Summary
The Gospels are by far the most important records of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ. Knowing that they are an accurate record of the events and teachings that they describe is important to any understanding of Jesus Christ, and of course to Christianity.

One way of deciding whether the accounts are accurate or fictional is to look at the description of things that can be established by other, independent means. One of several of these is to compare descriptions of people, places and events with descriptions of the same gained from archaeology. If the two correspond in detail this is good evidence that the account is an accurate and unaltered narrative of what actually happened.

The archaeology of the Gospels includes:-

• **Evidence of details of lifestyle in the area at the time.** The methods of preparing food, washing, building houses and the like are described in the Gospels. Archaeological evidence shows that this is an accurate reflection of the way that life was lived in the area at the time of Jesus.

• **Evidence of specific places.** The Gospels contain details of particular places in Judea and Galilee, and some of these places have been excavated. The precise correspondence of the Gospel accounts with the archaeological details shows that the accounts are accurate.

• **Evidence of particular people.** The Gospels mainly contain accounts of people who are insufficiently important to leave an archaeological record. However, a few characters in the Gospel have left evidence. These include Herod the Great, Caiaphas the High Priest and Pontius Pilate the Roman governor who finally sentenced Jesus to death.

The evidence is especially strong in Jerusalem where a substantial number of sites described in the Gospels have been excavated. The correspondence between these sites and the Gospel descriptions provides further evidence of the accuracy of the Gospels.

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Introduction
For the last two centuries or more there has been a general attack on the reliability of the Gospels as records of the words and actions of Jesus Christ. The general substance of this attack is the idea that the four Gospels were written late and are hence a poor witness to the events of the time of Jesus. In fact there is no direct evidence behind this claim; it is a supposition only. The real evidence suggests that the Gospels are, in fact, an accurate record. This paper looks at archaeological evidence, but it is worthwhile remembering that there are other kinds of evidence as well, and that all of them point to the accuracy of the Gospel accounts.

The reason for looking at this kind of evidence is that one can use archaeology to tell one what the world was like in the past. It is possible to obtain evidence of places, people and events from archaeology. This evidence has lain in the ground untouched for centuries and gives a realistic and unbiased picture of the time of Jesus. By comparing it with the Gospels one can see the accuracy of the record in the Gospels.

The archaeology of the New Testament period has several different components to it which bear on the Gospels. These are:-

• General Picture of Lifestyle
  The Gospels contain a considerable number of incidents where people are described carrying out day-to-day tasks in the way that they would have been carried out in New Testament times. The sower sows his field, fishermen fish from boats, water is fetched from the well and stored in jars. Some of these details are timeless and continued in the same way over the whole of the ancient world for many centuries. Others are more specific to Palestine in the time of Jesus. Archaeologists have excavated various villages and towns and have found examples of local industry, farming and household life. These finds match the descriptions in the Gospels.

• Places
  The Bible mentions specific places and occasionally gives a considerable amount of detail on the topography of those places. Thus one knows that Nain was a walled town (Luke 7:11,12 refers to the gate, which would only arise if the city was walled). Later excavations of Nain have shown that it was, indeed, walled. Capernaum, on the other hand, was not walled, although this fact is not mentioned in the Gospels. In Jerusalem there are details of various features of the city such as the Temple, the pools of Siloam and Bethesda and the Pavement (Lithostratos). The correct description of these places is especially significant as a large proportion of the buildings of the area were destroyed by the Romans in the Romano-Jewish war of 66-73AD.

• People
  The Gospels contain the names of a large number of people. Many of these are simply ordinary members of the public and there would be no reason for them to leave identifiable remains which would allow one to confirm their existence. However, some of the more important people have left inscriptions behind.

The correspondence between the Gospel records and the discoveries of archaeologists is generally very good. The existence of any such correspondence is confirmatory to the idea that the Gospels contain an accurate record. The correspondence suggests that the writers of the Gospels had extremely good sources who had exceptional memories of what they had witnessed.
The Gospels give descriptions of life and customs in Galilee at the time of Jesus. These descriptions are shown to have an accurate match with Archaeology. The Gospels give accurate descriptions of the places in which the events they describe took place. Some of the people who appear in the Gospel have left inscriptions or other evidence in the archaeological record.
Archaeology and the Gospels

The General Picture - Life in Galilee
One feature of the Gospels is that they describe the general conditions of life in Galilee and Judea at the time of Jesus. This includes the habits of ordinary people of the time with their ways of working and living. A good deal of this can be seen in archaeological discoveries from the time. One can then check that the descriptions in the New Testament are consistent with the general picture of life in the first century in the area covered by the Gospels.

Several villages in Galilee from the time of Jesus have been excavated by archaeologists. These villages show the general construction of houses in the area, the general way of life in these villages and occasionally confirm the existence of places that Jesus visited.

For example, consider the village of Gamla which was situated in the Golan and not far from the Sea of Galilee. Gamla doesn’t appear in the New Testament, but it is an almost unique archaeological site in the area and is a microcosm of the period, like a large time capsule. Gamla was built by Herod the Great shortly before the birth of Jesus and grew prosperous under the Herodian dynasty. However, in 66AD the population of the area revolted against Roman rule and there was a war. Gamla was besieged and overrun by the Romans in 67AD, 37 years after the resurrection. It was completely destroyed and has never been rebuilt. What we have is a site which can be guaranteed to be a first century Galilean village, typical of many that Jesus would have visited.

The remains of Gamla which have been excavated include details of the way that the house roofs were constructed. Basalt slabs were laid on stone cross-beams and caulked with clay to form a waterproof roof. This sheds light on a detail of the description of a house in the account of the paralysed man who was let down through the roof to be healed by Jesus.

In this account a paralysed man is brought on a stretcher to see Jesus in Capernaum with the hope that Jesus will heal him. When they reach the house where Jesus is teaching they find that there are so many people in the house, and such a large crowd gathered outside that it was impossible for the stretcher to be brought even as far as the door. The men carrying the stretcher therefore took the man up onto the roof, made a hole in it, and lowered the man to ground in front of Jesus. The action of lowering the man is described in the Luke account: -

but finding no way to bring him in, because of the crowd, they went up on the roof and let him down with his bed through the tiles into the midst before Jesus.  

(Lk 5:19)

The gospel speaks of tiles being used on the roof. This detail was considered doubtful because most houses of the time had a roof of brushwood covered with clay to make them watertight. Now we know that, at the time of Jesus, houses in areas where there was a considerable amount of Basalt used stone slabs on the roof. These would be the tiles described in Luke’s Gospel.
First Century Synagogues

This picture shows the remains of a synagogue in Chorazin. This synagogue is from the second century AD although it is possible that it is from the late first century.

Hardly any custom-built synagogues from the time of Jesus have been excavated; the main one is the synagogue in Gamla. Other examples found from the time are temporary synagogues converted from other buildings.

The synagogues we know were large enough for a considerable number of people and tended to line up with the direction of Jerusalem.

Thus the Gospel record contains a detail that would not be well known in the ancient world away from the Basalt areas of Galilee. Capernaum is within this region with its particular geology and house construction.

Another building in the ruins of Gamla is the synagogue. This is one of only a handful of first century synagogues discovered and it helps to give a picture of synagogue design of the time. A similar synagogue has been discovered at Chorazin, but from shortly after the Romano-Jewish war and rooms converted from their normal function to serve as synagogues have been found at Herodium and Masada. The full structure of the first century synagogue at Capernaum has never been uncovered; nevertheless the features of the two custom-built synagogues at Gamla and Chorazin allow one to have a very good idea of what a first century synagogue would be like.

The Galilee Boat

Among these general finds is a boat whose remains were found in the mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee. Enough of the boat remains for the hull to be fully reconstructed, and one can see what kind of boat was in use at the time of Jesus. Jesus probably never used this boat, but it would have been afloat when he sailed the lake, and he may very well have passed it in another similar boat.

Capernaum

Capernaum is a town which has a direct connection with the Gospels. This is the small town to which Jesus returned very many times, and seems to have become the base from which he set out on his journeys around Galilee to heal, teach and proclaim the Gospel.

A small area of central Capernaum has been excavated. This contains two complete “Insulae” (squares surrounded by streets on all sides and containing houses, other buildings and courtyards), several partial insulae, and a synagogue. The area was close to a Roman road which formed a main route in the area (the Via Maris - way of the sea). The site was near the border between the region ruled by

This boat was discovered in 1986 in the mud at the bottom of the Sea of Galilee during a drought. The boat is now kept in a museum at Kibbutz Ginosar, close to where it was discovered. Part of the boat has decayed away, but enough remains to see its size and how it was built. Pottery found in the boat was dated between 50BC and 50AD; radiocarbon dating of the wood is consistent with this but less precise.

The boat was carvel built (the planks met edge to edge without any overlap) and the cross-members only went part way across (a modern boat would have frames which went right across the boat). It could be rowed by four men; it could also be sailed. It was large enough to carry up to 15 men, including the crew. The boat had a flat bottom which would allow it to come close to land without touching the lake bed.
The Synagogue in Capernaum

Several incidents concerning Jesus took place in Capernaum. One of these concerns the healing of a Centurion’s servant. The account appears in Luke 7:2-10. Verse 5 of the chapter tells us that the centurion had paid for a synagogue to be built in the town. As the centurion was still living in Capernaum, at the time of the miracle the synagogue must have been fairly new. It was thus built in the 20s AD.

Among the finds is a white marble synagogue, probably built in the fourth century AD. This was not built when Jesus proclaimed the Gospel in Capernaum.

However, underneath the white synagogue there is a foundation made of black basalt which doesn’t quite line up with the fourth century building. The black basalt building also shows every sign of having been a synagogue and has been dated to the early first century by finds of coins in a trench dug into it through the floor of the fourth century synagogue. The archaeological evidence is consistent with the synagogue having been built at the time indicated in the reference in Luke.

This picture shows a detail of the synagogue in Capernaum. The white stone at the top is a fourth century construction. The foundation of the first century synagogue is seen in the black stone layer below. This is the foundation of the synagogue in which Jesus taught.

Herod Antipas and the region ruled by Herod Philip, his brother. There would thus be a customs post to collect excise duty on goods crossing the border and probably a small military garrison to protect the collection of taxes. The harbour area has been discovered and there was a synagogue at the time of Jesus. The houses are built of black basalt and have been dated from coins found in cracks between the paving stones in their floors. The site was occupied from the early 2nd century BC.

One of the buildings was considered to be the house of Peter in the middle of the second century. Peter had a house in Capernaum where Jesus stayed sometimes, and if this identification is correct the house may have been the one where the man was let down through the roof. A church has been built on the site, but it is possible that the identification is incorrect.
Archaeology and the Gospels

Stone Water Jars
The account in John’s Gospel of the wedding feast at Cana in Galilee contains a small description of the water jars used for ritual washing.

Now there were six stone water jars there for the Jewish rites of purification, each holding twenty or thirty gallons. (John 2:6)

This verse preserves a small detail of first century life. It is the keeping of water in jars made out of stone.

Many such stone jars have been excavated from first century houses in the area; they are characteristic of Jewish buildings in Judea and Galilee at the time of Jesus. The reason for the choice of the expensive and difficult to make stone jars was that under Jewish law the stone jars did not become ritually unclean if some unclean object fell into them, while earthenware ones did and would then have to be destroyed. This is different from the rest of the Mediterranean where water was stored in earthenware jars called pithoi; these would be much cheaper and would help to keep the water cool.

The memory of stone water jars was specific to the time and place. The existence of such a detail in the Gospel of John shows that even details of this gospel fit in with what was actually there on the ground.

The Jewish War
This war was box fought between the Romans and a rebel army of Jews and Samaritans from its start in 66AD to a conclusion at the fall of the desert fortress Masada in 73AD. Initially the Jewish rebels were successful and drove the Romans out of the inland area and it took four legions to defeat them.

The first year of the war consisted of the defeat of a Roman legion which marched on Jerusalem without sufficient manpower to protect its lines of communication. Command was then given to Vespasian and the Roman forces increased to four legions. Vespasian conducted a successful campaign in Galilee, but as he turned his forces towards Jerusalem events overtook him as Nero was displaced from power. After various other claimants were crowned Vespasian was declared Emperor and Titus, his son, took over command. The climax of the war was in 70AD when Jerusalem was captured and completely destroyed by the Romans. This broke the back of the rebels’ resistance, but mopping up operations continued for three more years. The final action was the siege of Masada. When the Romans finally breached the walls the defenders committed suicide rather than be taken captive.

The inhabitants of rebel areas of Judea and Galilee were taken into captivity by the Romans and sold as slaves in Egypt and Asia Minor. The war brought a complete end to Jewish rule in Judea and Galilee.

The archaeological evidence of life in first century Galilee seems rather non-specific, but it provides more information than one might think. The archaeology produces a picture of the general lifestyle of the area in the first century and even the remains of a town where Jesus walked, taught and healed. It is worth remembering that the world of Jesus was lost in the Jewish war of 66-73 AD. After 70AD this world was swept away. Much of the Jewish population was sent away from the land, the buildings were frequently destroyed and those that weren’t were often left derelict. When the area was resettled it was by Greeks; they didn’t even speak the same language as the earlier population and certainly wouldn’t have known of the customs and manner of life of the time of Jesus. Some towns, like Capernaum, were not destroyed, but the effect of the Jewish war was to marginalise the area so that it became even less well known than before. Certainly distinctive details of life, such as the stone water jars, disappear from the archaeological record.

Vespasian, the general commanding the Roman legions at the start of the Roman advance, and Emperor at the end of the war, was so proud of the destruction of Judea that he had it struck onto the coinage. Various coins with the caption “Judea Capta” - “Judea is Captive” - were struck and issued by Vespasian and his two sons who succeeded him as emperors. It announced to the whole world that Judea was in the hands of the Roman Empire.
The point is that by about 100AD there would have been no-one left alive who could remember the pre-war world of Judea and Galilee at the time of Jesus. Details of architecture, of specific places, of customs and even of the language spoken would have been completely lost. If one was making up a Gospel later on then one would be unable to produce an accurate description of these things. This is where archaeology comes in. We know more of Judea at the time of Jesus now than anyone living in 120AD, say, could possibly have done. And we can see that the Gospels describe even quite small details with accuracy.

The Sychar Monument

Another incident where there is a detailed connection between the Gospel record and archaeology is the occasion where Jesus has a conversation with a woman near a well in Samaria.

5 So he came to a town of Samaria called Sychar, near the field that Jacob had given to his son Joseph.
6 Jacob’s well was there; so Jesus, wearied as he was from his journey, was sitting beside the well. It was about the sixth hour.
7 A woman from Samaria came to draw water. Jesus said to her, “Give me a drink.” (John 4:5-7)

This refers to an incident which occurred in Samaria near the city of Sychar. Sychar is the New Testament name for Shechem, a site which is now covered by the city of Nablus; New Testament Sychar was at or near the site of Old Testament Shechem.

The incident occurred at Jacob’s Well, a site that has been known for some time. A church has been built over it, but in spite of this some details remain:-

The woman said to him, “Sir, you have nothing to draw water with, and the well is deep. (John 4:11)

This particular well is very deep, 125 feet to be precise. However, there is another detail. Jesus continues to speak to the woman for a while and one of the points that he makes is in v24 where he says:-

God is spirit, and those who worship him must worship in spirit and truth. (John 4:24)

This is an echo from a passage in the book of Joshua.

Now therefore fear the LORD and serve him in sincerity and in faithfulness. (Joshua 24:14)

This is slightly different in English translation, but the two sayings are effectively the same in the original languages. Effectively Jesus is quoting from the speech made by Joshua.
Why did Jesus use this example? According to Joshua 24:1 Joshua gave this speech to the leaders of Israel near Shechem, the same place at which the woman went to the well. And Joshua erected a monument to remind Israel of his words:

And Joshua wrote these words in the Book of the Law of God. And he took a large stone and set it up there under the terebinth that was by the sanctuary of the LORD. (Joshua 24:26)

An ancient stone monument stands near to the well at Sychar; it is usually supposed that this was the stone that Joshua raised, although some scholars suggest that this is not the case but that the monument was raised by one of the Judges. However, the genuineness of the monument doesn’t matter. What matters is that the monument was there at the time when Jesus talked with the woman and the people believed that it was a monument raised by Joshua. The point is that Samaritans didn’t use any other books of the Old Testament than the first five. The woman wouldn’t know most of the Old Testament, but she would know the speech of Joshua at Shechem because she came from near Sychar and there was a memorial stone close to her home.

This is a connection with archaeology which is so intricate that it is not within the bounds of possibility that anyone invented it. During the second century when the inventions are supposed to have been made no-one would have been likely to remember that there was a monument to Joshua’s speech close to the woman’s home and that the woman would know only this element of the Old Testament.

The account must refer to an event that really took place, in the right place and at the right time. What we have is very clear evidence that the Gospel record is accurate.

**People**

Besides the places and events that are recorded in the Gospels, some of the people who appear in the Gospels have left behind traces of themselves. As one would expect these tend to be the more important people in terms of the politics of the time; less important people tend not to leave monuments, buildings or inscriptions.

*Herod the Great*

Herod the Great ruled Judea from 37BC to 4BC. He founded a dynasty which continued until after 70AD when it became irrelevant due to the destruction of Judea in the Jewish War. Herod the Great was King of the Jews at the time of Jesus’ birth, but died soon after. His kingdom was divided between his sons, although Archelaus was such a bad ruler that he was replaced by a Roman governor. The Herod mostly mentioned in the Gospels was Herod Antipas, son of Herod the Great and tetrarch of Galilee.

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**The Tomb of Herod the Great**

Herod’s tomb was discovered in 2007 after a protracted search. Herod was buried at Herodium in a tomb on the side of Herodium, which he had constructed as a fortress and palace. The tomb is on the side away from the main entrance to the fortress.

The tomb was built in classical style with a large plinth and a colonnade. It has been despoiled and the bones of Herod removed from it.
Herod was a great builder and the remains of many of the buildings that he commissioned are still visible. His main building programme included:

- **Cities:** Caesarea Maritima, Sebaste (Samaria rebuilt), Antipatris, Phasaelis, Archelais. These cities were rebuilt by Herod the Great in grand style and frequently dedicated to Herod’s Roman patrons. Sepphoris and Tiberias were built by Herod Antipas and Banias was built as Caesarea Philippi by Herod Philip.

- **Fortresses:** Alexandrium, Cyprus, Hyrcanus, Herodium, Machaerus, Malatha and Masada. These were built as considerable military installations and required great effort to reduce them in the Jewish war. However, they also contained palaces of some luxury. Herod would have been able to withstand a siege in comfort in any of these.

- **Palaces:** Herod built palaces in most of his fortresses. He also built separate palaces in Jerusalem, Jericho and Caesarea.

- **Religious Buildings:** Herod rebuilt the Temple in Jerusalem and the tomb of the patriarchs in Hebron. The tomb of the patriarchs is still in use as a building in essentially its original form.

The existence of these monuments provides a strong witness to the existence of the Herodian dynasty.

**Pontius Pilate**
Another well-known character from the Gospels is Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor who finally sentenced Jesus to death. Pilate is known from Roman historians; he is mentioned by Tacitus, who records that he was governor of Judea at the time of the crucifixion of Jesus, by Philo of Alexandria and by Josephus.
However, more spectacular evidence for Pontius Pilate comes from an inscription discovered in Caesarea. This inscription is damaged and part of the text is missing, but it is quite clear that the name “Pontius Pilate” is inscribed on it along with the title “Prefect of Judea”.

Caiaphas the High Priest
The third example of a person from the Gospels is Caiaphas the high priest. Caiaphas took part in some of the trials and legal processes that condemned Jesus to death; he carries a major part of the responsibility for the crucifixion of Jesus. In the case of Caiaphas we have more than just an inscription and a set of coins; we have an ossuary containing his bones.

In Judea at the time of Jesus the custom was to leave a body in a cave tomb until it had decomposed. The bones were then placed in an ossuary and the tomb would be available for someone else. The ossuary in question is rather splendid example with involved carvings on one side; one would expect it to belong someone important. It has a name written on the back and on one end. The name is “Joseph bar Caiaphas”. This is the name by which Caiaphas is known to Josephus, a Jewish writer of about 50 years later. Most scholars agree that this ossuary contained the bones of Joseph Caiaphas the high priest. There was also the body of a woman in the box, and of three small children. All of them have now been reburied, but the woman was probably Caiaphas’ wife and it seems that three of his children died young.

Jerusalem
The last events of Jesus’ life before the crucifixion took place in Jerusalem. There has been a considerable amount of archaeological activity in Jerusalem over the years and we now have a fairly good idea of what it was like at the time of Jesus [see map opposite]. The Gospels contain a picture of Jerusalem as it was at the time of Jesus’ ministry in the late 20s AD. Ten years after Jesus, around 40AD, Herod Agrippa I carried out a major building programme and the city was considerably rebuilt and extended. The Gospels reflect the Jerusalem of 30 AD rather precisely.

The map on the next page shows Jerusalem as it was at the time of Jesus. The labels show sites mentioned in the Gospels that have been identified by archaeologists. Most of these sites have been excavated, at least in part, and it is clear that the descriptions in the Gospels are precisely accurate.

Some of the locations of events at the time of Jesus are slightly speculative. The most likely site of the tomb of Jesus and of Golgotha, the place where Jesus was crucified, are in the place now covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, but other sites have been proposed. The site of the judgement was once thought to have been in the Antonia tower, to the north of the Temple precincts, but there is a modern consensus that judgement was given from the palace of Herod the Great and a suitable feature exists there.
Now there is in Jerusalem by the Sheep Gate a pool, in Aramaic called Bethesda, which has five roofed colonnades.

(John 5:2)

This passage mentions a pool in Jerusalem with five porticoes where people could go to be healed. Such pools are typical of the sanctuaries of Asklepios, a pagan god of healing. 19th century critics insisted that no such pagan site could have existed in Jerusalem, especially not close to the Temple where John places it. They argued that this was an example of a glaring error in John’s Gospel.
Then, late on in the 19th century, the pools were discovered in the right area. More recent excavations have shown that the pools were there at the time of Jesus and that they were destroyed 40 years later in the sack of Jerusalem.

On the basis of their excavations, archaeologists have reconstructed the pool of Bethesda. It fits the Bible picture, two pools surrounded by five porticoes.

Interestingly, the critics have not given up on this one. Having seen that the pool existed the next comment is that it couldn’t have been called Bethesda, but must have had some other name. However, the Copper Scroll (3Q) contains the name “Bethesdaim” - Bethesda with the Hebrew dual ending. This would match the pool of Bethesda found by the archaeologists and described in John’s Gospel.

Upper Rooms
The descriptions of houses in Jerusalem includes the detail that those houses had a large upstairs room which was used for public events rather than as a private family room.

The first of these upper rooms is the one in which the Last Supper took place.

11 and tell the master of the house, ‘The Teacher says to you, Where is the guest room, where I may eat the Passover with my disciples?’
12 And he will show you a large upper room furnished; prepare it there.” (Luke 22:11,12)

Notice the description of the room. It was large, and it was upstairs. The presence of a large room indicates a large house, so there is a picture of a middle or upper class family in Jerusalem having a large upstairs reception room in their house.

The accounts of the examination of Jesus’ case in the High Priest’s house shows a similar architecture.

And they led Jesus to the high priest. And all the chief priests and the elders and the scribes came together. (Mark 14:53)

Here Jesus has been brought to the High Priest’s house. The room in which the questioning of Jesus took place must be a large room, because it has so many people in it. Not only were there the people listed in Mark’s account, but there would also be people guarding the prisoner and the Priests and there would have been witnesses.

The account goes on to say:-

And as Peter was below in the courtyard... (Mark 14:66)

Here we read that Peter was below Jesus, in the courtyard. This means that Jesus must have been in an upstairs room. Again, we find that large houses in Jerusalem had large upstairs rooms.
We can therefore see that it was a common feature of houses in Jerusalem that they had a large upper room (presumably if the family concerned was wealthy enough to afford one). This is a detail in the architecture of a well-to-do house which is supported by archaeological finds.

The Wöhl Museum in Jerusalem contains a row of houses from the time of Jesus; these houses were destroyed when the Romans finally captured Jerusalem in 70AD and destroyed it. At least one of the houses belonged to a priestly family as a weight marked with the name of such a family has been found in it. The largest house in the row was the “Palatial Mansion” which shows clear evidence of a large upper room. This has a large number of baths for ritual cleansing and may very well have been a priestly house as well, especially as it was close to the house of another priestly family. However, there is no particular reason to suppose that this is the actual house to which Jesus was taken after his arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane.

The Praetorium
The trial of Jesus before Pontius Pilate, such as it was, took place in the Praetorium, the governor’s residence in Jerusalem (John 18:28). By comparing ancient writings one can confirm that this was the palace built by Herod the Great. The sentence was announced outside, because the priests would not enter the building. The place where Pilate gave judgement is named in John’s Gospel:—

So when Pilate heard these words, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judgment seat at a place called The Stone Pavement, and in Aramaic Gabbatha. (John 19:13)

The name “Gabbatha” is an Aramaic word which means “Raised place” or “Ridge”. The top of the pitched roof of a house might be referred to by this word. The place of judgement should be a prominence of some kind.

The other name, “Lithostratos”, is a Greek word which means “stone pavement”. For a long time this was wrongly identified with a stone pavement discovered near the Temple Mount which, it turns out, was from the time of the Emperor Hadrian. More recent discoveries indicate that the real pavement was part of the palace of Herod the Great, near the modern “Citadel”. This place has some Roman steps which originally led into the palace; there are signs of a Herodian or Roman stone pavement next to a raised outcrop of rock. This is almost certainly where Jesus was finally condemned to crucifixion by Pilate.

The Crucifixion of Jesus
We also have evidence about the process of crucifixion. A tomb discovered at Giv’at HaMivtar near Jerusalem contained, among other things, the bones of a crucifixion victim. His heel bones had been pierced by nails. One of the nails had bent and could not therefore be withdrawn; it was thus
buried with the body. The presence of the skeleton of a crucified man in a family grave shows that the victim could be released to others for burial just as the body of Jesus was.

The marks of the nails in the bones shows how the victim was attached to the cross. Nails had been used to fasten both hands and feet. The feet were fastened through the heel-bones and the arms appear to have been fastened to the cross with the palms towards the wood.

Several places have been suggested for the site of the crucifixion, but the most likely of these appears to be under the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Excavations alongside the church show that at the time of Jesus it was outside the city walls and that it was in a recently closed quarry. It was close to the walls of the city, however, which matches the text of John 19:20. The place of crucifixion would have been on a stone outcrop of inferior quality; the tombs were nearby, having recently been cut in the walls of the former quarry. Sadly, the alterations to the site made to build the Church of the Holy Sepulchre and the various alterations made to it since have effectively removed all detail of the site and a visit will not give any impression of the area at the time of Jesus.

**The Tomb of Jesus**

We know what a first century tomb looked like; many have been excavated. Typically the tomb took the form of a cave, inside which was a shelf on which the body was laid. The tomb could be sealed by rolling a circular stone across the entrance. The mass of the stone would be very great; a conservative estimate for the weight of such a stone is over two tonnes. This matches the kind of detail of the tomb given in the Gospels:-

> 46 And Joseph bought a linen shroud, and taking him down, wrapped him in the linen shroud and laid him in a tomb that had been cut out of the rock. And he rolled a stone against the entrance of the tomb. (Mark 15:46)

> 2 And very early on the first day of the week, when the sun had risen, they went to the tomb.

> 3 And they were saying to one another, “Who will roll away the stone for us from the entrance of the tomb?”

> 4 And looking up, they saw that the stone had been rolled back—it was very large.

(Mark 16:2-4)

The details of the tomb of Jesus given in the Gospels match the details of many other tombs found in the area from the same time. The existence of details of this kind shows that the narratives of the death and burial of Jesus were consistent with events and actions that took place in Jerusalem at the time of Jesus.
Archaeology and the Gospels

Time Line

Galilee
- Rule from Syria

Judea

- Jewish War

Agrippa II
- Roman Procurators

Agrippa I

- Roman Prefects

Herod Antipas

- Ministry of Jesus

Archelaus

- Start of Jesus' Ministry

Herod the Great

- Birth of Jesus

10 BC

BC/AD

50 AD

80 AD

Fire of Rome

2 Timothy

Acts written

Galatians

2 Peter

Epistles written

Gospels written

Ministry of Jesus

Start of Jesus' Ministry

Resurrection of Jesus
Conclusion
There is much more archaeology with a bearing on the New Testament; this article is intended only to provide a survey.

The picture of the New Testament world found in the Gospels fits in with the general picture we have from excavations such as the ones at Gamla and Capernaum. This continues to precise details, even concerning places and customs that disappeared completely and finally in the Jewish war of 66 - 73 AD and were forgotten within a generation. The people who are referred to in the Gospel fit what we know of them from other historical documents and from archaeology: names, dates and titles all fit. We even have the remains of some of them.

The most detailed correspondence between archaeological finds and the Gospels is in Jerusalem. The Gospels refer to places which have been excavated and we can see where various events happened.

The important conclusion is not only that the Gospels have a general picture of the time, but that they are accurate down to quite small details. This is especially true of the trials, the crucifixion and the burial of Jesus. All the details of the Gospel accounts fit in very precisely with one another and with the archaeological record. The accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus are accurately remembered and recorded, down to tiny details. Our Gospel records are Gospel Truth.

What Archaeology Shows
Archaeology shows a detailed correspondence between Palestine in the time of Jesus and the Gospel records.

This does not, in itself, prove that the Gospels are a message from God. However, it is consistent with the idea that the Gospels provide an accurate record of what Jesus said and did. The evidence shows:-

• The Gospels were written at a time when people still knew in great detail what ancient Judea and Galilee were like at the time of Jesus. This shows that the Gospels were written well within the living memory of the time of Jesus.

• It would have been exceedingly difficult for anyone to make up stories about the actions or sayings of Jesus and include such accurate detail of the place and time.

• Many of the points of accuracy are details. If the copying of the Gospels was wildly inaccurate then much of the topological detail would have been lost.

There are two theories as to how the Gospels were written. One of them is that the Gospels were written by those who had access to eyewitnesses and are substantially accurate. The other is that the Gospels were invented by communities of people writing much later and are inaccurate. Archaeology supports the picture of an accurate document written by those close to the original events.

Gamla - Town of Jesus’ Time
Gamla was built in the reign of Herod the Great and occupied until it was destroyed in 67AD in the Jewish War. It was never re-occupied so it forms a picture of life at the time of Jesus. The remains include oil-presses, a synagogue and houses from the time, as well as defensive walls. The local stone is of the same kind as that found at Capernaum and one can see that the houses were constructed in a manner consistent with what is described in Luke’s Gospel.

The picture shows the site of the ancient city of Gamla. It was sited on the hill in the centre of the picture. The Romans assaulted along the ridge.

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