nativity.

the grove of Tammuz described by Jerome (*Letter 58 to Paulinus*), reports that Hadrian (AD 117-38) "profaned the site by planting a wood over the grotto, but this helped to maintain the tradition of the birthplace of Jesus." The place seems to have been well



Manger Square, Church of the Nativity, Bethlehem

known by the local inhabitants at least as early as Justin Martyr (died AD 165) (see Justin's *Dialogue With Trypho* 78). Origen (AD 185-252) wrote in *Against Celsus*, ch. 51, that even the enemies of Christianity would point out the cave where "Jesus who is worshipped and revered by the Christians" was born. The great Church of the Nativity was built over the spot under Constantine, and then rebuilt under Justinian (AD 529) and remains standing today.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Roderick Graciano in Nazareth, February, 1978.



Nazareth

History

Nazareth exists to this day as an important tourist city in Israel, lying nestled in the hills of lower Galilee, overlooking the plain of Esdraelon. However, Ian Wilson, in his *Jesus: The Evidence*, reports that some think that “Nazareth may not even have existed in the first century AD,” i.e. in the time of Jesus. This skeptical theory is based on the absence of the name *Nazareth* in Josephus’ list of Galilean towns and the lack of references to Nazareth in other first-century documents and inscriptions. The earliest known non-canonical reference to Nazareth appears on a fragment from a 3rd to 4th century marble tablet discovered in

Caesarea in 1962, and which probably listed places where priestly families had settled. Nevertheless, excavations in the vicinity of the modern Church of the Annunciation in Nazareth have demonstrated beyond doubt that an agricultural village did exist at the site of present day Nazareth in the time of Jesus. In fact, Hoade reports that the village was inhabited during Iron Age II, in other words since before the Babylonian Captivity! Furthermore, the first Christian building erected in Nazareth was a Judaeo-Christian Church-Synagogue, built when Christianity in the town was still Jewish, i.e. before AD 80-135. (Sources: Finegan; Hoade, p. 685; Wilson (2), pp. 67, 68.)

Dishonoring Its Own Prophet

Nazareth is an important site in biblical archaeology of course, because it is the site of the early life of Jesus, and His later announcement of His Messiahship according to Isaiah 61.01 (Luke 04.21), and His rejection by the inhabitants. Luke tells us that the one time neighbors of Jesus tried to throw him over a cliff. While modern Nazareth still rests upon an elevation, there are no cliffs near the ancient site today. Hoade reports, however, that in antiquity the village was “situated on a hill bounded to the E and W by valleys, which although 10-15 m. deep, are today in great part filled in.” It would have been to one of these brows of the hill of Nazareth, where the valley is now filled in, that the inhabitants drove Jesus in hopes of throwing him over (Luke 04. 28-30). (Source: Hoade, p. 685.)

The natural features of Nazareth are now largely overshadowed by the man-made structures. Where once existed the southern end of the ancient village now stands the majestic Latin Church of the Annunciation. The visitor to this building is greeted at the entrance by a stunning facade of stained glass windows and awed within the upper sanctuary by a dozen or so mosaics of the Madonna and Child, each donated

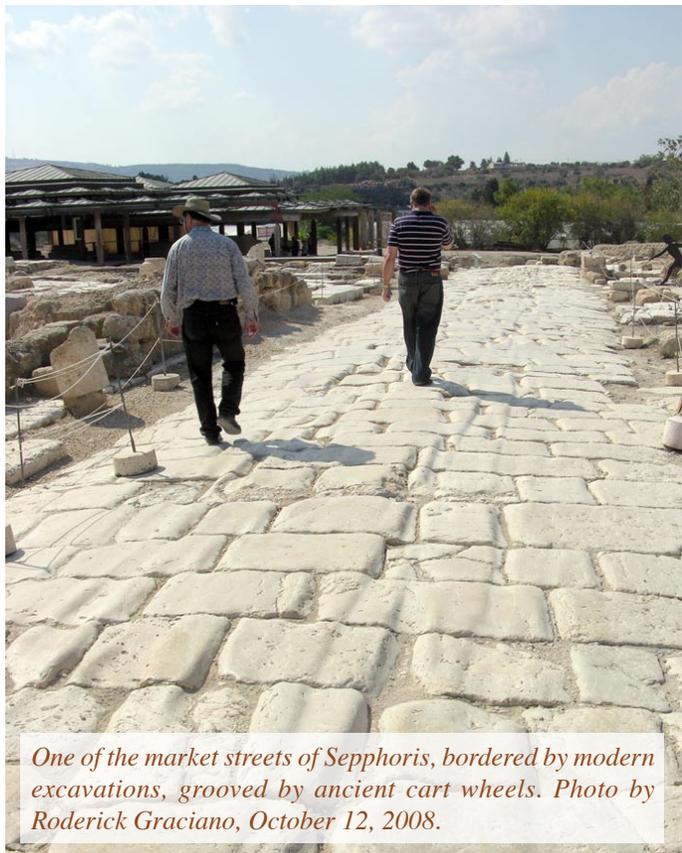
CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

by a different country and made with materials reflecting the culture of origin. I was particularly struck by the Japanese mosaic with its Asian Madonna, the wings of whose kimono flare out like the beam of the cross. The mosaic is made with tesserae so fine that the kimonos appear to be embroidered with pearls. This gorgeous basilica is built over and incorporates the ruins of (1) the supposed grotto where the angel announced to Mary that she would give birth to the Savior; (2) Mary's house which the deacon Conon of Jerusalem converted to a Byzantine church around AD 427; (3) a Judaeo-Christian Church-Synagogue, the first building erected near the grotto; and (4) a Crusader basilica erected by Tancred. According to Hoade, "Remains of the Judaeo-Christian period include seven steps, inscriptions and other symbols..." One inscription, the oldest of its kind and dated before the council of Ephesus (AD 431), reads *XE MAPIA*, "Hail Mary." Another reads, "Christ, Son of God." (Source: Hoade, pp. 690-697.)

Artisans for Sepphoris

The lack of early references to Nazareth no doubt have to do with its relative unimportance in the first century, as compared to Sepphoris, the Galilean capital that was within view of Nazareth and only an hour's walk away. As indicated above, shortly after a rebellion in Galilee was crushed, Herod Antipas arrived in Galilee to assume authority over the region and chose the smoldering ruins of Sepphoris as the location for his new capital. Josephus says in *Ant.* 18.02.27, that "Herod also built a wall about Sepphoris (which is the security of all Galilee), and made it the metropolis of the country." Elsewhere, Josephus speaks of Sepphoris as "the strongest city of Galilee," (*Wars* 2.18.511), one of "the greatest cities of Galilee" (*Life* 346), and mentions the "strength of their walls" (*Life* 373). Since Sepphoris was Herod's capital, the strongest and greatest metropolis in the region, its no surprise that Josephus would anonymously lump a small village of farmers and artisans like Nazareth among the "many villages [that Sepphoris had] about it" (*Life* 346).

To Josephus, writing a political history of Galilee, Sepphoris was vastly more important than Nazareth. For us however, Sepphoris is important precisely because of its proximity to Nazareth, the home of Joseph, Mary and Jesus. We know that Herod Antipas launched a vast construction project in Sepphoris that lasted throughout the lifetime of



One of the market streets of Sepphoris, bordered by modern excavations, grooved by ancient cart wheels. Photo by Roderick Graciano, October 12, 2008.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Jesus. There is a real possibility that it was the construction in the Galilean capital that kept Jesus employed as a “carpenter” (Mark 06.03) throughout his early life, and archaeology now tells us that “the construction of an influential Roman capital city near Jesus’ home in Nazareth redefines the carpenter’s occupation in central Galilee.”

The Greek word *tekton*, translated “carpenter” in Mark 6:3, has the root meaning of “artisan,” that is, a skilled worker who works on some hard material such as wood or stone or even horn or ivory. A metal smith also might be described as a *tekton*. The preferred translation of *tekton* in Mark 6:3 is “carpenter.” In Jesus’ day construction workers were not as highly specialized as in today’s work force. For example, the tasks performed by carpenters and masons could easily overlap. When a *tekton*, or artisan, from a village near Sepphoris, visited the construction site, he would be introduced to another world—an urban world. (Source: Batey.)

In other words, while we have traditionally pictured Jesus as building tables and chairs out of wood in a tiny shop, or at the most, helping a farmer mount the wooden beams for the roof of his small barn, the excavation of Sepphoris is causing us to realize that Jesus was more likely involved in the raising of a spectacular theater and beautiful basilicas constructed out of finely dressed limestone and marble!

Capernaum

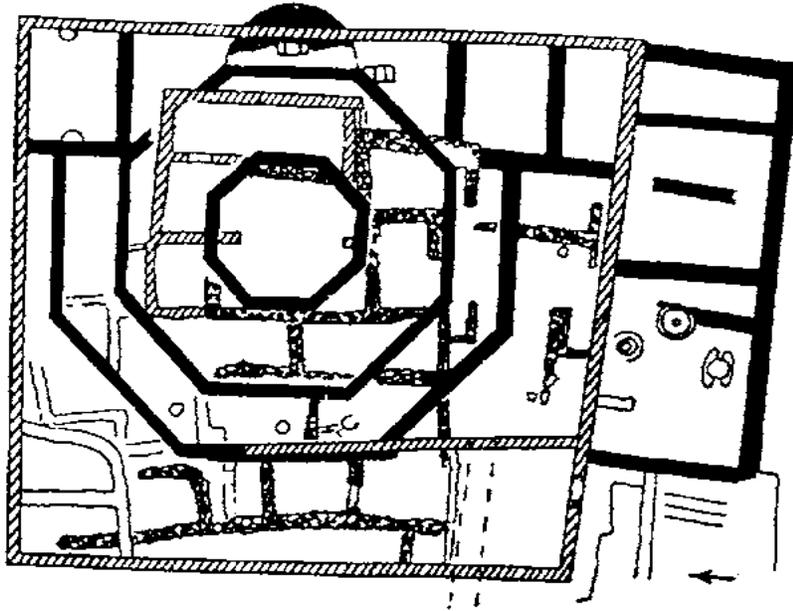
Capernaum was an important town in the life of Jesus because it was where he made His home after the people of Nazareth rejected Him (Matthew 04:13). According to the gospels, Capernaum was where Jesus did many mighty works, including the healing of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 08.05-13), the healing of a demonized man (Mark 01.21-28), the healing of Peter’s mother-in-law (Mark 01.29-34), and the healing and forgiveness of the paralytic (Mark 02.01-12). Capernaum is where Jesus found and called Matthew Levi from his tax booth (Mark 02.14). It is also where Jesus taught about greatness in the kingdom of heaven (Mark 09.33-37), and where He claimed to be the “Bread of Life” (John 06.24-71: according to Hoade, the Talmud says that Capernaum was famous for the quality of its wheat). Capernaum was also the setting for the incident of the two-drachma tax (Matthew 17.24-27).

Capernaum, also known as Capharnaum or Kafer Nahum, lies on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. Josephus, in *Wars* 3.10.519, described the site of Capernaum as a place that “not only nourishes different sorts of autumnal fruit beyond men’s expectation, but preserves them a great while; it supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually during ten months of the year, and the rest of the fruit as they become ripe together, through the whole year; for besides the good temperature of the air, it is also watered from a most fertile fountain.” Josephus was well acquainted with the place having once been carried into Capernaum to recuperate after a fall from his horse (*Life* 403).

Today, Capernaum is an important tourist stop in modern Galilee, because of its fascinating ruins, including the ancient synagogue and the house of Simon Peter which stood within a stone’s throw from it. The spectacular synagogue ruins that have been excavated and partially restored date from the 4th century. However, trenches cut in the central nave of the 4th-century prayer hall have revealed a very large basalt pavement dating to the 1st century AD, and believed to be the remains of the earlier

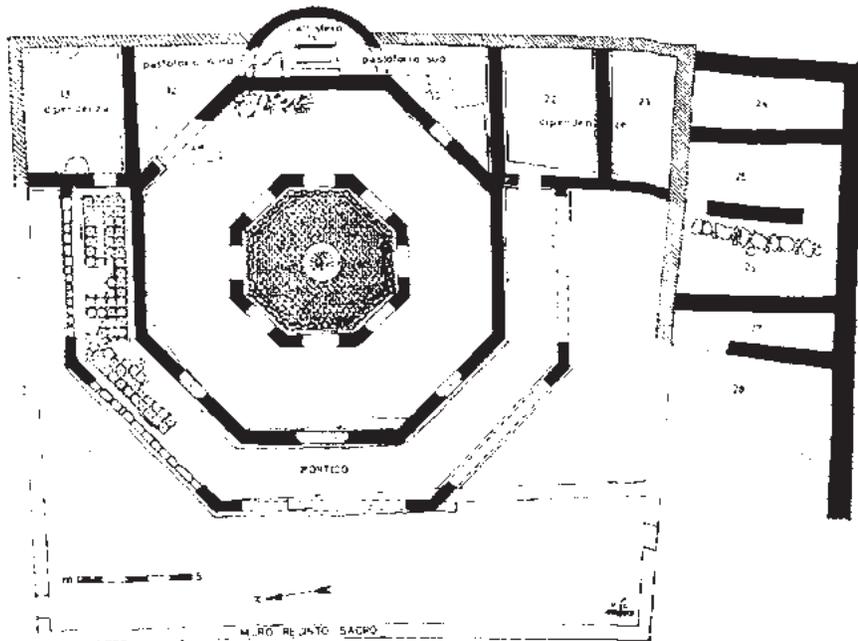
SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST



The ruins of St. Peter's house with overlaid church ruins (Above)

The plan of the 5th century church built over Peter's house (Below)



CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

synagogue built by the centurion and visited by Jesus (Luke 07.02-05). The remains of Peter's house and of church structures built over it, mark a site that "was venerated in a special way from the 1st century onwards by the local Judaeo-Christian community, who transformed this area into a place of [worship], while they continued to live in the nearby rooms." The identity of the site has been established by the shape of the ruined walls, remains of mosaics and by Christian symbols and graffiti. (Sources: Loffreda (1); Loffreda (2); Hoade.)

Interestingly enough, rabbinical writings report that within a century after Christ's death, Capernaum had become a "veritable Jewish Sodom." The Midrash *Koheleth* says that the people of *Kefar Nahum* were sinners, but twice calls these sinners "heretics" who were involved in sorcery. This gives us the clue that the real problem for the rabbis was that the Jews of Capernaum were Christians!

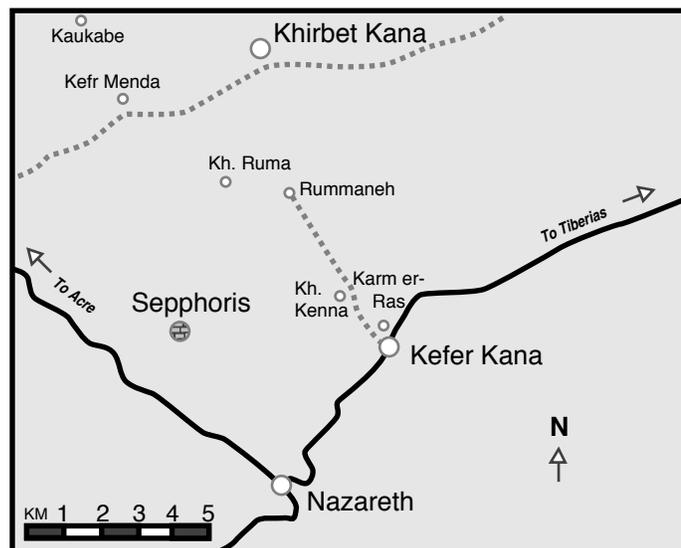
Nain

The village of Nain where Jesus raised the widow's son, survives today in the Muslim village of *Naim* or *Nein*. It lies in southwest Galilee on the northwest slope of the hill of Moreh, about five miles southeast of Nazareth, and about twenty-five miles from Capernaum. The Franciscan Fathers erected a chapel there upon the foundations of an ancient sanctuary that had commemorated the compassionate visit of Jesus. The name *Na'im* means "pleasant." (Sources: *ABS Reference Bible*, Hoade.)

Cana

Cana stands out to us in the gospel story as the place where Jesus graced a wedding with His presence and performed his first miraculous sign by turning water into wine. Cana was also where Jesus performed His second sign, the long-distance healing of a royal officials son who lay sick in Capernaum. Cana was the home of Nathanael Bartholomew who did not think highly of his neighbors in nearby Nazareth—until he met Jesus.

Although the Crusaders seem to have confused the biblical Cana with Khirbet Kana north of Sepphoris, archaeological and historical evidence supports the opinion that Kefer Kana, nearer to Nazareth, is the true site. The spring in Kefer Kana and the remains of churches identify it as the spot venerated by pilgrims in the Roman and Byzantine periods. Excavations have revealed evidence of simultaneous but separate Jewish and Judaeo-Christian communities in antiquity.



CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Bethany

Bethany lies less than 2 miles outside of Jerusalem, just east of the Mount of Olives (John 11.18) on the road to Jericho. The present village is adjacent to the excavated ruins of the ancient site, and has grown up around the tomb of Lazarus. Eusebius (AD 256-340) mentions the tomb of Lazarus, and by AD 390 Jerome reported that a church had been built over it. The tomb has been well attested since that time and is an important tourist stop today.

As Báez-Camargo observes, “in spite of the antiquity of the tradition, it cannot be said with any certainty that this is indeed the tomb of Lazarus.” Still it is instructive to visit the ancient, underground tomb which was at one time closed with a stone that laid horizontally over the entrance. I visited the tomb in 1978 and was impressed by the labor that must have been involved in carving the burial chamber, and the narrow, curving stairway that descends to it, out of solid rock. (Source: Báez-Camargo, pp. 231, 232.)

Jerusalem

At about 5,000 years old, Jerusalem is one of the oldest continuously inhabited cities in the world. Having been besieged at least 30 times, and repeatedly destroyed and rebuilt through the ages, Jerusalem also constitutes a veritable time machine for archaeologists. A person can go 2,000 years back in time simply by descending a flight of stairs and emerging on a Roman pavement dating from the time of Jesus. New homes in the Jewish quarter of the Old City have fabulous archaeological museums in their basements where precious artifacts were discovered during building and now remain displayed *in situ*. As the city where Jesus taught, performed miracles, was tried, crucified and resurrected, Jerusalem represents the most important link in the geographical verification of the gospel narrative. Do the archaeological remains support the descriptions of the evangelists? Most certainly!



The first-century temple complex towers high above the Kidron Valley in the scale model at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

Pinnacle of the Temple

The visits of Jesus to Jerusalem in his early life center around the Herod's Temple (also known as the Second Temple). It was there that He was presented to the Lord

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

according to Jewish custom and where He was identified as the promised Savior by Simeon and Anna. It was also there in the Temple precincts that He confounded the rabbis when he was only 12 years of age.

The first reference to an adult visit by Jesus to Jerusalem also focuses on the Temple. In a supernatural visit, Jesus was conveyed to the “pinnacle of the temple” by Satan who tempted Jesus to throw Himself off (Matthew 04.05). The “pinnacle of the temple” is generally thought to refer to the southeastern corner of the Herodian wall around the temple mount. Báez-Camargo mentions archaeological calculations that “this corner may have reached a height in Jesus’ time of no less than 295 feet above the bottom of the Kidron Valley, although the wall itself would have had an imposing height of about 140 feet.” Josephus wrote that if one looked down from the royal cloister on the south side of the temple enclosure, he would not be able to see the bottom of the valley and would risk vertigo due to the immense height. (Sources: Báez-Camargo, p. 200; Josephus Antiquities 15.11.5.)

Pool of Bethesda

Other specific sites in Jerusalem visited by Jesus and described in the gospels have been historically and archaeologically identified. The remains of the pool where Jesus healed the paralytic have been excavated to the north of the Temple Mount and adjacent to the Church of St. Anne. Finegan estimates the water surface of the pool as having exceeded 5,000 square yards. The pool is variously called Bethzatha, Bezatha, Bethesda and also the “Probatric Pool,” i.e. Sheep Pool. (The reading *Bethsaida* in some mss. is most certainly a scribal error.) The pool may have been associated with a Sheep Gate or Sheep Market of antiquity (cf. Nehemiah 03.01; 12.39), but Eusebius explains the Sheep Pool name as deriving from the phenomenon of Bethesda’s reddish water which had supposedly been used to wash sacrificial animals before finding its way into the pool (as rain?). The Qumran Copper Scroll confirms the existence of a place in Jerusalem with a pool or pools called *Beth Eshdathayin*. The dual ending of the Copper Scroll Hebrew name lends itself to the translation: House of Twin Pools, and historical evidence confirms that Bethesda was a double pool. Porticoes bordered the pools on all sides, a “fifth porch” running between them. Numerous votive offerings, including one in the shape of a foot, have been recovered from the site, indicating that people did in fact come to it seeking healing. Some have speculated that pulsing, underground springs fed the pools and accounted for the movement of the waters mentioned by John. A Syriac version of John 05.02 calls Bethesda a “baptistery” implying that it was used at some time for Christian Baptism. (Sources: Báez-Camargo, pp. 227-229; ABS Reference Bible; Finegan, pp. 143-147.)

Pool of Siloam

The pool of Siloam to which Jesus sent the blind man in John 09, and which is fed by Hezekiah’s tunnel, is still in use in the southeast quarter of Jerusalem. The name “Sent” is not a translation of Siloam in a strict sense. The Aramaic root for Siloam means “peace” (shalom), not “sent.” However, besides “Siloam” the pool was also called “Sent” by virtue of the waters that were sent into it through Hezekiah’s tunnel. By

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

way of “translation,” John provides the alternate name for the pool. (Source: Báez-Camargo, p. 230.)

Mount of Olives

The Mount of Olives figures prominently in the visits of Jesus to Jerusalem, as well as in prophecies of His return). It is...

...a mile-long ridge of raised ground, nearly three thousand feet in elevation, that overlooks Jerusalem on its east side. It is thus the most conspicuous marker on the Jerusalem landscape, especially as the terrain drops to the Kidron Valley (II Sam. 15:14, 23, 30). An accurate description is the “mountain which is on the east side of the city” (Eze. 11:23), and it was reached by covering a walking distance on a Sabbath (it equal 960 yards, according to Acts 1:12). This hillside was covered with olive trees in NT times. Hence the name Mount of Olives was applied.

The most prominent references to this locale in the OT are in connection with David’s escape from Jerusalem during Absalom’s revolt (II Sam. 15:30), Ezekiel’s vision of a theophany on its summit (Eze. 11:23), and Zechariah’s apocalyptic scenario (14:4), which entailed an earthquake whose epicenter at Olivet would produce a new valley.

In the Gospels, Jesus, John reports (7:53 - 8:1), used the Mount of Olives as a retreat. On entering the city on Palm Sunday (Luke 19:29, 37, 41-44), he grieved over it and foretold its destruction. In Gethsemane on one of the lower slopes he prayed (Luke 22:39), and here he was arrested. In Luke’s artistry the same location is made the scene of the Ascension (Acts 1:9, 12), a tradition marked today by the Russian Orthodox Church of the Ascension and an Islamic mosque. Both buildings are intended to mark the scene of the Ascension.

By historical irony the strategic elevation of the Mount of Olives was capitalized by the Roman general Titus at the time of the Jewish War (A.D. 66-70), and from the commanding position of this area the Roman army was poised to lay siege to Jerusalem.

Author’s initials: R.M. (Source: *ABS Reference Bible*.)

Today the summit of the Mount of Olives is a favorite place from which to view the whole panorama of the modern city of Jerusalem, with the walled Old City in the medium distance, and the cemeteries and churches on the Mount’s slopes in the foreground. Today, the Church of All Nations encloses the rock upon which Jesus is believed to have prayed in Gethsemane. While there is really nothing of special note about the rock, other than that a church was built over it in about AD 380, outside the Church of All Nations stands a garden of ancient olive trees that probably date back to nearly the time of Jesus. Gnarled and hollow in the center of their wide trunks, these trees may have sprouted from roots that survived the Roman destruction of Jerusalem. Other sites of interest on the Mt. of Olives include the traditional location of Christ’s ascension, which we will describe further below as we explore the historical and archaeological corroboration for the final events of the Lord’s earthly ministry.

Part 3: The Final Events

While historical claims are always difficult to “prove” or “disprove,” nevertheless when it comes to any important claim about the past we must ask at least this: *is it plausible?* In the case of the gospel accounts of the death and burial of Jesus, we must ask: are they historically *plausible* given what we know of 1st-century Jerusalem. In one form or another, this question has haunted thinking people for the last 2,000 years—and it surfaces in the media regularly at Easter time. As one news weekly reported:

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Prior to the 18th century, few Christian theologians challenged the historical accuracy of the Passion, as related in the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. But by the 18th century, skeptics and believers alike were examining the Scriptures and other records in a quest for “the historical Jesus.” They found disappointingly little to corroborate the Gospel texts, a compendium of oral traditions written 20 to 60 years after the events and sometimes differing on important details of the story.

That has changed dramatically in recent years. Since shortly after the discovery of the Dead Sea Scrolls some 40 years ago, theologians, Bible scholars, archaeologists and cultural anthropologists have refocused their search, hoping to illuminate the theological meaning as well as the historical accuracy of the Gospel accounts of the final events in Jesus’ life.

Where has it all led? Some scholars, frustrated in their pursuit of a purely “historical” Jesus, have come to reject the Passion as pure fiction. For others, the account of Jesus’ death, burial and resurrection some 2,000 years ago remains a story worthy of faith, its truth protected through the centuries by the very hand of God. (Source: U.S. News & World Report, April 16, 1990.)

I believe that the gospel account of the Passion is “a story worthy of faith” because the details of the story fit very plausibly with what we know about 1st-century Judaism and with the archaeological remains of the Holy City where the events took place. One of the great values of the Dead Sea Scrolls is that they reveal how true to the setting of Judaism the gospels are. In the words of Prof. Lawrence Shiffman of New York University:

The Judaism of this period was very rich with all kinds of theological ideas just as it had been throughout history. Many of these theological ideas—we didn’t really know about before these scrolls were discovered and made known. And therefore, we find that sometimes the things in the New Testament that we didn’t know before were Jewish turn out to be Jewish. (Source: Witkin. Path on CD-ROM: Main Menu, History, New Testament, Prof. Shiffman video.)

For ages before the Dead Sea scrolls were publicized though, pilgrims have been claiming to have seen the sites and even some of the artifacts relating to the final days of Jesus. Modern archaeology continues to analyze ancient claims and add new finds and insights. Following are some of the data relating to the death, burial and resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.

The Last Supper & Betrayal

The Upper Room or Cenacle (from *cenaculum* = top story)

Tradition links the last supper and post-resurrection appearances of Jesus, as well as the coming of the Spirit on Pentecost, to the same upper room. The following passages do not explicitly place all those events at the same location, but the definite article in Acts 1.13 at least sounds like a reference to an earlier mentioned “upper room.”

Mark 14:15 “And he himself will show you a large **upper room** furnished {and} ready; and prepare for us there.”

John 20:19 ¶ When therefore it was evening, on that day, the first {day} of the week, and when **the doors were shut where the disciples were**, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst, and *said to them, “Peace {be} with you.”

John 20:26 ¶ And after eight days again His disciples were **inside**, and Thomas with them. Jesus *came, the doors having been shut, and stood in their midst, and said, “Peace {be} with you.”

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Acts 1:12 ¶ Then they returned to Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is near Jerusalem, a Sabbath day's journey away.

Acts 1:13 And when they had entered, they went up to **the upper room**, where they were staying; that is, Peter and John and James and Andrew, Philip and Thomas, Bartholomew and Matthew, James {the son} of Alphaeus, and Simon the Zealot, and Judas {the son} of James.

Acts 1:14 These all with one mind were continually devoting themselves to prayer, along with {the} women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with His brothers.

Eugene Hoade writes:

An ancient Christian tradition found in writings of the 4th century, but reaching back to the Apostolic age, indicates in the southwest angle of the western hill of Jerusalem the Cenacle, the place of the institution of the Blessed Eucharist, the Apparition of the Risen Christ and the Descent of the Holy Ghost. (Source: Hoade, p. 304.)

The present-day Cenacle on Mt. Zion dates from the 14th century and is associated with the Basilica of Sion, the Basilica of the Dormition and other Churches. (It is also near the House of Caiaphas.) The history of the Cenacle and the buildings raised upon it is quite long and involved and adds weight to the belief that the location was venerated by Christians since the beginning of the faith. In fact:

Bishop Epiphanius, a native of Palestine (310-403) basing himself on documents of the 2nd century writes "Hadrian ... found the city entirely rased to the ground and the Temple of God destroyed and trampled upon, with the exception of some houses and a certain *small church of the Christians*, which had been constructed



The Upper Room today.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

in that place, in which the disciples, after the Saviour was taken up to heaven from Mount Olivet, betaking themselves, mounted to the Cenacle. (Source: Hoade.)

Hoade says that Epiphanius is reliable because the Roman operations of AD 70 focused on the opposite side of the city from where the Cenacle was and would have left it unharmed. He believes that the first Jerusalem Christians who fled to Pella in 70 before the siege of Titus would have returned after the war to center of their community on Mt. Zion. This paints an amazing picture of the Cenacle as being virtually the only important building left standing after the Roman destruction of Jerusalem!

The Upper Room has also been associated with the House of John-Mark and his mother Mary, which in turn is associated with the meeting place where Peter knocked on the door after his angelic release from prison (Acts 12.12). The House of John-Mark is commemorated by a church on the Assyrian Convent Road of the Armenian Quarter in the Old City. McBirnie reports:

It is believed that the discovery of the actual foundations of the house of Mary, the mother of Mark, has recently been made in the basement of the church of St. Mark in Jerusalem. An ancient inscription discovered and displayed there tells that the original church was built on the site of the house of Mary and Mark, and that it was the place of the “upper room” which was the gathering place of the first Christians and was also the site of the Pentecostal baptism of the Holy Spirit.

It may be that the attempt to place so many New Testament events within *one* Upper Room are speculative only. The evidence seems to point to more than one location for all the events we’ve mentioned, with the Cenacle on Mt. Zion being the most important site, but the house that Peter went to straight from the jail having its location at the present-day site of the Church of St. Mark. (Sources: McBirnie, p. 258; Hoade.)

John 18.01 tells us that from the Upper Room, Jesus and the disciples went across the Kidron valley to a garden on the Mt. of Olives. The path from the Cenacle to Gethsemane is also well-marked by tradition. A path, for which some stone steps still remain from the Roman period, runs alongside the present Church of St. Peter Gallicantu near the Pool of Siloam. Báez-Camargo reports that some call these steps the Holy Thursday Stairway, for if the traditional site of the Last Supper on Mt. Zion does indeed mark the actual neighborhood of that event, then Jesus likely descended these steps on his way to the Kidron Valley and Gethsemane. (Source: Báez-Camargo, p. 233.)

Gethsemane

The name Gethsemane probably reflects the Aramaic, *Gat-shemanin*, “press of oils.” Though not explicit in the Gospel texts, Jesus and His disciples probably stayed in an olive pressing cave, rather than in the open air, when they spent the night on the Mount of Olives. The present-day Church of All Nations commemorates the garden agony of Jesus on the night He was betrayed, and purports to enclose the very rock that He leaned against to pray. However, the Gospels do not say that Jesus leaned against a rock to pray, but only that he “knelt down” (Luk 22.41) or that he “fell face with his

face to the ground” (Mat 26.39; Mar 14.35). This does not preclude the involvement of a rock or a rocky surface, but neither does it require such. Whether or not this Church of All Nations and its famous rock do mark the *very spot* where Jesus prayed with bloody sweat, there is no question that Jesus did in fact spend time in this *vicinity* with his disciples when they retreated to the Mount of Olives.

Of greater interest is the Grotto (Cave) of Gethsemane, mentioned above, that is just to the north of the Church of All Nations, and associated with the Church of the Assumption, the site of Mary’s tomb:

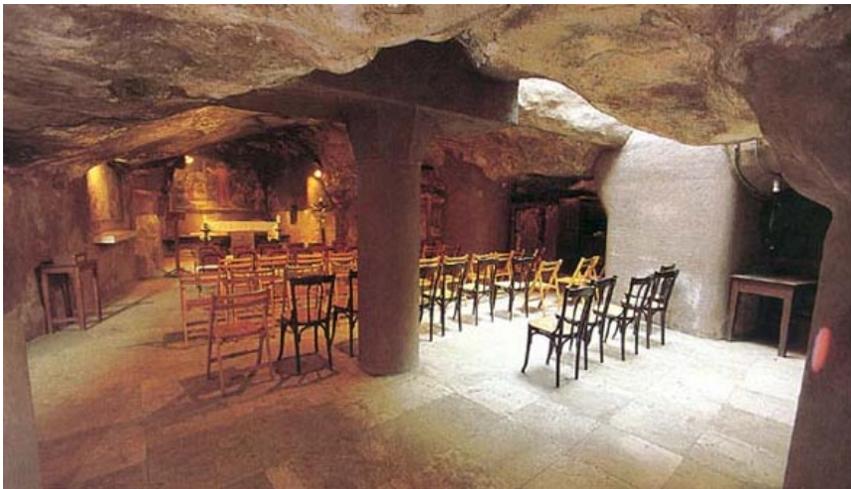
A Welcome Refuge: Inside the Cave of Gethsemane

Jesus and his disciples regularly spent the evenings on the Mount of Olives, and the warm, dry Cave of Gethsemane would have been a natural place to find shelter, suggests Joan Taylor. The cave’s oil-press would have operated only in the autumn and winter, after the olive harvest. By spring, when Jesus and his disciples came to Jerusalem to celebrate the festival of Passover, the cave would have been used only for storage. Thousands of people made pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem during Passover, and every possible lodging in the city and surrounding village was offered to visitors.

Today, the cave is an underground chapel, with chairs set out for services. The olive-press may have been located in what is now the sanctuary, in the easternmost extension of the cave. An ancient hole in the wall, visible through the square hole cut out of the modern wall jutting out at right, lies at the exact height to support the wooden beam of the press. The press would have extended out, parallel to the modern altar, in this eastern cave extension.

The beam olive-press, used in the second step of olive pressing, extracted the last drops of oil from olives. First mill-stones crushed the olives in large basins to remove the finest, virgin oil used for sanctuary lamps. The remaining pulp was placed in loosely woven baskets (called *aqalim* in Arabic and Hebrew) that were stacked on a smaller vat and topped with a stone. Pressure applied by the long wooden beam, anchored in the wall and weighted down with stones on one end, squeezed the remaining oil out of the pulp, through the baskets and into the stone vat below.

Few clues to the cave’s original appearance remain. The stellar ceiling decorations and other rock paintings in the sanctuary date to the Crusader period (11th and 12th centuries); a recent mural behind the altar depicts Jesus and his disciples praying in the cave, with a large mill-stone beside them. The stone paving was laid after the excavations of 1956–1957, and the T-shaped concrete column at center is a modern support. Three pillars (two fully visible and one mostly cropped at right, in the photo) consist of ancient rock-cut pillars covered with modern concrete. The remains of a fourth ancient pillar, to the right of the modern T-shaped column, are marked on the plan. The cave’s original entrance was cut into the north wall, behind the small table in the photo. A gutter and Byzantine mosaics lie near the modern entrance....



The spacious cave, measuring 36 by 60 feet, was probably the largest olive-oil processing site on the Mount of Olives. The cave’s central chamber was large enough to house a crushing basin with a mill-stone, used in the first step of olive pressing, although there are no archaeological remains. (Source: Editor, H. S. (2004; 2004). *BAR* 21:04 (July/Aug 1995). Biblical Archaeology Society.)

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

30 Pieces of Silver

The thirty pieces of silver paid to Judas by the chief priests (Matthew 26.14) were probably the well-known Phoenician shekels of Tyre (later minted at Jerusalem) which were the only acceptable currency at the Jerusalem Temple and had attained a semi-official status. The Tyrian Shekel has the laureate head of Melkarth (Melkarth, the Baal of Tyre) on its obverse an eagle standing with its right foot on the prow of a ship and palm branches over its right shoulder, with a date and club in a field to the left, a Phoenician letter between the eagle's legs and the inscription: ΤΥΡΟΥΙΠΑΣ ΚΑΙΣΥΛΟΥ (of Tyre the holy and inviolable). These coins were minted in Tyre from 126-5 to 19-18 BC and then in Jerusalem from 18-17 BC to AD 69-70. (Source: Hendin; Durant, vol. 1, p. 294.)

Potter's Field

Matt. 27:7 And they counseled together and with the money bought the Potter's Field as a burial place for strangers.

Matt. 27:8 For this reason that field has been called the Field of Blood to this day.

Matt. 27:9 Then that which was spoken through Jeremiah the prophet was fulfilled, saying, "And they took the thirty pieces of silver, the price of the one whose price had been set by the sons of Israel;

Matt. 27:10 and they gave them for the Potter's Field, as the Lord directed me."

Acts 1:18 (Now this man acquired a field with the price of his wickedness; and falling headlong, he burst open in the middle and all his bowels gushed out.

Acts 1:19 And it became known to all who were living in Jerusalem; so that in their own language that field was called Hakeldama, that is, Field of Blood.)

The Potter's Field or Field of Blood (Akeldama) is commemorated today by a church compound on the site of an ancient cemetery. The problem is that the tombs excavated at the site have proven to be the splendid graves of rich Herodians, not of poor strangers. While the present-day Haceldama has great archaeological value and has yielded fascinating and beautiful treasures of glass and gold, positive identification of the field purchased with Judas' blood money is yet to be made.

The Trials

House of Caiaphas

The house of Caiaphas has long been located near the site of the Cenacle on Mt. Zion. It is ironic that after the long walk from the Upper Room to Gethsemane, Jesus may have been brought right back to the same neighborhood for his kangaroo court with Caiaphas. (As we have already noted, the family tomb of Caiaphas has recently been found by road workmen to the south of the Old City in the present-day Peace Forest area.)

Pilate's Wife

History records that Pilate's wife was:

Claudia Procula, granddaughter of the Emperor Augustus and illegitimate daughter of Claudia, third wife of the Emperor Tiberius. She was a princess royal, sophisticated, cultured, and sensi-

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

tive. Perhaps it was through her that Pilate got this particular appointment [to Judaea], rather than for his diplomatic tact. The governors of Judaea did not usually get permission to take their wives, and although many women would have welcomed an excuse to say in the comfort and society of Rome, Claudia was with him even in Jerusalem. (Source: Brownrigg, p. 367.)

Flogging

We will discuss the flogging of Jesus further below, in connection with the analysis of the Shroud of Turin. Suffice it to say that Roman brutality is recorded in enough historical sources for us to realize that Jesus was virtually unrecognizable when he was finally crucified. Some scholars say that the skin of His back was hanging in ribbons around His waist by the time the lictor was done. The Shroud seems to indicate that there was more bruising than tearing caused by the dumbbell-shaped weights in the leather straps.

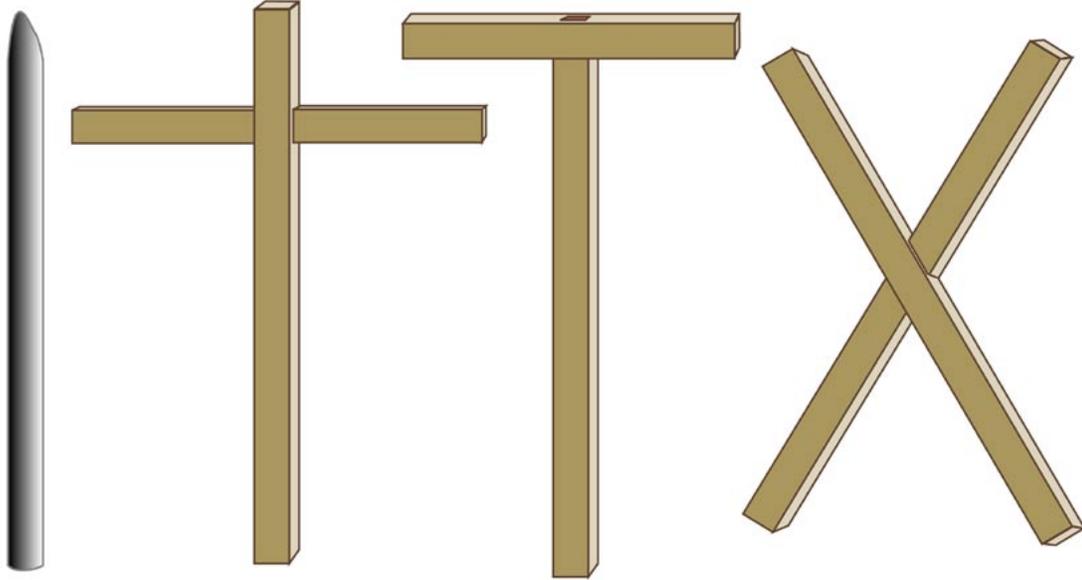
Where Was the Praetorium

One of the ongoing archaeological debates about the last days of Jesus is regarding the location of Pilate's headquarters and the site of the scourging of Jesus. Proposed locations include places attached to Herod's Palace in the Upper City or to the Hasmonean Palace in the center of Jerusalem. The traditional location of Herod's Quarters and of the flagellation are commemorated beneath churches built where the Fortress of Antonia once stood.



The Antonia Fortress, possible site of the Praetorium, adjacent to the Temple Mount, model of first-century Jerusalem at the Israel Museum, Jerusalem.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST



crux simplex

*crux immissa or
crux capitata*

crux commissa

*crux decussata
(St. Andrew's cross)*

The Crucifixion

Though closely associated with Rome, crucifixion originated with the Phoenicians and Persians. It was practiced from the 6th century BC until the 4th century AD. The Roman emperor Constantine I banned crucifixion in 337. (Source: *Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia*.)

The German theologian Ernst Bammel has noted that execution by crucifixion had been used in Palestine since the second century B.C.—even by Jewish courts. Because it was a particularly gruesome form of punishment, said Bammel, “it was used especially in political cases such as those branded by the Romans as rebellion.” (Source: *U. S. News & World Report*, April 16, 1990.)

The Place of Crucifixion: Golgotha

Golgotha comes from the Aramaic word *gulgalta*, meaning skull. General Charles Gordon found a hill outside the walls of Jerusalem in 1883 that reminded him of a skull, and the place has become known as Gordon's Calvary, which we will mention again below in connection with the Garden Tomb. Here's what we know from the New Testament about the place of Christ's execution:

Outside the Gate (Hebrews 13.12)

Near the City (John 19.20)

Adjacent to a Garden (John 19.41)

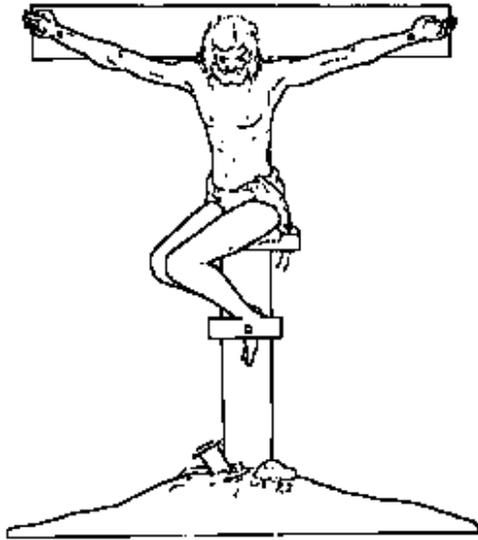
At The Cross

Titulus

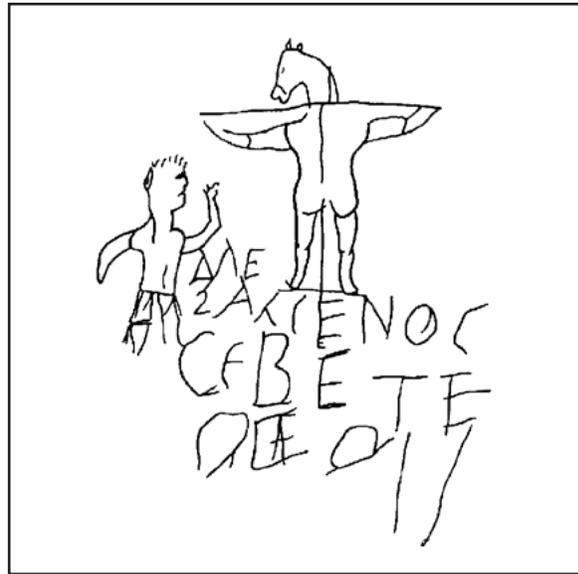
According to John 19.19, 20, Pilate wrote a title (*titulus*) that stated Jesus' crime in “Hebrew, Latin and Greek,” to attach to the cross. Jesus may have worn it around his neck as he stumbled toward Golgotha carrying his cross beam, or the inscription may

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST



Typical Crucifixion
Based on Recent Archaeology



3rd-century Anti-Christian Graffiti:
“Alexamenus worships his god”

ישוע נצרי מלך היהודים
ΙΕΣΟΥΣ ΝΑΖΑΡΕΝΟΣ ΒΑΣΙΛΕΥΣ ΙΟΥΔΑΙΑΣ
IESVS NAZARENVS REX IVDÆORVM

Reconstruction of the Titulus
Based on the relic in
“The Basilica of S. Croce in Gerusalemme.”
The writing on the relic is shown against the light background

have been carried before him by the centurion. The detail given in Matthew 27.37, that this title was placed “above His head,” implies that the cross was probably a *crux immissa* (though *crux commissa* is possible, since the title could still be mounted above His head if the Lord’s arms were not greatly distended).

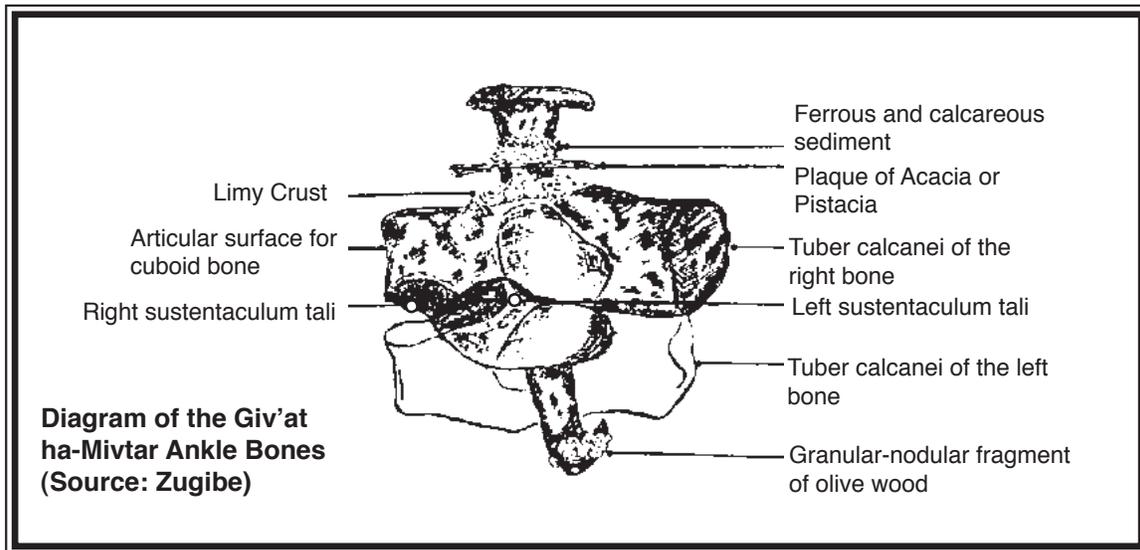
Zugibe provides a photo of a relic of part of the deteriorated titulus, supposedly found by St. Helen in the 3rd century, and now housed in “the Basilica of S. Croce in Gerusalemme.” This relic shows parts of all three languages, with the Greek and Latin written from left to right like the Hebrew (Source: Zugibe.)

Fossilized Heel Bones

The remains of a crucified man discovered in the excavations of the tombs of Giv’at ha Mivtar in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem in 1968 have added much to our understanding of crucifixion. Until then we had no direct archaeological evidence of the form of execution. Many of the illustrations of typical crucifixions one sees in the literature now are based on insights from this find.

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST



The Darkness

Computer reconstructions seem to rule out a Palestinian eclipse around AD 30, and anyway, Christ was crucified at Passover, according to the Gospels, when the moon was full. An alternative theory for the darkness in a violent dust storm of a kind not unknown in Palestine, and definitely capable of bringing darkness at midday. Whatever the cause, the miraculous aspect of it was its timing, decreed by God, some believe to cover the shame of His Son. The important thing for us to know is that unbelievers noted the phenomenon at the time and recorded the event in writing.

Joseph of Arimathea

Joseph became a popular figure in apocalyptic literature. Medieval legends connect Joseph with the Holy Grail and with Glastonbury, England, where his staff was believed to have taken root and grown into a thorn tree that flowered every Christmas Eve. (Source: *Grolier Electronic Encyclopedia*.)

There is a vast literature on Joseph of Arimathea, but most of it has a legendary flavor. One interesting tradition is that he and Nicodemus were buried in the same cemetery as Jesus.

The Tomb of Jesus

Here's what we know from the New Testament:

New Tomb Where No One Had Ever Lain (Matthew 27.60; Luke 23.53)
Hewn in the Rock (vs. natural cave) (Matthew 27.60)
Rolling Stone Over the Entrance (Matthew 27.60)
Seal Placed on the Stone
Near Other Tombs (Luke 24.05)
In A Garden (John 19.41)

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

The Garden Tomb is near the Damascus Gate of Old Jerusalem. Adjacent to the Damascus Gate and the Garden tomb is a hill having on one side the appearance of a skull's hollow eye sockets. This hill's appearance was first noticed in recent times by General Charles Gordon in 1883, from whom it is named "Gordon's Calvary."

The Garden Tomb is hewn in solid rock, with the stone worker's tool marks still visible. It is in a garden today, but seems also to have been in a garden in antiquity—a garden with a vineyard of which the wine press has been uncovered. The tomb has two burial niches, one of them unfinished, indicating that the tomb was never used—or perhaps used only for a short time and then abandoned. It shows the marks of having had a rolling stone covering the entrance at one time, though the stone has never been found.

Archaeologists Sir Flinders Petrie and Sir Charles Marston agreed that the Garden Tomb dated from the Herodian period. Kathleen Kenyon dated it to the first



General
Charles
Gordon



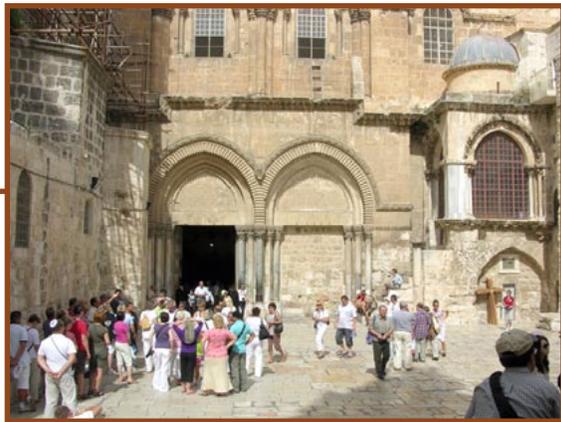
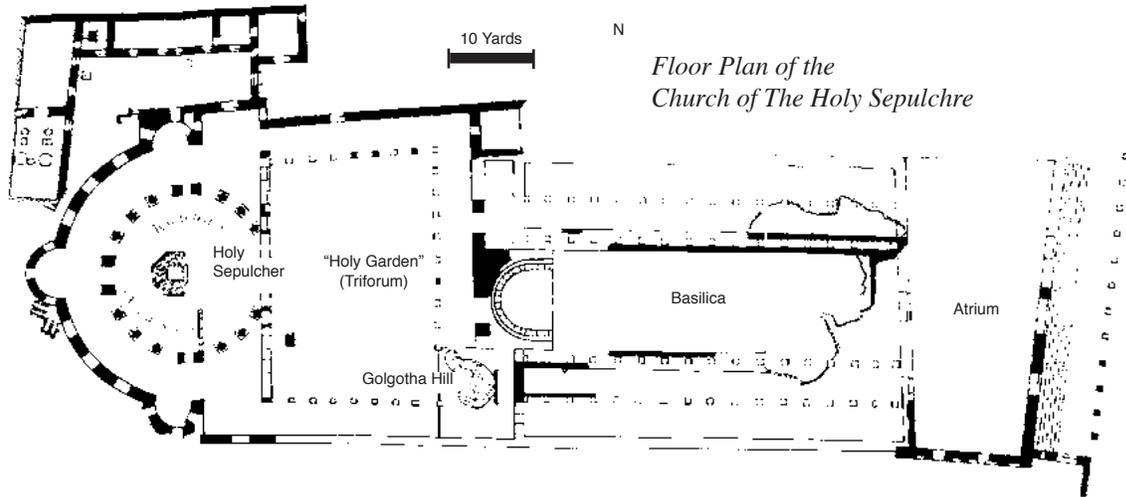
The Garden Tomb

century AD. An anchor, an early Christian symbol, is carved in the tomb face. Inside the tomb is a small painted cross dating from Byzantine times indicating later veneration by Christians or possibly use for Christian burial. (Source: Garden Tomb Association.)

The Garden Tomb seems to fit the description of Scriptures beautifully, but interestingly enough, archaeological opinion is shifting back to the probable authenticity of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher with its ancient traditions

and new discoveries that have come to light during recent repairs. Recent excavations have shown that the Church of the Holy Sepulcher lies over a limestone quarry that was worked from the 7th to the 1st centuries BC. When mining ended in the quarry, it was covered over with a layer of soil and became a garden cemetery.

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS



**Church of the Holy Sepulchre in 1858 (left);
Visitors at the Massive Entrance in October, 2008, (above)**

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Linen Cloth (Matthew 27.59)

According to Matthew 27.59, “Joseph took the body and wrapped it in a clean linen cloth (Greek: *sindoni*)...” Could a linen cloth survive for 2,000 years? Yes, Egyptian burial wrappings have survived even longer. Could the burial cloth of Jesus have not only survived but also retained markings identifying it as the shroud of Christ? Some scholars answer yes to this question and point us to perhaps the most mysterious archaeological artifact of all time: The Shroud of Turin.

Archaeology and The Resurrection

The Mystery of the Shroud

Description of the Shroud

The Shroud of Turin is a strip of linen 14.25 feet long and 3.58 feet wide. Faintly visible on one side of the cloth are images of the front and back of a human body bearing wounds and bruises matching those of the crucified Christ. “The image is that of a bearded male, approximately 5’11” in height....The man’s estimated age is 30-35 years, and his estimated body weight is about 175 pounds. The man is well-built and muscular—a man accustomed to manual labor.”The man in the image has longish hair, parted in the middle and with a ponytail in back. Bloodstains and image markings reveal wounds in wrists and feet, a side wound, scalp punctures and both abrasions and dumbbell-shaped markings on the back. (Source: Stevenson (2).)

Though its Catholic caretakers have never officially claimed that the Shroud was the actual burial cloth of Jesus, it has been venerated as such by pious individuals since the beginning of its recorded history in about AD 1357 when it was first publicly displayed in the small French town of Lirey. (Source: Drews, p. 23.)

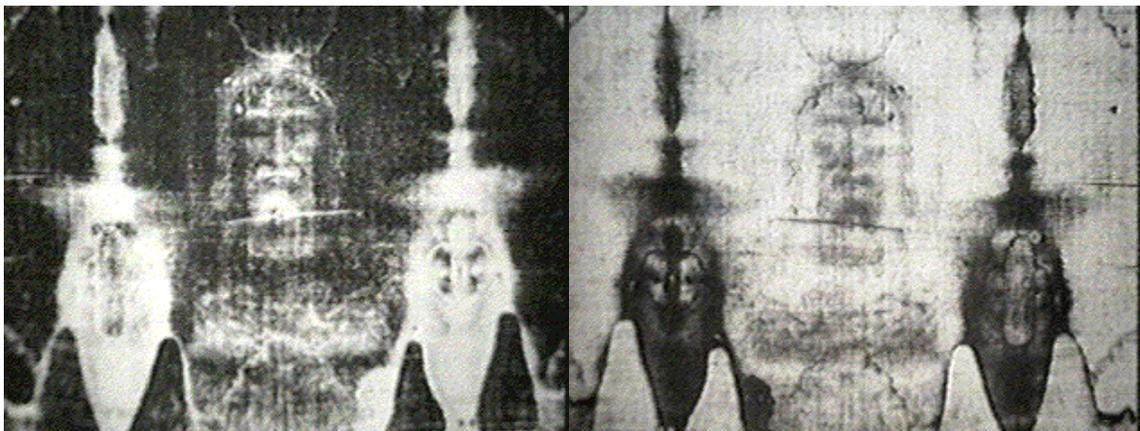
Evidence For Authenticity

Various aspects of the Shroud of Turin suggest not only antiquity but also authenticity by negating the likelihood of fraud (if not of human artifice altogether).

Weave With Parallels in the Greco-Roman Period

A similar three-to-one herringbone twill to that in the Shroud has been found in silks of the Greco-Roman period. (Source: Drews, p. 8.)

Negative and Positive Photographs of the Shroud Image



© 1997-2008. www.timothyministries.info

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Palestinian Pollens

Palestinian pollens were discovered in the linen by Swiss criminologist, Max Frei. Along with common pollens of northern Italy and France, Frei identified pollens of numerous halophyte desert plants from the Dead Sea area and other pollens from plants restricted to northeastern Syria and eastern Turkey. Frei concluded that at some point in its history, the Shroud had been exposed to the air in Istanbul (Constantinople). (Sources: Biblical Archaeology Review, Nov/Dec 2000; Drews, p. 8,13,14.)

Mites

Microscopic analysis of the shroud in 1978 revealed the remains of mites “peculiar to ancient burial linens, specifically Egyptian mummy wrappings. If the shroud was a creation of the Middle Ages, then its forger must have ordered the mites to go with it.” (Source: Stevenson (1), p. 65.)

Human Blood

The blood is not strictly-speaking part of the image, but real blood that shows up as a photographic positive in contrast to the negative image.

Image Within Rather Than Upon the Fibrils

Most observers of the Shroud now agree that the image on it is not painted. Though Walter C. McCrone found traces of iron oxide (an ingredient of the rouge used by medieval painters) in the image area of the Shroud, examinations have shown that the image is not due to “an applied substance,” and the cloth shows no brush marks. Rather, the image appears as the result of “an accelerated degradation or ‘rapid aging’ of the linen fibrils.” (Source: Drews, p. 9,16,21.)

Close-up Invisibility of the Image

An extraordinary aspect of the Shroud is that the image upon it blurs and fades when viewed from closer than six feet—making it difficult for an artist to have painted the image and see his work as it progressed. An artist could not have painted the image without a long extension on his paint brush!

Negative Image

Another aspect of the Shroud that seems to make forgery unlikely is the fact that the image upon it is a negative one. This was first discovered by an early photographer, Secondo Pia, who was invited to photograph the Shroud in 1898. (Source: Drews, p. 3.)

3-D Information in the Image

Perhaps most astounding to scientific investigators is the discovery that the Shroud image contains three-dimensional information that can be analyzed and modeled by computer. The 3-D information in the image implies two very important conclusions: (1) However the image was made, it was transferred from a three-dimensional object, either a human body or a statue of one; (2) When the image was made, the Shroud was held tautly and flat over the front of the body.

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Wrist Wounds Rather Than Palm Wounds

The forgery explanation of the Shroud image proposes a medieval time frame. However, the Shroud image reveals a man crucified with nails through the forearms or wrists while the convention in medieval art was to depict Christ as nailed through the palms of the hands. Dr. Pierre Barbet's experiments with cadavers as well as the skeletal remains of the crucified Jehohanan found at Giv'at ha-Mivtar demonstrate that the Shroud image is a more credible testimony to crucifixion than the unanimous testimony of medieval artwork. Furthermore, it would have been in flagrant departure from medieval artistic convention to depict Christ naked and with long hair (Sources: Drews, p. 25; Stevenson (1), p. 68.)

The Crucified Man's Nakedness

...Christians in late antiquity never depicted Jesus naked or dead. In fact, early Christian art did not even portray Jesus on the cross. The earliest known representation of the crucifixion of Jesus is a panel on the wooden door of Santa Sabina in Rome, carved ca. 432, and the subject remained a great rarity until the eighth century. One of the early examples appears in the Rabbula Codex, an illuminated Syriac manuscript dating ca. 586, and there Jesus is portrayed, incongruously, fully clothed while hanging on the cross. In the third and fourth centuries Christians restricted themselves to depicting Jesus as a teacher, a miracle-worker, a shepherd, or as Christ in Triumph. The passion was not a subject that Christians had any desire to visualize. That some Christian in late antiquity should have decided to create, on a fourteen-foot sheet of linen, an imitation of the frontal and dorsal images of the naked body of the crucified Jesus is unimaginable. (Source: Drews, p. 29.)

Images of Coins Minted Under Pontius Pilate

Imaging studies have revealed a high degree congruences with two coins minted under Pontius Pilate: the lepton (widow's mite) issued between AD 29 and 32 over the right eye of the image, and the "Julia Lepton" of AD 29 over the left eye. There are certain inconsistencies with what has been known of the coins. The lepton over the right eye shows the letters UCAI where the know coin has UKAI, but according to Zugibe, Rev. Francis Filas, a Jesuit theologian of Loyola University, has located a few Pilate coins showing a minting error of a "C" for a "K." The position of the lettering on the "coin" on the Shroud image (9:30 to 11:30), contrasts with the position of the lettering on lepton



Leptons:
(1) "Julia"
Lepton;
(2-4) Other
Leptons of
Pilate;
(5 & 6) Earlier
Leptons
(Widow's Mites)
of Alexander
Jannaeus
(103-76 BC)

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

pictures in Hendin (11:00 to 2:00), but I don't know that Hendin is exhaustive on all versions of Pilate's lepton. (Sources: Hendin; The News Tribune, June 30, 1980.)

Evidence Against Authenticity

An Admission of Forgery

Drews writes: "A fourteenth-century bishop...declared the Shroud a forgery when it was first displayed, and had even obtained a confession from the man who had painted the image." His reference is to a memorandum written in 1389 by Pierre d'Arcis, bishop of Troyes, to Pope Clement VII in Avignon. The memorandum declared that the Shroud could not be authentic:

since the holy Gospel made no mention of any such imprint, while, if it had been true, it was quite unlikely that the holy Evangelists would have omitted to record it, or that the fact should have remained hidden until the present time. Eventually, after diligent inquiry and examination, [an earlier bishop] discovered the fraud and how the said cloth had been cunningly painted, the truth being attested by the artist who had painted it, to wit, that it was a work of human skill and not miraculously wrought or bestowed.

Many skeptics have based their opinion of the Shroud on the above claim of fraud, but modern analysis undermines the medieval admission that it was "painted." (Source: Drews, pp. 4,23,24.)

The Lack of a History

The fatal criticism of the Shroud by the memorandum of Pierre d'Arcis was that it was of recent discovery and had no previously known history. In 1978, however, Ian Wilson, in his *Shroud of Turin*, built a plausible case for the idea that the Shroud of Turin is the rediscovered Mandylion. The Mandylion (= "little towel" or "little handkerchief") was "an unspeakably sacred cloth" kept in one of the Emperor's chapels in Constantinople until its disappearance after the sack of the city by the Crusaders in 1204. By identifying the Shroud with the previously known Mandylion, Wilson is able to reconstruct a fairly complete history of the artifact from the time of Christ's crucifixion in Palestine to the Shroud's present existence in Turin! (Sources: Drews, pp. 31-51; Wilson (4).)

While a plausible history of the Shroud has now been offered by Wilson, it should be noted that the early Christians were against representational art in general and detested religious icons and images in specific. Irenaeus denounced the Carpocratians (Gnostic "Christians") for their images and for maintaining that "a likeness of Christ was made by Pilate at that time when Jesus lived among them (*Against Heresies* 1.25.6). Hippolytus makes this same charge in *Refutation of All Heresies* 7.20: "And they make counterfeit images of Christ, alleging that these were in existence at the time (during which our Lord was on earth, and that they were fashioned) by Pilate." Based on these early condemnations of the Gnostics for their images, Drews proposes that Gnostic "Christ-followers" were the first caretakers of the Shroud of Turin, an imprinting of Christ made after His death by Pilate or Joseph of Arimathea, using a since forgotten thermographic process! However, it is utterly implausible in the light of Jewish and early Christian attitudes toward images, that any of Christ's first followers would have

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

purposely “taken his picture” (particularly in view of the dangerous circumstances they were in at the time). If Pilate or some other heathen ordered the “picture,” they did something for which we have neither precedent nor sequel in all of history. While Wilson’s history seems to take the Shroud back to the time of Jesus, it still cannot explain how the Shroud first came into the possession of Christians, whether Gnostic or orthodox. (Sources: Drews, p. 107; Wilson (1); Wilson (4).)

Lack of Parallels in Jewish Burial Customs

Drews writes:

During most of antiquity the Jews, like the Greeks and Romans, clothed their dead as they had been clothed in life....During the first century it is possible, as the Gospel of John indicates, that many Jews adopted the practice of anointing a corpse with spices and then wrapping it, like a mummy, in linen strips. These are the only alternatives. Burial of a naked corpse in a linen sheet is unexampled in Jewish literary sources.

Besides the fact that there is no known parallel to this kind of a burial shroud in antiquity, the unique dimensions of the Shroud (14' x 3'7") would have served no known utility in the ancient world. These facts together convince Drews that the cloth of the Shroud was woven specifically to receive the imprint of a man’s body.

The 3-D Image

While the three-dimensional information retained in the image of the Shroud negates the likelihood of someone having painted the image or otherwise producing it without an actual body or statue of a body, the same three-dimensional feature of the Shroud image militates against it having been produced on a burial shroud. A burial shroud would have draped over the body. To produce the image of the Shroud, the linen cloth had to be suspended tautly and flat, like a roof over the prone body. Related to this problem is the curious gap between the images of the front and the back of the head. Was the Shroud loosely draped around the back of the head, or was it tightly drawn over the top of the body when the image was produced? (Source: Drew, pp. 98, 99.)

Carbon Date Suggests Medieval Origin

On October 13, 1988, Cardinal Anastasio Ballestrero, custodian of the Shroud of Turin, announced that radiocarbon tests conducted independently by three laboratories in that year had concluded that the shroud cloth was created between 1260 and 1390 AD rather than in the time of Jesus. Though Carbon-14 dating has proven unreliable for the great dating schemes of evolutionists, it is believed to accurately date objects as old as perhaps 15,000 years. However, nothing seems to have stirred up the debate over the Shroud like its carbon dating! The carbon-dating procedures used on the Shroud have been widely condemned by sindonologists as having been generally slipshod, as not having taken into account possible sources of sample contamination, and as having been performed on samples far from the image—possibly even from cloth woven onto the main shroud long after its creation. Suffice it to say that the medieval carbon date for the Shroud remains highly controversial, particularly in the light of the other indications of the Shroud’s antiquity.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Perfect Blood Stains

The blood stains on the Shroud's image show no evidence of the smearing that would result from the wrapping of Christ's body as described in John 19:39-40; they are sharply outlined. Also they flow the wrong direction for a prone body. This does not prove fraud, however. The blood stains do flow correctly for a body suspended from a cross. The implication is that if the Shroud directly recorded the image of Jesus (or another crucified man), it recorded the image of the body as it was first taken from the cross—though we might still expect more smearing than shows on the image. (Source: BAR, March/April 1984.)

Unnaturally Long Arms and Fingers

The arms of the Shroud image are unnaturally long so that the joined hands conveniently cover the genital area. This is appropriate artistry but improbable anatomy. One might suggest that this elongation is accounted for by the disjuncting of the limbs in crucifixion, but would the disfigurement of the cross explain an index finger that is at least five inches long, on a normal-sized man? Skeptic Joe Nickell lists other anatomical anomalies:

- right arm longer than the left
- great right pectoral muscle broader than that of the left
- impossibly excessive distance “from the lips to the wound of the left carpus”
- excessively long front part of the legs, 5.6” longer than the back imprint of the same area
- hair at the side of the face suspended alongside the cheeks rather than falling back as it should if the body was prone
- asymmetry of the face
- no pressure-point flattening of the buttocks

Nickell goes on to mention that Zugibe attempted to explain these anatomical problems by suggesting that Jesus had Marfan's syndrome, the rare disease that afflicted Abraham Lincoln. The more plausible explanation is that the shroud image is the imperfect artwork of a forger. However, it seems inconceivable in view of the history of Christian art, that a naked, long-haired image of Jesus, nailed through the wrists, would have been created by a medieval artist. It is equally unthinkable that such a picture would have been created by an early Christian artist. The artwork theory poses as many problems as it solves! I am forced to ask, “Can the anatomical distortions be explained by a tendency to aberration inherent in whatever process formed the image—such as irregular draping of the cloth, etc.?” Ercoline, Downs and Jackson, in a paper entitled *Examination of the Turin Shroud for Image Distortions*, conclude that the distortions in the Shroud image can indeed be explained by the irregular draping of the Shroud over the body at the time of image formation—but this contradicts the implication of the 3-D aspect of the Shroud that implies that the Shroud was not draped, but suspended tautly over the body!

So How Was the Image Produced?

All the recent scientific analyses point to some modification of the cellulose structure, whether by a scorch or by sensitization and “aging,” as the process that produced the image. It must be conceded, however, that there is not yet a satisfactory explanation of how the Shroud's image was made, much less a successful duplication. (Source: Drews, p. 21.)

SHOUTING STONES: ARTICLES & QUICK FACTS

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

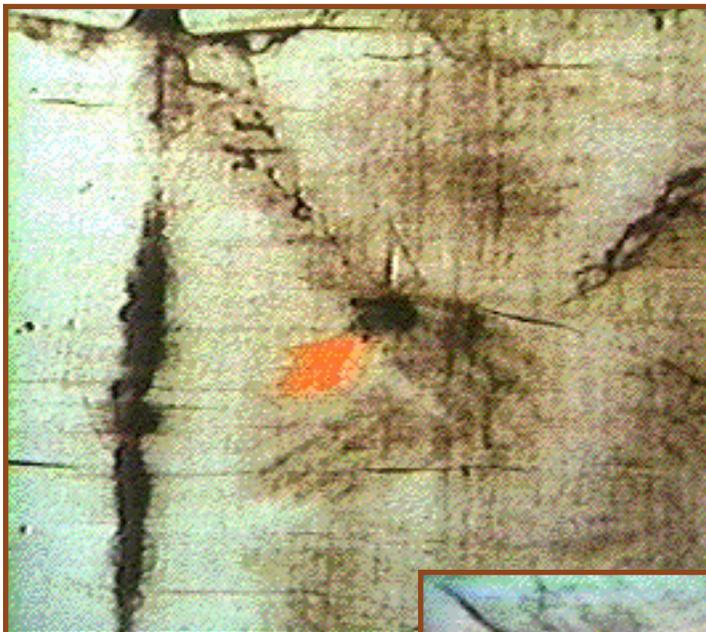
Drews' conclusion as to how the Shroud image was produced rules out neither a miraculous, first-century burst of light/heat, nor medieval, human artifice. The recording agent that produced the image on the Shroud of Turin—and the Shroud itself—remains...a mystery.

The Resurrection: The Most Important Evidence

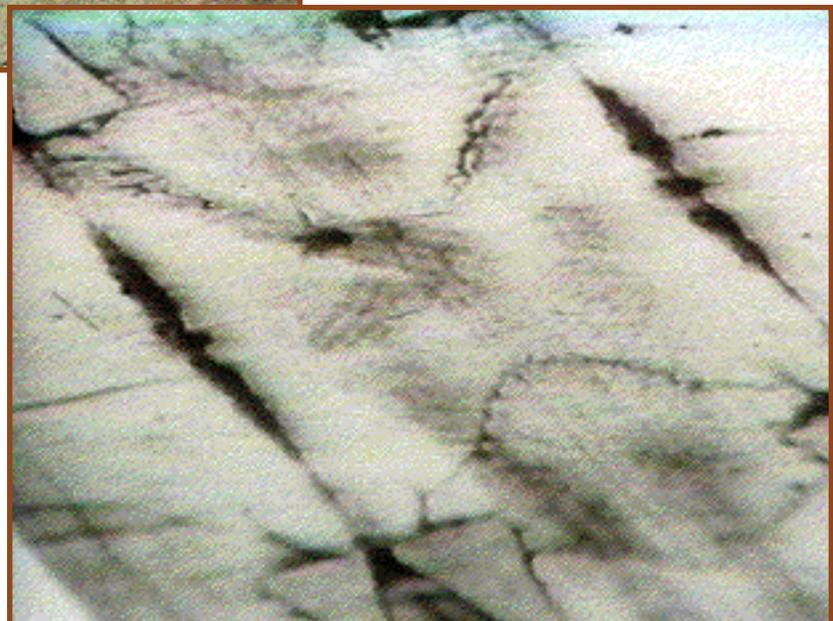
Taking all the evidence together, it is not too much to say that there is no historic incident better or more variously supported than the resurrection of Christ. —English New Testament scholar, Brooke Foss Wescott (quoted in McDowell (2))



Does the Shroud, like the Pietà reveal artistic distortions?



The Disturbingly Long Fingers of the Shroud Image (above and right)



CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

The resurrection of Jesus presents the same challenge to archaeology as once did the phenomenon of crucifixion: by definition, a crucified body would not stay on a cross nor a resurrected one in the tomb. How then can an archaeologists find artifactual evidence of either phenomenon. The skeletal remains of the crucified man discovered at Giv'at ha-Mivtar in 1968 provided the first artifactual evidence of crucifixion because of a fluke: ankle bones from which the burial party could not extract the Roman nail. But what artifact would the singularity of a bodily resurrection leave behind? Not much besides an empty tomb! The one possible exception is the unexplained Shroud of Turin. At present, however, the Shroud presents too many unanswered questions to provide even believers with settled confidence that it provides direct evidence for the resurrection. For that evidence, we must turn instead to the testimony of history and historical documents.

The most important evidence for the resurrection of Jesus is the eye-witness accounts recorded in the gospels and the writings of Paul. While it is always possible for such documents to have been written fraudulently, internal and external literary evidence weigh against the idea that the gospels were so written. The canonical accounts of the resurrection of Jesus fit too plausibly in their first-century Judean setting and agree in too many details to be written-off as lies or later forgeries. Furthermore, the testimony of subsequent history regarding the emergence and phenomenal growth of Christianity can best be explained by the truth of the gospel claims. It is inconceivable that the first disciples of Jesus could have been so galvanized into their heroic acts of spreading Christianity if Jesus had not really died, if He had died and not risen, or if He had died and His body been stolen. It is also impossible to believe that the adversarial Roman and Jewish authorities would have permitted a fraud regarding the body of Jesus to persist; the fraud would have been sought out and made public and the perpetrators condemned or banished in shame. It is also too much to believe that the rabid persecutor of Christians, Saul of Tarsus, would have become the champion of Christianity had he not really seen the risen Christ. There is not reason to doubt the gospel testimony of the resurrection of Jesus unless one presupposes that miracles can't happen. Even if one denies the possibility of a miraculous resurrection however, he is faced with the miracle of the historic rise of Christianity, a religion that cuts across the grain of human nature and that is based squarely on one essential fact: Jesus rose bodily from the dead!

Remains of the 2,000-year-old "Jesus Boat" found near Capernaum.



Photos by Roderick Graciano, 2008.

CORROBORATION FOR THE LIFE OF JESUS CHRIST

Postscript Regarding the Study of Biblical Archaeology

Does the study of biblical archaeology really have value? As we have considered various highlights of biblical archaeology and read related historical sources, we have found that archaeology can sometimes raise as many questions as it answers about a biblical text. Rarely has a debate over some Biblical question been conclusively settled by some new artifact found in a dig. Nevertheless, aside from the fascination we all have with discoveries of previously unknown or long-lost objects, archaeological discoveries have breathed three-dimensional life into familiar Bible stories for us. Not only can we mentally picture biblical characters and their environments more clearly, but archaeological data has also forced us to slow down and observe the biblical text more carefully than ever before. This is the great value of biblical archaeology: not the answering of all our questions, but the motivation to read carefully and discover what the Holy Text really says!

Biblical archaeology does something more for us besides: it greatly strengthens our Christian apologetic. While scholars of various lands and centuries have acknowledged the Bible as the most reliable account of ancient history in the world, skeptics persist in attempting to deny Scriptural accounts of places, people and events, even to the point of denying the existence of the central figure of all time, Jesus Christ. G. A. Wells in his *The Historical Evidence for Jesus* (Prometheus, Buffalo, 1988), writes:

My fundamental theses remain the same: namely, the earliest references to the historical Jesus are so vague that **it is not necessary to hold that he ever existed**; the rise of Christianity can, from the undoubtedly historical antecedents, be explained quite well without him; and reasons can be given to show why, from about AD 80 or 90, Christians began to suppose that he had lived in Palestine about fifty years earlier. (Emphasis mine.)

While Wells, in my opinion, offers no significant arguments for his theses, relying foolishly on discredited, higher critical, theories of biblical interpretation, it nevertheless behooves us to realize that writings like his are taken up by those predisposed to disbelieve, and we are bound to hear a friend or colleague at work parrot the ideas without



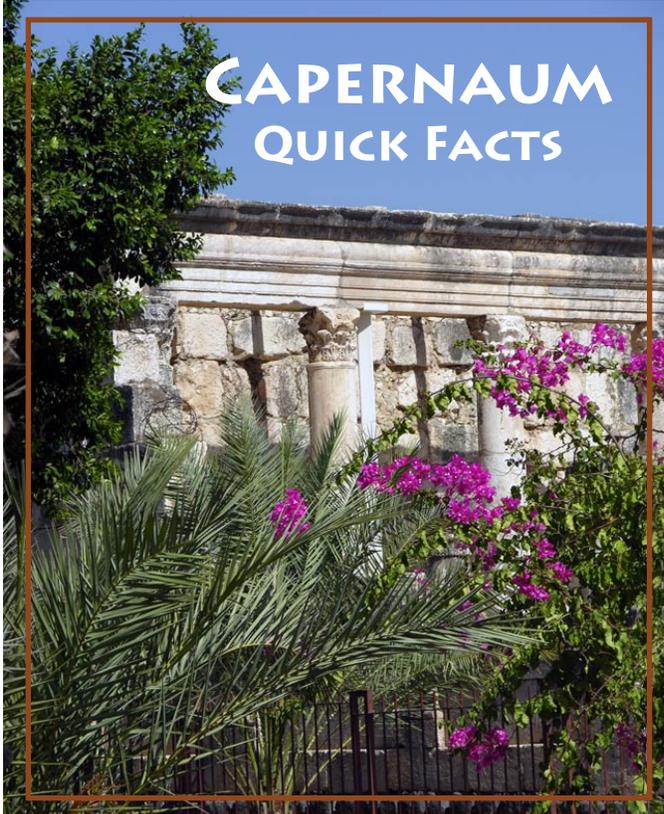
Mid-hull of the 2,000-year-old "Jesus Boat."

understanding the weakness of the scholarship. I am grateful that when our friends and neighbors tell us, "I've heard that Jesus didn't even really exist," we can politely rebut that slander with the data that history and archaeology so abundantly provide for us.

ILLEGALITIES IN THE JEWISH TRIAL OF JESUS CHRIST

according to Walter M. Chandler in
The Trial of Jesus From A Lawyer's Standpoint, Vol. 1

1. Law prohibited all proceedings by night (Part III, point. iv.)
2. Law permitted no testimony by an accomplice, i.e., Judas (III, i.)
3. No judge sitting alone could interrogate or pass judgment (III, ii.)
4. Private interrogations were not allowed (III, ii.)
5. Sanhedrin could not originate charges (III, iii.)
6. The indictment could not be indefinite (III, iii.)
7. Sanhedrin could not convene before morning sacrifice (III, v.)
8. Court could not convene on a Sabbath or eve of a Sabbath (III, vi.)
9. Death sentence could not be pronounced in a trial lasting less than two days (III, vii.)
10. A condemnation could not be founded on uncorroborated confession (III, viii.)
11. Accused could not be condemned by unanimous vote of the Sanhedrin, i.e., with no defender (III, ix.)
12. No death sentence could be passed outside of the official courtroom (III, x.)
13. Judge disqualified if an enemy of the accused (III, xi.)
14. Law required inquiry into possible defense (III, xii.)



City Name

Alternate city names and spellings include Καφαρναούμ (Capharnaum), Καπερναούμ (Capernaum), Cepharnome, Kefar Nahum, Kafer Nahum, Kefar Techumin, Kefar Tanhoum, Tell Hum, and Tell Hûm. The original Semitic name of כפר נחום (*Kfar Nahum*) means “village of Nahum.” Origen, in his *Commentary on the Gospel of John*, Book 10, ch. 6, curiously gives the meaning of *Capernaum* as “field of consolation,” perhaps based on the meaning of the name *Nahum*: “compassionate.”

Geographical Location

Nation of Israel, on the western shore of the Sea of Galilee. The present site has been identified largely by matching the ruins to literary accounts of Capernaum’s location. Theodosius, for example, placed Capernaum two miles from Eptapegon, modern et-Tabgha. Other writers of antiquity described it as

near the Jordan river, having the lake shore to the south and hills to the north. As to the character of the first-century location, Josephus (*Wars* 3.10.519) describes Capernaum as a place that “not only nourishes different sorts of autumnal fruit beyond men’s expectation, but preserves them a great while; it supplies men with the principal fruits, with grapes and figs continually during ten months of the year, and the rest of the fruit as they become ripe together, through the whole year; for besides the good temperature of the air, it is also watered from a most fertile fountain.” (Source: Loffreda.)

Habitation Time Frame

First mentioned in the Gospels, no remains earlier than Hellenistic have yet been studied on the site, although Professor John C. H. Laughlin reports the remains of an Early Bronze Age (3rd millennium BC) wall beneath first-century remains associated with the Roman Bathhouse. Passing through Hellenistic, Byzantine and Arabic periods, Capernaum was finally abandoned as a viable city after devastation by earthquake in the 11th century.

Strategic Importance

In Capernaum “commerce from Transjordan crossed the Jordan river just before that stream entered the Sea of Galilee. It was the border crossing between the territory of Herod Antipas and that of his brother Herod Philip. Thus both commerce and politics came through this narrow funnel and Christ’s message could be ideally broadcast from there ... Capernaum was also on the direct route from the Tetrarchy of Philip to Ptolemais, the major port of Galilee on the Mediterranean. And it had other advantages, for on both sides of the Sea of Galilee were very famous health resorts. The one near Tiberius is even mentioned by the Roman Pliny. Another was less than two miles from Capernaum.” (Source: Kelso.)

CAPERNAUM QUICK FACTS (CONT.)

Earliest Biblical Reference

Matthew 04.13 relating how Jesus left His previous hometown of Nazareth and “came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.”

Major Biblical Events

Healing of the centurion’s servant (Matthew 08.05-13); incident of the two-drachma tax (Matthew 17.24-27); teaching in the synagogue and healing of a demonized man (Mark 01.21-28); healing of Peter’s mother-in-law and of many others (Mark 01.29-34); healing and forgiveness of the paralytic (Mark 02.01-12); calling of Matthew Levi (Mark 02.14); teaching regarding who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Mark 09.33-37); Christ’s “Bread of Life” teaching (John 06.24-71).

Other Historical Events

Wise reports that “In the rabbinical literature several successes of the apostles are noticed, especially at Capernaum and Capersamia.” Flavius Josephus was once carried into Capernaum to recuperate when he was thrown from his horse (*Life* 403). Gibbon reports that “About thirty years before the first crusade, the arch bishop of Mentz, with the bishops of Utrecht, Bamberg, and Ratisbon, undertook this laborious journey from the Rhine to the Jordan; and the multitude of their followers amounted to seven thousand persons. At Constantinople, they were hospitably entertained by the emperor; but the ostentation of their wealth provoked the assault of the wild Arabs: they drew their swords with scrupulous reluctance, and sustained siege in the village of Capernaum, till they were rescued by the venal protection of the Fatimite emir.” (Sources: Gibbon; Wise.)

Curious Facts

Jesus predicted the Sodom-like demise of His “hometown,” and its corporate shame in the final day of judgment: “And you, Capernaum, will not be exalted to heaven, will you? You shall descend to Hades; for if the miracles had occurred in Sodom which occurred in you, it would have remained to this day. Nevertheless I say to you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgment, than for you.” (Mat 11.23,24). Capernaum lies in ruins today, and until recent archaeological analysis, students of the site could only say with John P. Newman, “As the history of its origin is obscure, so the time of its destruction is unknown.” Now we know from excavated buildings that Capernaum was temporarily abandoned in the mid-fourth century because of a devastating earthquake. The rebuilt Byzantine city stood until the seventh century when it was apparently ruined a second time by an earthquake. Five strata of Arabic settlements carry the history of Capernaum into the 11th century when a third devastation by earthquake left the city abandoned thereafter. Because Capernaum lay in ruins and forgotten for so long, it was identified by earlier explorers and geographers with the ruins of *Tell el Oreimeh* (Newman) or *Khan Minyeh* (Geikie (2); Smith), both sites lying slightly further south on the lake shore. (Source: Newman.)

Major Excavations and Explorations

Charles Wilson explored the ruins sufficiently in 1866 to note the remains of a synagogue. Franciscans purchased the site in 1894. German professors Kohl and Watzinger explored the site in 1905, uncovering the central and eastern naves of the Synagogue. From 1905 to 1914, Franciscan, Wendelin Hinterkeuser, worked to clear the rest of the Synagogue and its courtyard, and began work on the octagonal structure south of the Synagogue. The Octagonal Church with its mosaics was uncovered by Franciscan, Gaudentius Orfali, between 1921 and 1926. In 1968, Franciscan Fathers Vergilio Corbo and Stanislao Loffreda uncovered the traditional house of St. Peter associated with the Octagonal Church. In 1969-70, they completely excavated all the area between the Octagonal Church and Synagogue, and in 1975 they made further excavations in the eastern nave and porch of the Synagogue. (Source: Loffreda.)