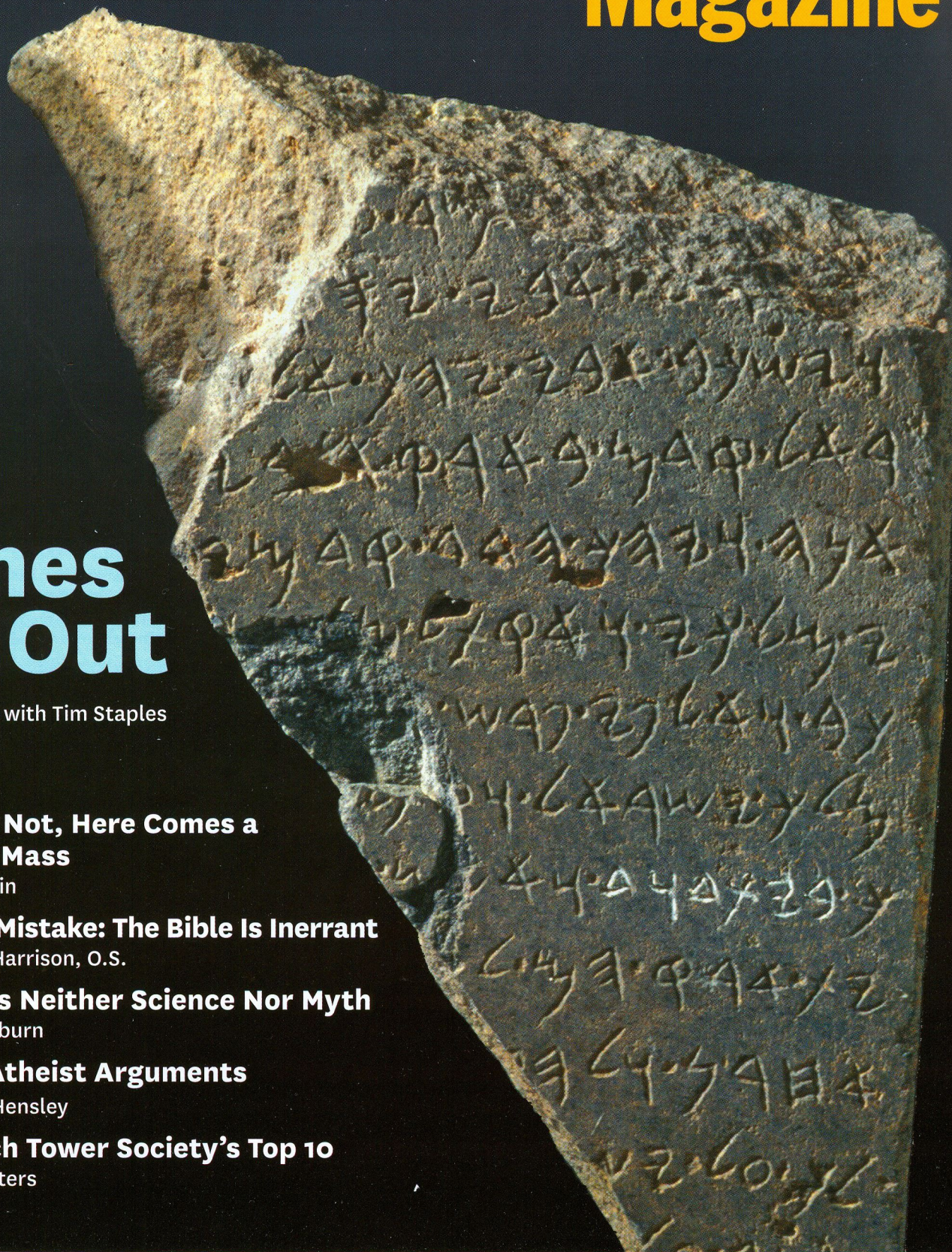


# Catholic Answers Magazine

Share the faith. Defend the faith.



## The Stones Cry Out

6 By Steve Ray with Tim Staples

16 **Ready or Not, Here Comes a Changed Mass**

By Jimmy Akin

22 **Make No Mistake: The Bible Is Inerrant**

By Fr. Brian Harrison, O.S.

28 **Genesis Is Neither Science Nor Myth**

By Jim Blackburn

32 **Answer Atheist Arguments**

By Kenneth Hensley

38 **The Watch Tower Society's Top 10**

By Joel S. Peters



# Truth Written in Stone

## The Apologetics of Archaeology

By Steve Ray and Tim Staples

**Tim Staples:**

**Let's start with a challenge. We believe in the Bible: Isn't that enough? If we have enough faith, do we need to prove it with artifacts?**

Steve Ray:

To understand salvation history fully, we should use all the means at our disposal. God has provided means to help us understand him, our world, and his involvement with men. God is the author of the Bible and of history, and it is good to read both to understand God's work in history.

**Why is it important to study and understand archaeology?**

To understand life and religion in earlier times, to place ourselves in the full historical context, to gain greater insight into Scripture and our Catholic faith, and to affirm the truth and historicity of Scripture. It is also evangelistic. If people learn the truth and have it confirmed, many will bow their knee to the truth.

**How is digging in the ground similar to reading the Bible?**

Both contain and record the acts of God in history. The Bible is the written story of God's involvement with men to bring us his salvation. In archaeology we study the same historical record by discovering

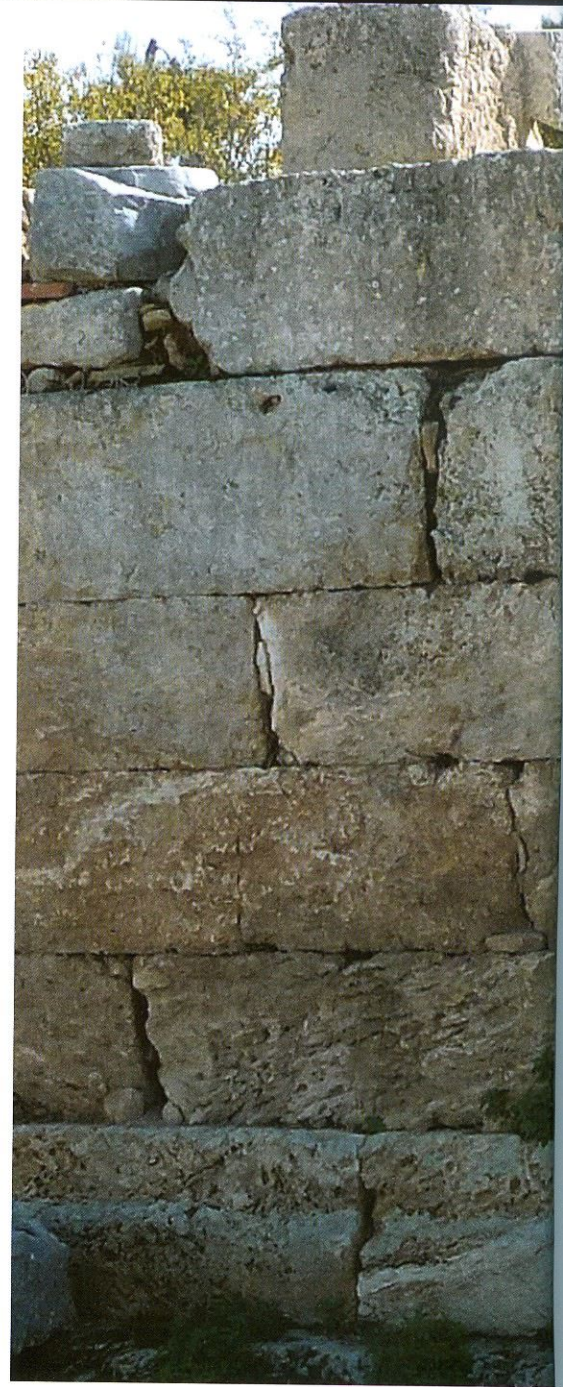
the story buried in the sand. Discovering the Holy Land and its history is like reading a fifth Gospel.

**Is archaeology always straightforward, or is there a danger of ideologies, politics, and egos getting in the way?**

This is a complicated question because multiple voices are chiming in. Politics are involved, and therefore biases can influence interpretation. For example, Palestinians are often upset with new findings that confirm previous Jewish occupation of the land, especially Jerusalem. The more Old Testament history that is uncovered, the more it is used by Jews to assert a prior claim to the land. On the other hand, there are secular or atheistic Jews who have no desire to see the Bible confirmed and will often lean in a direction to disprove the idea of God working in history. Sometimes there is a bit of competition for ancient sites, not only religiously but also politically.

**Does archaeology confirm or disprove what we read in the Bible?**

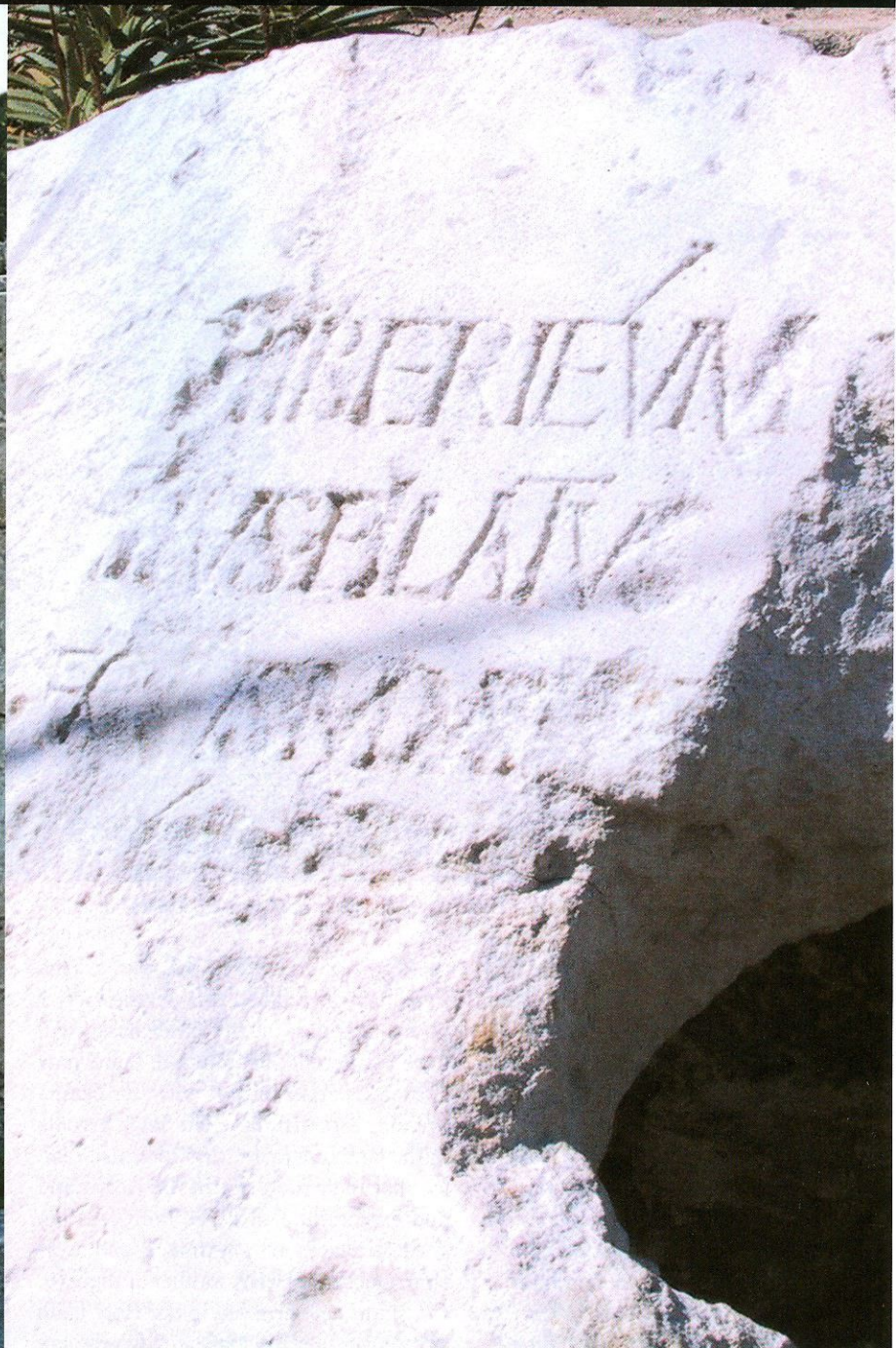
We can say that it confirms Scripture. But there are factors that must be considered. The more ancient the period of time—whether in scriptural accounts or in civilizations—the more difficult. For example, Jerusalem has been destroyed



and rebuilt 15–20 times, so the further we go back the more difficult it is to find intact remains and to interpret them precisely within their cultural timeframe.

Sometimes people jump to conclusions and deny the statements, events, or people in the Bible because no evidence exists outside the Bible as proof. But when we consider how much is still buried in the ground, is it wise to say that archaeology denies the events in the Bible?





(L): A plaque marks the spot of the “bema” or judgment seat, where St. Paul was tried before the proconsul Gallio (see 1 Cor 18). (R): A reproduction of the “Pontius Pilate” stone on display in Caesarea. The original is in the Israel Museum.

Just because we have not yet unearthed physical evidence for every passage of Scripture, does that prove the Bible is erroneous or simply a myth?

**Can you give us an example?**

Yes. Before 1961 some might have doubted

Pontius Pilate was a real historical figure: Where was the physical evidence? No physical evidence of his existence or rule in Judea had been uncovered. Maybe he was invented as the fall guy for the death of Jesus. But in 1961 archaeologists working in Caesarea Maritime on the Mediterranean Sea pulled up a stone step in the ruins of the ancient

theater and discovered the name and title of Pontius Pilate, Prefect of the Roman Province of Judea from A.D. 26 to A.D. 36.

**Then the Pilate Stone presents one clear case of concrete evidence for the reliability and historical accuracy of the New Testament.**





The Machpelah where Abraham is buried in Hebron. The building is 2,000 years old and was built over cave tombs from 4,000 years ago.

Exactly. I remember someone once saying, “I don’t object to your Christian creed, since it is not history, just faith. But I do have one problem—the mention of Pontius Pilate as a historical person. It is as though you are trying to root your belief into real history.” Funny, that is precisely what the creed intends to do—affirm the objective and historical truth of the Incarnation. God became man in space and time for the Redemption of the world. Here is a clear case of the two books—archaeology and the Bible—affirming the same thing.

**How does archaeological data get interpreted? Are there sometimes differing interpretations of findings in a dig?**

Yes, sometimes along ideological lines. Religious Jews will inevitably interpret findings as confirming the literal historicity of the Hebrew scriptures. In other words, the Bible provides the blueprint. Read the Bible to chart the history, and

then go dig and prove the text. Christians have also taken this perspective at times. Skeptics, on the other hand, will have a different goal in mind. Some may approach archaeology with a Zionist agenda, establishing their Jewish roots in the land of Israel. Christians also realize that their roots are in the Holy Land and explore and preserve the Christian sites as places of pilgrimage and worship. Queen St. Helen, mother of Emperor Constantine, journeyed to the Holy Land to discover the Christian sites, to preserve them, and to build churches. She placed a claim on them for Christianity and the Catholic Church. The Crusaders were not without the same impetus. They marched in a series of campaigns from Europe to the Holy Land to recover it from the Muslims. They sought to preserve the holy sites for future Christian generations.

Others do research simply to uncover the past to understand the ancient world. Many universities adopt sites and use the opportunity for students to learn and get

experience in their course work. Signs at a *tel* often list multiple universities involved in sponsoring the excavations, usually from the United States, Canada, or Europe.

Sites are also developed for commercial purposes. Israel knows a large portion of its gross national product comes from tourism. Almost 70 percent of the yearly visitors are Christians, about half of whom are on a religious pilgrimage. Israel recently established a new pilgrimage destination for Christians. It is the authentic baptismal site of Christ on the Jordan River near the northern tip of the Dead Sea. Jordan has a corresponding location on the other side of the Jordan. There can be competition over historical sites, often with religious, political, or financial overtones or to challenge authenticity.

**What are some concrete examples of archaeology confirming the truth of Scripture and the Catholic Church? Let’s begin with the beginning, the first five books of the Bible, the Pentateuch.**





Newly opened archaeological dig uncovering ancient Jerusalem from the era of the Kings.

## To understand salvation history fully, we should use all the means at our disposal.

This is the most exciting part for me. My wife and I have been to Israel and the surrounding countries over a hundred times. We think of the Holy Land as our home away from home. We've led thousands of Catholic pilgrimages through these marvelous holy sites. This allows me to see these sites from a whole new perspective. From my teenage years, as an Evangelical Protestant, I always loved the Bible. I love to demonstrate its historical truth and relevance in our modern age. Now that I am a Catholic, this love of Scripture has not waned but rather intensified. My love for Scripture and the land where it was lived out is like a fire

burning in my bosom. Discovering the story from the book and from the dirt are both very exciting.

This is a tough era since it is so ancient. Time tends to obliterate the traces of these extinct civilizations. Earthquakes, upheavals, destruction in battle, changes in civilizations, and more. Conquerors destroyed and obliterated everything of the old and carried the plunder back home. Wars have a way of killing people and destroying things.

We also have to realize that not everything has been discovered or been properly evaluated. Work is still going on. Remember that Pilate's inscription was a happy surprise. Who knows what will turn up tomorrow?

Now about Abraham and his family. He is dated as early as 2,000 B.C. He did not build a city. He was a nomadic shepherd living in tents following his flocks and herds. So it was with his son Isaac and his grandson Jacob. It would not be any surprise to find nothing physical to

prove his existence. However, his story, his times, his lifestyle, and the details of the biblical account are harmonious with what we know about the cultures at that time.

### **Do we find any hard evidence of the existence of Abraham or his family?**

There are interesting confirmations of Abraham's life. In the land that Abram left, there are cities named after his relatives. These cities—or should we say *tels*—are attested to as early as the 19th century B.C. Serug, Nahor, and Terah were not forgotten, and cities named after them are known to this day through archaeology. Written records and laws from contemporary civilizations confirm what we read in the Pentateuch. Here's one example among many: Abraham intended to appoint his servant as his heir in the absence of a child (Gn 15:2). We learn from a Sumerian letter from the city of Larsa on the Euphrates River that the law allowed a childless man to adopt his servant to become his



heir. The accounts of the patriarchs reflect customs and institutions that did not exist in later times. These discoveries have confirmed the ancient nature and historical accuracy of the biblical text.

**Are there other finds that affirm the biblical account of Abraham?**

We are told that Abraham bought a cave called Machpelah in which to bury his wife Sarah (Gn 15:18). Abraham was later buried there, followed by Isaac and Rebecca, Jacob and Leah. Did the cave really exist? Does the location correspond with the account of Genesis? Indeed it does. King Herod built a marvelous structure over the cave 2,000 years ago. It still stands today. How do I know? I've visited the Cave of Machpelah in Hebron five times in the last year. It is really there 4,000 years later.

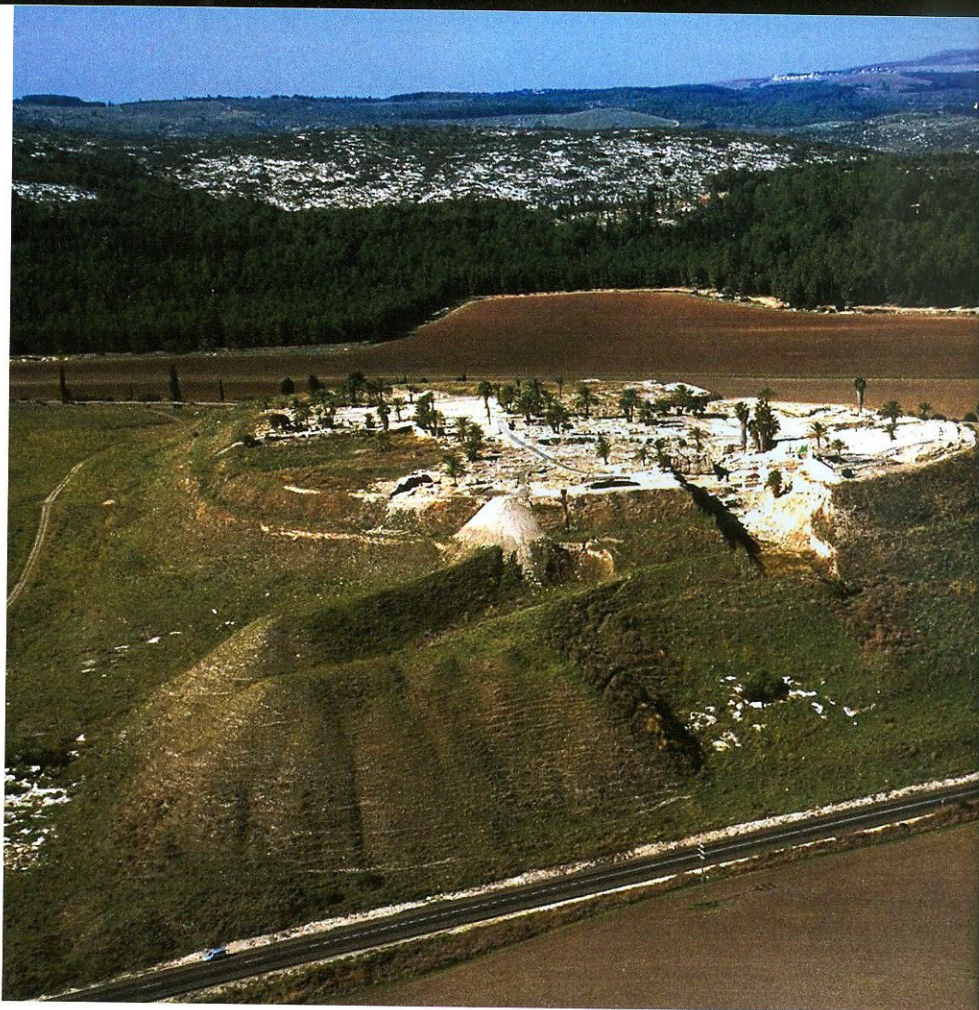
**I know there must be many more details we could discuss for this period, but let's move to the Kings of Israel. I am thinking in particular about David, since there have been many assertions that David never really existed but was actually invented to be the ideal king and founder of the kingdom.**

David is a very interesting case. The minimalists (See "An Archaeologist's Glossary," page 11) interpret the Bible as a mythical book, especially when it comes to David and Solomon. For them, at best it is a story blown way out of proportion.

**Are there discoveries that discredit the minimalist position?**

Yes. Israeli archaeologist Yosef Garfinkel writes in *Biblical Archaeology Review*:

There is at least one, and possibly two, clear references to the dynasty of David in the ninth century BCE, only 100-120 years after his reign. This is clear evidence that David was indeed a historical fig-



Aerial view of Tel Megiddo in northern Israel.

ure and the founding father of a dynasty. This led to the collapse of the minimalist paradigm in which David was little more than a myth. There was a David. He was a king. And he founded a dynasty. ("The Birth & Death of Biblical Minimalism," May-June 2011)

In northern Israel along the border with Lebanon lies the portion of the Promised Land that Joshua allotted to the tribe of Dan. From 1993 to 1994, archaeologists uncovered fragments of a stone *stela* with Aramaic inscriptions. The *stela* was dated from the ninth century B.C. The text clearly refers to a king of Israel and mentions the "House of David." Thus we have ancient physical evidence of a king from the dynasty of David.

This then led to a reexamination of another stone found earlier in Jordan

called the Mesha Stele or the Moabite Stone. It was set up in 830 B.C as a memorial of Mesha's victory over "Omri King of Israel." Omri and Mesha are both well known in the Old Testament text. However, even more important is again the title "House of David." In his article Garfinkel sarcastically says of the minimalist position, "The Tel Dan *stela* ended the first phase of the debate regarding the historicity of the Hebrew Bible, demonstrating that the mythological paradigm was nothing but a modern myth."

**Before we move to the New Testament, are there any other stones or evidence of the truth of the Old Testament?**

There is a lot of further evidence. But let me mention one stone I saw in the Egypt Museum in Cairo. There is another ancient *stela* called the Merneptah Stele or commonly



## An Archaeologist's Glossary

**Analysis:** evaluating, interpreting, and cataloging artifacts and publishing the findings of the excavation.

**Excavation:** the actual digging and sifting of dirt as the excavators move their way down into the *tel*, uncovering the civilizations below.

**Minimalist:** a recent movement in archaeology. *Biblical Archaeology Review* magazine describes this movement as starting in Denmark and England. The minimalists' principal argument assumes that the story of David and Solomon was not written until 700 years after their alleged kingdom and the biblical descriptions of these kings was not historical but purely literary. Like the Jesus Seminar people, minimalists deny that the Gospels provide true history. They assert that the Gospels were written much later and that the historical Jesus is shrouded in miracle and myth. Their goal is to pull away the shroud of fantasy and extract the "historical" Jesus from the mythical, superhuman Jesus who was just a hapless rabbi caught in the crossfire between Rome and the Jews.

**Stele:** an upright stone inscribed with words, usually pronouncing some victory or accomplishment.

**Survey:** the initial step in an archaeological dig. Modern technology, including computer models and aerial surveys, has quickly developed this first step.

**Tel:** a huge mound that, under the surface, reveals one civilization build upon another built upon another. After a city was leveled by war or earthquake or some other upheaval, a new civilization would build on top often using the building material over again—recycling. A good example of this is Tel Megiddo overlooking the Jezreel Valley in northern Israel. Tel Megiddo is a mound containing 26 separate civilizations, one built upon the other. Digging through this *tel* reveals an 8,000-year cross-section of cultures going back to 7,000 B.C.

**Zionism:** a movement founded by Theodo Herzl to re-establish, develop, and protect a Jewish nation in what is now the state of Israel.

known as the Israel Stele. It mentions Israel and is from around 1213 B.C. This confirms that Israel was a well-established political entity in Canaan in the 13th century B.C., over 200 years before David.

We might also mention the Arch of Titus in Rome and the recent discovery of one of oldest synagogues uncovered in Israel—in Magdala in Galilee. Both display in stone the image of the Jewish menorah once placed prominently in Moses' tabernacle and later in Solomon's Temple. It was whisked off as plunder by Titus after sacking Jerusalem in A.D. 70. The books of Moses describe the holy articles used in the tabernacle. The artistic images of the ancient utensils and musical instruments used give evidence to the

accuracy and truth of the Bible. There are so many other examples, but like you said, let's move into the New Testament.

### **What about the Gospels? What about Jesus and other people and events mentioned in them?**

We would not expect to have physical evidence proving Jesus' existence. He was not an emperor or governor. He was a low-income carpenter who for three short years became an "itinerant preacher." As we said before, until 1961, no physical evidence proved the existence even of Pilate, the important prefect of Judea.

However, literary records do mention Jesus in the very context we read of him

## **Just because we have not yet unearthed physical evidence for every passage of Scripture, does that prove the Bible is erroneous or simply a myth?**

in the Gospels. He is mentioned by Jewish and Roman writers in addition to the Gospels, the New Testament, and the writings of Christians of the first centuries.

### **Who were some of the non-Christian writers who mentioned Jesus as a historical figure?**

One is Pliny the Younger (c. 61–c. 112). He was the governor of Pontus and Bithynia, and he wrote a letter to Roman Emperor Trajan about A.D. 112. He asked advice on handling people who worshiped "Christus."

Roman senator and historian Tacitus (c. 56–c. 117) wrote about the Christians who suffered under Emperor Nero in A.D. 64. In his *Annals* he wrote:

Nero fastened the guilt of starting the blaze and inflicted the most exquisite tortures on a class hated for their abominations, called Christians [Christians] by the populace. Christus, from whom the name had its origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilatus, and a most mischievous superstition, thus checked for the moment, again broke out not only in Judaea, the first source of the evil, but even in Rome.



## Romans, Jews, and Christians from the end of the first century and beginning of the second did not doubt the historicity of the man Jesus.

Roman historian Seutonius (c. 69–140) wrote in his *Lives of the Twelve Caesars*, “As the Jews were making constant disturbances at the instigation of Chrestus, he [Claudius] expelled them from Rome.”

Jewish historian Josephus (c. 37–c. 100) refers to Jesus in a number of places in his writings. There are other Jewish sources as well.

What do these writings prove? In the least they confirm that Romans, Jews, and Christians from the end of the first century and beginning of the second did not doubt the historicity of the man Jesus. Add to this the well-attested Gospels and writings of the first Christians. All this testimony makes one who denies the historicity of Jesus look foolish. There are other proofs too, like the martyrdom of eleven of the twelve apostles. They knew the gospel to be true and were willing to die for it.

### Let’s get back to digging in the ground. What other interesting archaeological finds have confirmed the truth of the New Testament?

The artifacts I will mention now I have seen with my own eyes in Israel, Corinth, and Rome. One of the loves of my life is Scripture study, especially in conjunction with the lands that gave birth to God’s written word.

When I lead pilgrimages in the footprints of St. Paul, I like to take our group



Steve Ray at the Erastus Stone in Corinth, Greece.

off the beaten path. For example, most people never leave the confines of the ruins of Corinth “within the fence.” In Corinth we find things mentioned in the Scriptures that attest to the accuracy of the text. After the “official tour” is over, we walk past the parking lot and down a rugged path strewn with weeds, which is a bit slippery. My group follows me in rapt anticipation. We pass ruins of an ancient theater unknown to most tourists. Near the theater’s stage is a courtyard. In 1929 archaeologists uncovered an engraved marble slab there. It is dated to the second half of the first century, when Paul was living with the Corinthians. The inscription is deeply cut into the marble and was originally inlaid with metal, some of which still remains.

We all pose for pictures beside the

Latin words *ERASTVS. PRO. AED. S. P. STRAVIT*—an abbreviation for “Erastus, in return for his aedileship, laid this pavement at his own expense.”

While living in Corinth Paul wrote to the Romans, “Gaius, who is host to me and to the whole church, greets you. Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you” (Rom 16:23). “Aedileship” is a title of a city government official, something like a commissioner of public works. To acknowledge the honor of this position, Erastus paid for pavement at his own expense and put his name to the project—just as donors do today. No other person in Corinth with this name is known to have served in government. The name Erastus is written in Scripture and in stone, and both “books” tell the same story.





### Is there anything else in Corinth to mention in this context?

The Erastus Stone is not the only archaeological find in Corinth to shout the truth of Scripture down through the millennia. There is also the *bema* or the judgment seat mentioned in Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians (18:12–17). In verse 12 we read, "But when Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews made a united attack upon Paul and brought him before the tribunal [*bema*]."

Gallio was the judge mentioned in Acts, and he sat in judgment of Paul. He is known in history outside the pages of Scripture. Gallio was the adopted son of Seneca the Elder, a well-known Roman orator. He was also the brother of Seneca the Younger, a famous philosopher, tutor, and later adviser to Emperor Nero.

## To view the burial place of Peter today is nothing short of stunning, confirming, convincing.

**I know Rome contains much that confirms the historicity of the Bible. We could do a whole interview just on that city alone. But give us one or two examples.**

I love Rome. It became the hub of the wheel in early Christianity. To walk its streets, view its monuments, and step squinting into the old churches is always a thrill. It is a step back in time. Peter wrote his first letter from Rome and was crucified there. Paul was imprisoned twice in Rome and later beheaded there. The Church in Rome was founded by the Prince of the Apostles and sealed with their blood.

The two items I will mention here never get old for me. I tour the necropolis under the Basilica of St. Peter's again and again. *Necropolis* means "city of the dead." It was a burial ground outside the city walls. Peter was killed in Nero's Circus and buried in the necropolis. Today, you can descend underground to walk through the excavations. They are under St. Peter's Basilica for one important reason—Constantine built the first basilica directly over the bones of Peter. He did not move the bones and put them under the church. No, he built the church over the bones. To view the burial place of Peter today is nothing short of stunning, confirming, convincing.

Then if we leave Rome to the east, we pass through the Roman walls that have stood through the millennia. One misty morning Nero's judgment was carried out by a husky executioner who sliced off Paul's head. Whoosh, thump!

Paul was buried, and the Christians kept track of his burial place. The Basilica of St. Paul Outside the Walls has stood for centuries over the place Christians remembered as the tomb of Paul. There

a marble slab was discovered saying "Paul, Apostle, Martyr." In December 2006 Vatican archaeologists announced the confirmation of a white marble sarcophagus under the altar. The sarcophagus was made visible in part to the public. On June 29, 2009, Pope Benedict XVI announced that carbon-14 dating had confirmed that the bone fragments inside were indeed from the first or second century. This confirms the unquestioned and unanimous tradition of 1,900 years. As with the bones of Peter, there was purple fabric—representing royalty and honor—around the remains.

### How does all of this affect you? How should it affect others?

Many times over the last two years I have knelt in prayer at the tombs of Peter and Paul—and of Jesus, with tears welling up in my eyes. "It is true! It is historical! I believe!"

For Catholics, these finds confirm our trust in Scripture and the Church. As we read in the Book and dig in the ground we proclaim, "It is not true because I believe it; rather, I believe it because it is true!"

Those outside the Christian faith should be challenged to do their homework. Set aside the mundane things of life for a time to read and research and to discover the truth of the Catholic faith. ■



**Steve Ray** is a convert to the Catholic Church and the author of *Crossing the Tiber, Upon This Rock*, and *St. John's Gospel*. He is writer, producer, and host of the 10-part video/DVD series *The Footprints of God: The Story of Salvation from Abraham to Augustine*, filmed entirely on location in the Holy Land and surrounding countries.