

“Now as they came out, they found a man of Cyrene, Simon by name. Him they compelled to bear His cross.”

Matthew 27:32

Biblical Archaeology (part 2)

Theme: Biblical studies are enriched by archaeology.

Review of Lesson 24

Archaeologists have discovered many things about cultures that existed in Bible times and about the Bible itself. Whereas we do not need proof that the Bible is true or accurate, it is sometimes good to know that true science and the Bible agree. The unearthing of the Rosetta Stone, the tells at Hazor and Jericho, and the rediscovery of Hezekiah's tunnel, are but a few examples of how archaeology has helped broaden our understanding of His Word. The study of archaeology enriches our understanding and is a noble profession for young Christians to pursue.



Introduction

This lesson will consider archaeological findings that pertain mostly to New Testament times and that may be in today's news.

Dead Sea Scrolls

The period between the Old and New Testaments was a struggle in the Jewish community as they coped with a lack of new prophets from the Lord and with Greek and Roman rule. Different religious parties emerged, such as the Sadducees and Pharisees, with whom Jesus and the Apostles often contended. Another group was called the Essenes; they are not mentioned in the Bible, but they have had a long-term influence upon Bible believers. They existed primarily from the second century BC to around 70 AD; many lived in the Judean wilderness near the Dead Sea. There is good and bad news connected with this group that existed in Jesus' time.

The good news concerning the Essenes relates to a major archaeological find in 1946-47. An Arab shepherd was reportedly searching for his lost sheep when he entered a cave near the Dead Sea. There he discovered a collection of pottery, Picture 1, some of which contained ancient Hebrew writings, Picture 2. One find was a scroll 24 feet long containing the book of Isaiah. Later archaeologists searched many caves in the area and 11 caves near a place called Qumran had scrolls in them, Pictures 3-4. Fragments of nearly every book of the Old Testament (OT) were found. These were great archaeological discoveries and the texts represent the oldest surviving witness to the OT (second century BC). These ancient documents are almost identical to the Hebrew text used for our Old Testament. The absolute accuracy of the OT text was supported by these finds. It appears the residents at Qumran, or at least those living in the caves, were Essenes. The Essenes were excellent protectors of the OT. It may be that the scrolls were placed there as a

secret hiding place to preserve them prior to the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

The bad news is the Essenes were a sect that had many strange beliefs (men only, lived in the wilderness in communes, no marriage, sold all they had, totally separated from society, etc.). They were a community that wrestled with how to be faithful to the Law of Moses. They eventually died or were killed. The Essenes had their own writings in these caves (not OT documents) which were based upon their

beliefs. Their writings were not inspired by God and do not reflect the later truth revealed by Jesus Christ.

Discussion: Archaeology can unearth real items which give a false message, such as the Essenes' writings found near Qumran. How can a person know what to believe? (Thoughts: believe the Bible and read all other writings skeptically. God has preserved His Word and it is complete; do not be tricked by supposed lost books of the Bible.)

Bible Truth

The Temple

The original Temple was built in hilly country in Jerusalem, on Mt. Moriah. To build on hilly ground it was first necessary to level the site by constructing a huge platform out of rock. The original platform was about 861 feet long and wide, leveling-off the rounded stone mount that existed (this platform is called the "Temple Mount"). The platform provided a level base for the Temple and all the associated facilities. The original Temple was built by Solomon in the 10th century BC and destroyed by the Babylonians in 586 BC. Ezra rebuilt the Temple on the exact same spot, Ezra 3-6. Then in the first century BC, Herod the Great extended the platform and rebuilt the Temple after the former one deteriorated. One of Herod's walls is the place tourists visit today, called the Wailing Wall; it is sacred to Jews as a place of prayer, Picture 5.

Herod's Temple was completely destroyed by Titus in 70 AD. On the Temple Mount today there is no Jewish Temple, in fact, the Temple Mount is controlled by the Muslims who have built a mosque and a building called the Dome of the Rock there, Picture 6. The original Temple was either built on the rock where this

Dome now stands or over another rock visible in the Temple Mount. The Bible teaches that in the future a new Temple will be rebuilt prior to (or during) the Tribulation. Will the Temple Mount contain both the new Temple and the Dome of the Rock during the Tribulation or will the Dome not exist then? No one knows for sure.

Erastus Stone/pavement

Some minor Biblical characters can add to our understanding and appreciation of the Word. One such character is Erastus. In the book of Romans, which was written in Corinth, Paul sends greetings from various people including Erastus. "**Erastus, the treasurer of the city, greets you...**" (Romans 16:23). It seems He was the equivalent of the city's director of public works. It was likely the same Erastus that gave up his position as a city director to travel with Paul (Acts 19:22). At the end of Paul's ministry he mentions that Erastus was back in Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20). One of the intriguing discoveries at Corinth is a pavement, of which 62 feet are still preserved. This pavement is inscribed, "Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [this pavement] at his own expense," Picture 7. Aedileship refers to a Roman official's position as

director of public works. This is most likely the Erastus that Paul mentions (not a common name then). This one section of pavement has been preserved for 2000 years and provides evidence of the reliability of Scripture.

Discussion: Suppose you worked in a museum and a stone statue was brought to you—a statue representing a god worshiped long ago. Should you destroy it in accordance with Deut. 7:2,5? (Thoughts: do not destroy it, it is not your property. Deut. 7 was not written for you to follow, but I Cor. 8:4 states, “... an idol is nothing in the world...” This stone image can be used to teach about the foolishness of idol worship.)

Simon and Sons

Jesus was mocked, beaten, and a crown of thorns pushed into His head. Then He had to carry His Cross to Golgotha, the place of the skull. As He went, the Roman soldiers made a man named Simon of Cyrene carry the Cross, Matt 27:32. Simon (a Jewish name) was most likely in Jerusalem for the Passover, like many other Jews. Simon was the father of Alexander and Rufus (Mark 15:21). In 1941 a sealed tomb near Jerusalem revealed its secrets. There were eleven ossuaries (coffins) in the tomb, one had the names “Alexander and Simon” painted on the front and inscribed on the back were the words: “Simon/Alexander [son] of Simon.” The Jewish custom was to let a dead person lie in a cave for about a year, allowing the flesh to decompose, and then to place the bones in an ossuary. This ossuary was for the bones of Simon and his son Alexander.

The tomb did not contain the name of Simon’s other son Rufus, but his name does occur in Rome in the list of Christians whom Paul greets, Roman 16:13. Most likely this Rufus is the other son of Simon.

James (the Brother of Jesus) Ossuary

Evidence of Jesus, written in stone, was first reported in the November/December 2002 issue of the *Biblical Archaeology Review*, a prestigious biblical archaeology magazine. The writing is on a limestone box, some 30 by 15 inches in size, Picture 8. The box bears the inscription "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." This box is an ossuary, a burial place for bones. No bones were found in the box (apparently already taken out), but the ossuary does appear to be from the first century AD—Christ's time. It is thought to be the ossuary of James the half-brother of Jesus, also the son of Joseph (Gal. 1:19). This was not the Apostle James, but the author of the biblical book of James and the man who presided over the council of Acts 15. Is this ossuary too incredible to be true?

There have been charges of forgery concerning the inscription, but the men accused of forging the inscription have been found not guilty. However, someone else may have forged the inscription. Experts on both sides provide compelling arguments. Is the ossuary a genuine artifact or a hoax? It is not an easy matter to resolve because today's hoaxsters can be very clever and can create inscriptions that appear to be as old as they claim. In this case, the Israeli Antiquities Authority claims it is a hoax, while other experts claim otherwise. True science may slowly unravel this mystery.

Shroud of Turin

The Shroud of Turin is an item of considerable popular interest. The Shroud is a long piece of linen cloth which some claim was wrapped around Jesus before He was placed in the tomb (a burial cloth). Its authenticity is a matter of debate. It first appeared in 1357 AD in France, and in 1578 it was relocated to Turin, Italy, where it remains to this day. The Shroud has a faint brownish-red image on the front and back

which is hard to make out. In 1898 it was photographed for the first time, and the black and white negative of the photo revealed the image of a man who appears to have been whipped and crucified; for example, a blood stain appears on the wrist and foot, Picture 9 (the long white lines and diamond shapes are folds and repairs). The image is said to have gotten on the Shroud as a result of Christ's resurrection.

One has to be skeptical of items that are kept in secret, have a mysterious origin, and are not open to scientific study. There is no convincing evidence the Shroud dates to the time of Christ; in fact, radiocarbon dating indicates it is about 600 years old (but the thread tested may have been contaminated). Additional test results were reported in 2013 but they too are suspect. Some scientists claim the image was made by paint, others claim the image is blood. Pollens collected off the Shroud indicate it came from a dry climate, like Jerusalem, not France or Italy. There were at least 40 so-called burial cloths of Jesus in circulation in the Middle Ages; most have been destroyed. Even if the Shroud were from Jerusalem and from the first century, that does not prove it was the cloth used for Jesus.

Discussion: The Shroud may be “too good to be true.” What should we think of it? (Thought: regard the Shroud as something of interest, but of unproven authenticity.)

Those who do not think the Shroud is authentic often quote John 20:7, “...and the handkerchief that had been around His head, not lying with the linen clothes, but folded together in a place by itself.” Thus they say a separate handkerchief was around His head, which means there was not one piece of linen covering the whole body as would be the case with the Shroud. The Shroud advocates contend the handkerchief was a strip of linen that was wrapped around the head (a strip going from under the chin and around over the crown of the head). This handkerchief was used to hold the jaw closed. Accordingly, the Shroud was the final wrap over the entire body and went over any other strips or handkerchiefs. If this were true, one would think these other strips would not have been large enough to fold together and would have altered the Shroud’s image.

Life Applications

Truth: Archaeological findings clearly show the Bible is accurate and true. The believer can have complete confidence and assurance his/her faith is grounded in truth.

Complete Word: We have to be careful with ancient writings, such as those from the Essenes. We cannot equate their writings with the Word of God. We have the entire Word of God, there are no secret books of the Bible yet to be found.

New Temple: Someday a new Jewish Temple will be rebuilt on the Temple Mount. The Jewish authorities today believe God will clearly reveal the timing for this event. When it is rebuilt, many in Israel will again start worshipping according to the Mosaic law but not believe in Christ (the Tribulation will later cause many to believe). This rebuilding project will most likely have world-wide impact. It may begin while we are here, or after the Rapture. We are unable to understand how God will do this, but our faith is founded on the veracity of God's Word.

Cautious Acceptance: The Shroud of Turin, the James' ossuary, and many other findings may, or may not, be authentic. If we strongly promote a finding as proof of the Bible's accuracy, and then later that finding is proven to be fake, we will have harmed the cause of Christ. Thus rejoice in the potential truth of new findings, but be cautious accepting spectacular finds until all the evidence is completely analyzed.

Archaeology as a profession: Archaeology is worthy of consideration as a profession for Christians. This field of study needs the input of believers in Christ. You will find there is controversy in this field of study

because many archaeologists do not believe in Christ and have a hidden agenda of disproving the Bible. It is important that Bible believers be trained in archaeology so they can properly influence the interpretations of archaeological findings. Christianity needs trained archaeologists to authoritatively teach and encourage people, to establish archaeological programs in Bible schools, etc. While some of your beliefs may be challenged, uncovering truth is worth that challenge. Consider going to a school/university with a good archeology program (biblical program if possible).

Take 2 Heart

Summary

Our study of archaeology has shown there are many items that have been 'unearthed' to give evidence that the Bible is reliable and accurate in every detail. Minor characters such as Simon, Rufus, Alexander, and Erastus provide overwhelming evidence that we can rely upon God's Word. The Dead Sea scrolls show the OT was carefully and faithfully preserved in the form we have today. The ossuary of James and the Shroud of Turin may not be authentic, so we must be cautious accepting findings until the facts are fully revealed. The Jewish Temple will be rebuilt in the future, this may create great conflict, but it will happen since it is part of God's overall plan.

Gospel

Our faith is in Jesus Christ and His truth is revealed in the Word. The main spiritual truth is belief in one God,

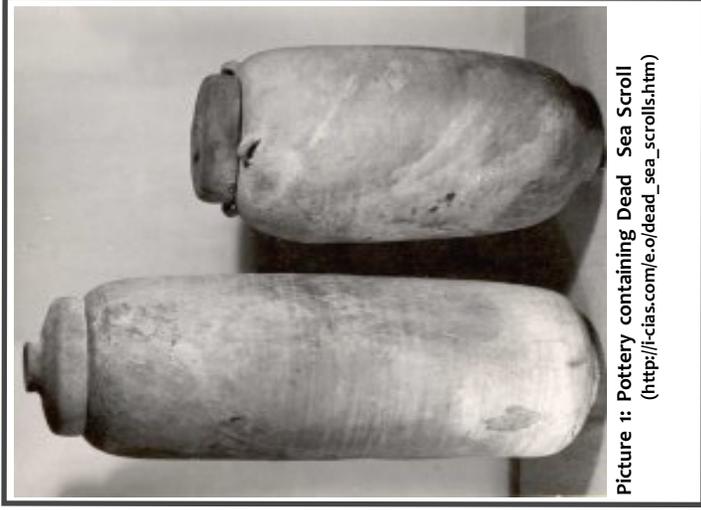
whose Son, the Lord Jesus Christ, died to pay the penalty of your sins. If you believe this, you will be saved by God's grace. **"Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and you will be saved..."** (Acts 16:31).

Encouragement

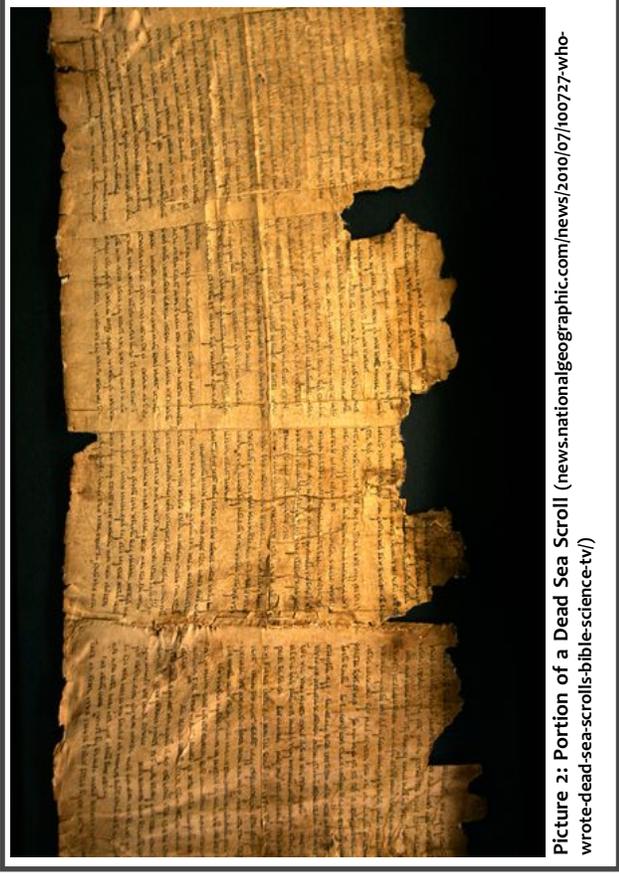
Christian teens living for Christ are often considered different. It seems people tend to be very hard on those who are a little different than they. Our Lord said this would happen, that is, it is common for Christians to endure some form of persecution. If you study hard and are sincere in your faith, people will grow to respect that faith and your godly convictions. You can honor the Lord by going into archaeology and the expertise you develop may be a blessing to others.

Lesson 25 Pictures

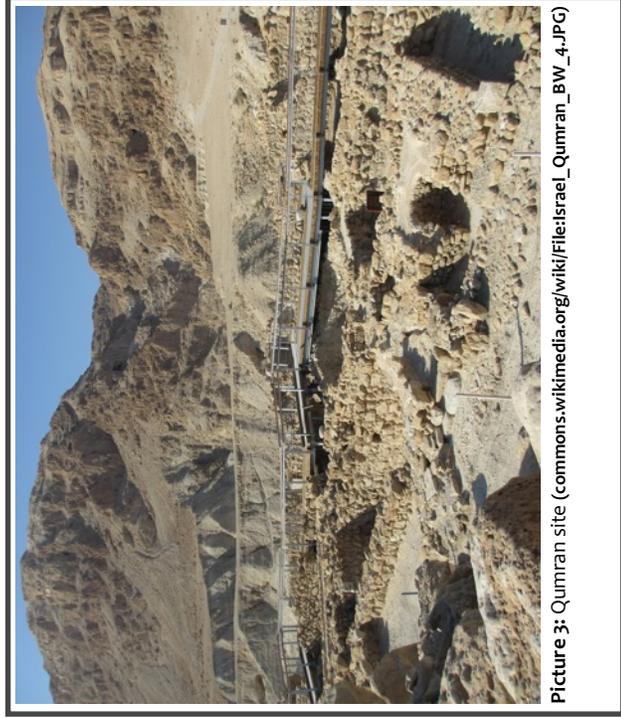
Biblical Archaeology (part 2)



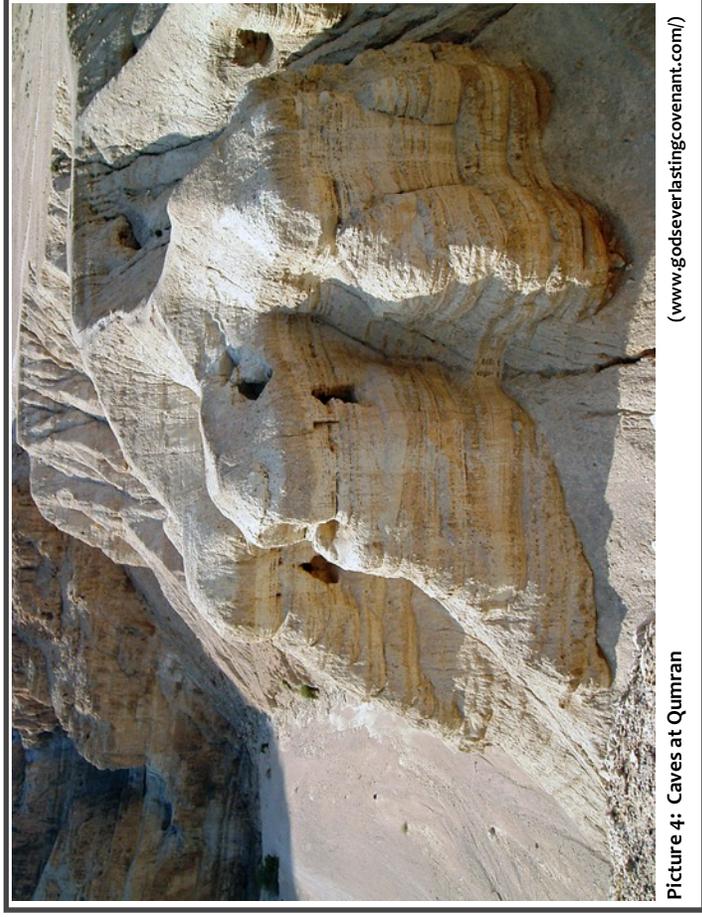
Picture 1: Pottery containing Dead Sea Scroll
(http://i-cias.com/e.o/dead_sea Scrolls.htm)



Picture 2: Portion of a Dead Sea Scroll (news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2010/07/100727-who-wrote-dead-sea-scrolls-bible-science-tv)



Picture 3: Qumran site (commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Israel_Qumran_BW_4.JPG)



Picture 4: Caves at Qumran

(www.godseverlastingcovenant.com)



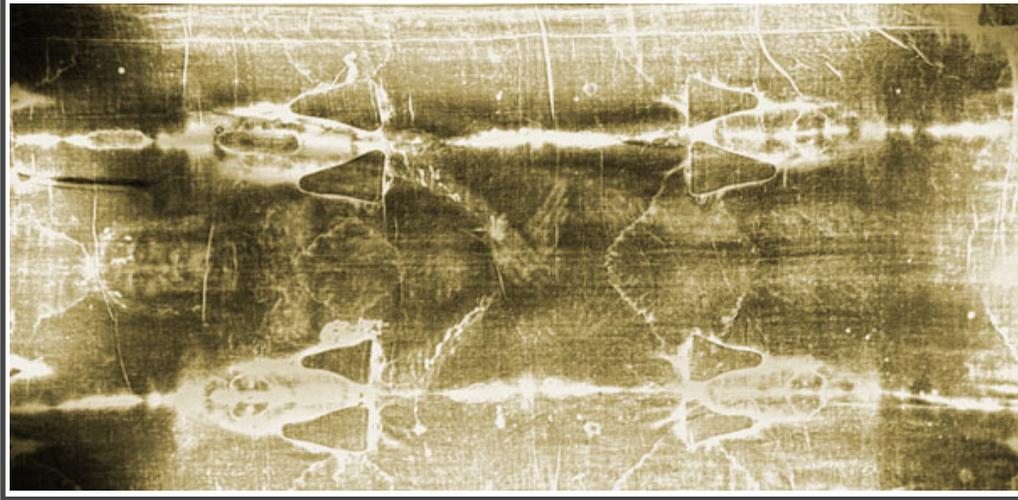
Picture 5: Wailing Wall (<http://www.levitt.com/slideshow/sorip05.htm>)



Picture 7: Erastus Stone (www.generationword.com/notes_for_notesbooks_pg/corinthians/introduction_to_corinthians.htm)



Picture 6: Temple Mount (<http://www.bibleplaces.com/free.htm>)



Picture 9: Shroud of Turin (newtheologcalmovement.blogspot.com/2012/04/shroud-of-turin-represented-at-every.html)



Picture 8: James Ossuary (www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2012/juneweb-only/james-ossuary-verdict.html)