Part II

Archaeology and the Bible

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Chapter 7
From Noah and the Flood to Joshua and the Israelites

While biblical archaeologists working today are generally more interested in learning about details of daily life in the ancient biblical world than proving or disproving the accounts in the Bible, many lay people have these priorities reversed. They want to know: Did the Flood take place? Did Abraham and the Patriarchs exist? Were Sodom and Gomorrah destroyed by fire and brimstone? Did the Exodus occur? These were some of the original questions in biblical archaeology that intrigued the earliest pioneers of the field. They still resonate today but are far from being answered by biblical archaeologists.

In fact, solutions and answers to such questions are more frequently proposed by pseudo-archaeologists or archaeological charlatans, who take the public's money to support ventures that offer little chance of furthering the cause of knowledge. Every year, "scientific" expeditions embark to look for the Garden of Eden, Noah's Ark, Sodom and Gomorrah, the Ark of the Covenant, and the Ten Lost Tribes of Israel. These expeditions are often supported by prodigious sums of money donated by gullible believers who eagerly accept tales spun by sincere but misguided amateurs or by rapacious confidence men.

These ventures, which usually originate outside the confines of established scholarly institutions, engender confusion about what is real and what is fake. By practicing pseudo-archaeology rather than by using established archaeological principles and real science, the archaeological charlatans bring discredit to the field of biblical archaeology.

The fact of the matter is that during the past one hundred or so years, there have been fabulous archaeological discoveries in the Near East of sites dating from the second millennium BCE. However, while these have provided enormous insights into the Canaanites of Syro-Palestine, the Hittites of Anatolia, the Egyptians, and the peoples of Mesopotamia, all of whom are relevant to the biblical text and to the world of the Bible, such discoveries have shed relatively little light on the actual stories found in the Hebrew Bible—particularly those in Genesis and Exodus. As a result, many of the earlier stories in the Hebrew Bible, especially those from Creation to the Exodus, have not been corroborated by archaeologists and remain a matter of faith.

On the other hand, events from a slightly later period, i.e., during the era of the Divided Kingdoms in the first millennium BCE after the empire of David and Solomon broke asunder, benefit from extrabiblical inscriptions, records, and other data that can be used to corroborate the biblical details. For instance, the attack on Judah in 701 BCE by Sennacherib and the Neo-Assyrians and the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BCE by Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians are events described in the Hebrew Bible that have been independently confirmed by archaeological excavation and artifacts.

A good example of the difficulties involved in finding archaeological evidence for events depicted in the early portions of the Hebrew Bible, and for the opportunities that this provides to the pseudo-archaeologists is that of the Flood and Noah's Ark, as described in the book of Genesis.

In 1929, the British archaeologist Leonard Woolley—who had, fifteen years earlier, partnered with T. E. Lawrence in conducting an archaeological survey of the Negev—was excavating at the ancient site of Kish, in what is now modern Iraq, when he and his team came upon several feet of silt that had been laid down by a flood in antiquity. Both below and above the silt were man-made artifacts, including pottery, demonstrating that humans had lived at the site before and after the flood. It was Woolley's wife who excitedly exclaimed that he had "found the Flood!" The discovery made headlines in newspapers around the world, but within a short time Woolley disavowed any such connection, stating that what he had found was simply evidence for a local flood, rather than a worldwide inundation. In fact, evidence for such local floods has been found at a number of sites in Mesopotamia, which is not surprising since this is the "land between two rivers"—namely the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which frequently overflowed their banks and flooded nearby areas.

On a larger scale, there is geological evidence that in the not too distant past, certainly by the time that humans occupied areas of the Near East and Asia Minor, extensive flooding sometimes occurred over a wider area. In 1997, William Ryan and Walter Pitman, two geologists at Columbia University, presented data documenting such an event in the area of the Black Sea around 7,500 years ago, when the sea broke through its barriers and flooded a large area in Turkey and perhaps farther south. These events could have been the catalysts for myths and epics of a great flood.

It is conceivable that such localized, perhaps devastating, floods were the origin for the stories told by the Sumerians, Akkadians, and Babylonians that have so many details in common with the story of Noah and his Ark in the Hebrew Bible. The first such story appears to be a Sumerian version, perhaps dating back to about 2700 BCE, featuring a man named Ziusudra who survives the Flood. In a version dating to several hundred years later, the

survivor is a man named Atrahasis. By 1800 BCE, in the Epic of Gilgamesh, it is Utnapishtim who survives the Flood and tells the story to the epic's protagonist, Gilgamesh. Only much later, most likely sometime between 1200 and 900 BCE, was the biblical version of Noah and the Flood written down.

The details of these stories are too close to be coincidental. In essence, these versions seem to originate from the same story, although some of the details differ—the name of the Flood survivor, the number and types of birds released immediately after the Flood, and the reasons behind the inundation. In the earlier versions, for example, the flood is sent because humans are too noisy; in the biblical version it is sent because humans are too evil and corrupt. The biblical story of the Flood may therefore be an example of a "transmitted narrative"—a story that is not only handed down from generation to generation within a tribe or people but from culture to culture as well, as from the Sumerians to Akkadians to Babylonians, and then to the Israelites, perhaps via the Canaanites.

However, in terms of archaeology, no indisputable evidence for a worldwide flood has yet been uncovered by archaeologists. Similarly, no remains of Noah's Ark have yet been found by a credible professional archaeologist. And yet, claims are made almost every year that another "expedition" has found the Ark. A prime example is Bob Cornuke, founder of the Bible Archaeology Search and Exploration (BASE) Institute in Colorado. Cornuke is a self-described former police investigator and SWAT team member turned biblical investigator, international explorer, and best-selling author.

In 2006 Cornuke led an expedition searching for Noah's Ark. Some media reports announced that Cornuke's team had discovered boat-shaped rocks at an altitude of 13,000 feet on Mount Suleiman in Iran's Elburz mountain range. Cornuke said the rocks look "uncannily like wood. . . . We have had [cut] thin

sections of the rock made, and we can see [wood] cell structures." But peer review by professional geologists quickly debunked these findings. Kevin Pickering, a geologist at University College London who specializes in sedimentary rocks, said, "The photos appear to show iron-stained sedimentary rocks, probably thin beds of silicified sandstones and shales, which were most likely laid down in a marine environment a long time ago." Despite the grandstanding by Cornuke, there was no archaeological—or geological—evidence that the Ark had been located.

Among the many sites at which Leonard Woolley excavated was a site in Mesopotamia known as Tell Muqayyar. According to inscriptions found at Tell Muqayyar itself, it was the site of an ancient city named Ur. Woolley and others quickly linked this site to the biblical "Ur of the Chaldees"—according to tradition, the birthplace of Abraham, the patriarch revered in Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. However, there were several sites in the ancient Near East that had the name Ur, just as there are many cities and towns in the United States today with the name "Troy," and it is not clear which city named Ur, if any, is to be associated with Abraham, just as none of the cities in the United States are actually associated with the original Trojan War.

The question of the existence of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob—the Patriarchs, as they are called—remains a contentious issue among archaeologists and biblical scholars. While some archaeologists argue that the details contained in the stories of the Patriarchs and their wanderings fit well within the conditions and practices of the early second millennium BCE, others argue that the stories and the characters could just as easily have been made up centuries later, in the first millennium BCE. The simple fact of the matter is that although numerous excavations have recovered tremendous quantities of archaeological remains from the early second through the early first millennia BCE, at sites in lands ranging from ancient Mesopotamia to Canaan to Egypt, there has not yet been any direct

archaeological or extrabiblical textual evidence found to confirm or deny the existence of Abraham and his fellow Patriarchs.

Similarly, perhaps the most vexing question asked by, and most frequently of, biblical archaeologists, is whether there is evidence that the Exodus took place. Exodus with a capital "E" refers to the departure of the Hebrews from Egypt, where they had been enslaved by a succession of pharaohs. Acknowledgment of that event (or at least a portion of it) is celebrated annually by the Jewish festival of Passover. However, despite attempts by a number of biblical archaeologists—and an even larger number of amateur enthusiasts—over many years, credible direct archaeological evidence for the Exodus has yet to be found. While it can be argued that such evidence would be difficult to find, since nomads generally do not leave behind permanent installations, archaeologists have discovered and excavated nomadic emplacements from other periods in the Sinai desert. So if there were archaeological remains to be found from the Exodus, one would have expected them to be found by now. And yet, thus far there is no trace of the biblical "600,000 men on foot, besides children" plus "a mixed crowd . . . and livestock in great numbers" (Exod. 12:37–38) who wandered for forty years in the desert. That is not to say that such an event did not take place, but merely that no archaeological evidence has yet been found for it.

Related to the Exodus story is the biblical account regarding the Israelite conquest of Canaan, which is told in the books of Judges and Joshua in the Hebrew Bible. It describes how Joshua and his army swept down upon the land and overran it in a lightning series of attacks, destroying the major Canaanite cities and capturing their kings. Over the past century, biblical archaeologists have argued about when this took place—settling upon 1250 BCE as the most likely time because of Pharaoh Merneptah's inscription of 1207 BCE that mentions an entity named "Israel" in the region of Canaan by that date—and have suggested several competing theories concerning how the Israelite conquest of Canaan actually

took place, based upon the archaeological evidence discovered during excavations at the various sites named in the biblical account.

For instance, William F. Albright favored the Conquest Model, which took the biblical account of events essentially at face value, arguing that the conquest occurred after a sudden and violent blitzkrieg attack. Not everyone agreed. Two German scholars, Albrecht Alt and Martin Noth, favored a Peaceful Infiltration Model, suggesting that over time small groups of Hebrew nomads entered Canaan quietly. Americans George Mendenhall and Norman Gottwald suggested the Revolting Peasants Model, arguing that the Israelites were an underclass within Canaanite society and that the conquest was actually a Marxist-type rebellion in which the oppressive upper class was overthrown and the proletariat took over. And finally, Israel Finkelstein has suggested the Invisible Israelites Model, which argues that Israelites and Canaanites were both present and sharing the land until the economy of Canaan collapsed following the withdrawal of Egypt from the region at the end of the Late Bronze Age. At that time, and only then, the Israelites gradually, and peacefully, emerged from the shadow of the Canaanites and took over.

All of these models call upon archaeological evidence to support their arguments. There is a small problem, however, for those who would follow Albright and the Conquest Model. Many of the sites mentioned in the biblical account and specifically noted as being destroyed by the invading Israelites have now been excavated by biblical archaeologists, with an interesting conundrum resulting. On the one hand, most of the sites described as being destroyed do not show any archaeological evidence of destruction—and some, such as Jericho, were not even occupied at the time. On the other hand, there are sites in the region that were definitely destroyed at that time, but none of these sites is mentioned in the biblical account. One of the few places named in the Bible as being

destroyed by the Israelites and at which a destruction has been found by archaeologists is the site of Hazor.

In fact, Yigael Yadin believed that his excavations at Hazor in the 1950s had found evidence for the Israelite destruction of the thirteenth-century BCE city established at the site, thus confirming (for him) the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan. After a break of more than three decades, excavations at Hazor began again in 1990, directed by Yadin's former student Amnon Ben-Tor, who found additional remains from this destroyed city. There is still debate as to who was responsible for the destruction—was it Israelites, Egyptians, Canaanites, or Sea Peoples?

Like Yadin before him, Ben-Tor argues that the Israelites are the most likely perpetrators of this destruction and provides a list of reasons why this is so, including the fact that neither the Egyptians nor the Canaanites were guilty because both Egyptian and Canaanite statues were found defiled in the destruction level, and neither group would have condoned such an act. But not all scholars are convinced by his arguments, and it is difficult to decide between Israelites, a destructive migrating group known as the Sea Peoples who appeared in the region at about the same time, or some other unknown group as the agents of destruction at Hazor. There is no archaeological evidence that contradicts Yadin's and Ben-Tor's theory, but there is also no additional archaeological evidence to support it at the moment.

Important components of this discussion are the related questions of who, exactly, the Israelites were and how one knows when one has uncovered archaeological evidence for their existence. It used to be an accepted axiom in biblical archaeology that if one found collar-rim jars or four-room houses in a Late Bronze Age or Early Iron Age settlement, then one was excavating an Israelite settlement, since those items were considered to be uniquely Israelite and not Canaanite in origin. More recently, though, a number of scholars have stated that such objects and structures

are not unique to the Israelites and, indeed, may not be unique to the Early Iron Age.

So, how does one tell an Israelite from a Canaanite? It has been suggested by some archaeologists that an absence of pig bones from a settlement of the appropriate time period may be an indication of the presence of Israelites, rather than Canaanites, because of the prohibitions against eating pork set out in the Hebrew Bible. Others insist that one cannot make such a generalized observation and that, in any event, arguing from negative evidence—the lack or absence of something at a site—is always dangerous since the next trowelful of dirt may turn up the necessary piece of evidence. The question, like many others in biblical archaeology, remains open.

Chapter 8
From David and Solomon to Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians

Debates concerning David and Solomon have been at the forefront of biblical archaeology for a long time, but especially since the early 1990s when their very existence was called into question. The problem is that although the Tel Dan Stele—fragments of which were discovered in 1993 and 1994—now presents us with the first known extrabiblical attestation for the House of David (*Beit David*), there is little other direct archaeological evidence available for either king at the moment.

On the other hand, biblical archaeologists have had considerably more success in corroborating the biblical accounts concerned with events just after the time of David and Solomon, during the early first millennium BCE from ca. 925 BCE to 586 BCE. There are extrabiblical inscriptions, archival and accounting records, and other data from this period, including inscriptions that name individual kings of Israel and Judah, archaeological evidence of Sennacherib's attack on Judah in 701 BCE, and Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in 586 BCE. In a certain sense, it is fortunate that military destruction sometimes leaves an archaeological record that can be correlated with biblical texts.

According to the biblical account, one of the first major events to take place after the death of Solomon was an invasion by Pharaoh

Shishak of Egypt in about 925 BCE. According to the text (1 Kings 14.25; 2 Chron. 12.9), Shishak invaded the land of Judah and besieged the city of Jerusalem, carrying away "the treasures of the house of the LORD." Egyptologists have long noted the existence of an inscription written on the walls of the Temple of Amon in Karnak (modern Luxor), recording an attack made by a Pharaoh Sheshonq upon the region of Israel and Judah, with a list of 150 cities that he claimed to have conquered. Sheshonq was the founder of the Twenty-second Dynasty of Egypt, coming to the throne ca. 945 BCE and ruling until ca. 924 BCE.

Among the conquered cities listed by Sheshonq was Megiddo. And at Megiddo itself, the Chicago excavators in 1925 recovered a fragment from a stone inscription bearing the royal cartouche of Sheshonq. It came from the type of inscription usually reserved for use by the Egyptians as a victory monument placed at a site that they had captured and then occupied. The inscription had later been broken up, with the pieces reused as building material. The fragment had been uncovered during the 1903–1905 excavations at Megiddo by Schumacher, but had been thrown out on the spoil heap, where it was later discovered by the Chicago workmen. Sheshonq's claim to have captured Megiddo was thus corroborated archaeologically. However, it remains unresolved whether the Egyptian Sheshonq is the same as the biblical Shishak, although most archaeologists and biblical scholars believe this to be the case.

Sheshonq's attack took advantage of the fact that the United Monarchy of David and Solomon had split into the two separate kingdoms of Israel and Judah immediately after the death of Solomon. Many stories in the Hebrew Bible concern kings who ruled the lands during this period of the Divided Kingdoms. Several of these kings are mentioned in Neo-Assyrian and Neo-Babylonian texts from the early first millennium BCE, thus providing independent corroboration for their historical existence. One can speculate that if the kings in the Bible are real, then its various descriptions of daily life may well be accurate too.

One northern king discussed by the biblical writers is Ahab, son of Omri, who married Jezebel and who "did evil in the sight of the LORD more than all who were before him" (1 Kings 16:30). The Bible recounts a number of battles that Ahab fought against Ben-Hadad of Aram who ruled from Damascus (as 1 Kings 20 says). Ahab is mentioned in an extrabiblical inscription on a seven-foot-tall stone monument that dates to 853 BCE. This, the so-called Monolith Inscription of the Neo-Assyrian king Shalmaneser III, describes a battle that he fought at the city of Karkar, located in what is now modern Syria. There Shalmaneser fought against a coalition of troops gathered from Damascus, Bylos, Egypt, Israel, and elsewhere, including 2,000 chariots and 10,000 infantry belonging to Ahab:

> Karkar, his royal city, I destroyed, I devastated, I burned with fire. 1,200 chariots, 1,200 cavalry, 20,000 soldiers, of Hadad-ezer, of Aram; 700 chariots, 700 cavalry, 10,000 soldiers of Irhuleni of Hamath; 2,000 chariots, 10,000 soldiers of Ahab, the Israelite . . . — these twelve kings he brought to his support; to offer battle and fight, they came against me.

Some archaeologists and historians have suggested that the Ben-Hadad mentioned in the Bible as Ahab's enemy and the Hadad-ezer described in Shalmaneser's inscription as Ahab's ally are one and the same person, but this theory is still unsupported by hard evidence. We can say with relative confidence, however, that Shalmaneser's text clearly establishes that Ahab was a real, historical person. Moreover, excavations conducted during the 1990s by Israeli archaeologist David Ussishkin and British archaeologist John Woodhead at the site of ancient Jezreel, which was located near Megiddo and was the home city to Ahab and his wife Jezebel according to the biblical account, confirms that there was indeed a city in existence at the site during the appropriate time period, i.e., the ninth century BCE. Unfortunately, thus far even the most ardent of archaeological investigators have been

unable to find confirmatory evidence that Jezebel was actually thrown out of a window and eaten by dogs (2 Kings 9:30–37).

Archaeological evidence also exists to confirm that King Jehu was a real person. The biblical account (2 Kings 8:25–10:27) relates that Jehu usurped the throne of Israel by killing both the king of Israel and the king of Judah. Jehu is independently described as the "son of Omri" (to whom he may or may not have actually been related) on the so-called Black Obelisk—another seven-foot-tall stone monument of Shalmaneser III—dating to 841 BCE. Jehu is depicted there, bowing at the feet of the king. The accompanying text reads: "Tribute of Iaua (Jehu), son of Omri. Silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden beaker, golden goblets, pitchers of gold, lead, staves (staffs) for the hand of the king, javelins, I received from him."

Almost 150 years later, the Neo-Assyrian King Sennacherib invaded the land of Judah and marched on Jerusalem in 701 BCE—an event recorded in the Bible. His forces attacked forty-six cities, including the second-largest in the land, Lachish. The biblical account states succinctly: "In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah, King Sennacherib of Assyria came up against all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them" (2 Kings 18:13).

This event was extensively confirmed by major archaeological excavations at the site of Lachish, conducted by David Ussishkin of Tel Aviv University beginning in 1973. Lachish was the focus of earlier excavations by James L. Starkey, from 1932 to 1938, but those ended when Starkey was murdered while traveling to Jerusalem for the opening of the Palestine Archaeological Museum (now called the Rockefeller Museum), in East Jerusalem. Ussishkin realized that the "tons and tons" of rocks and stones that Starkey and his team had been trying to dig through were actually the remnants of a siege ramp that the Neo-Assyrians had built when they attacked the city in 701 BCE. In addition, he found a Judean countersiege ramp within the city dating to the same period.

The site of Lachish is inextricably and forever linked to Jerusalem because of passages found in the Hebrew Bible and in extrabiblical depictions and inscriptions at the ancient site of Nineveh in what is now Iraq. Its importance for biblical archaeology lies not only in its connections to the Bible but in the careful and deliberate way that it was stratigraphically excavated by Ussishkin, and in the means by which he was able to use a variety of different sources, from as far away as Nineveh, to establish the history of the site. Ussishkin published the results of his excavations in a mammoth set of five volumes containing all the data uncovered by the expedition, from macroscopic architectural details to microscopic details of archaeobotany in each phase of the city's history.

When Sennacherib and his men eventually captured Lachish, they marched the captives back to Assyria—part of the more than 200,000 Judean exiles that Sennacherib claims to have deported in this campaign. Sennacherib ordered pictures of his triumph to be engraved and displayed on the walls of a room in his "Palace without a Rival," as he called it, at Nineveh in Assyria, on the banks of the Euphrates.

These pictures, which one can follow like a modern cartoon strip in panels along the four walls of the room, depict the entire siege. First, the Assyrian warriors, archers, and infantrymen march up to the city. Then the siege engines are wheeled up the seven or more ramps that the Assyrians built (including the one excavated by Starkey and then Ussishkin). Next is the battle for the city itself, with torches flying through the air and the defenders shooting arrows from the defensive towers, and then the aftermath, with triumphant Assyrians carrying away loot as some of the defeated Judeans are staked out on the ground and flayed alive, while others have their heads cut off (which are then hung from trees and used for target practice by Assyrians). The vast majority of the Jews are depicted as refugees, trudging toward far-off Assyria with their families and their belongings stacked on carts. Sennacherib

himself is shown in one of the final scenes, seated on his throne as goods and captives are presented before him.

The depiction of the siege and capture of Lachish in Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh was undoubtedly meant not only to immortalize the victory but also to serve as propaganda. It was a warning to the ambassadors and visiting delegations from other subservient nations not to rebel against the might of Assyria. It was effective, for though the Neo-Assyrians seem to have been as brutal and bloodthirsty as they depicted themselves, they apparently negotiated diplomatic settlements as often as they settled things on the battlefield.

The excavations by Starkey and then Ussishkin at Lachish, the depictions at Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, and Sennacherib's own inscriptions offer separate and unique sources of information and evidence for the Neo-Assyrian siege of Lachish, a compelling corroboration and elaboration of the spare details that are given in the Hebrew Bible. This is one of the very few instances where there are numerous separate sources of evidence for an event in ancient Israel or Judah. For this reason, the discoveries relating to the Neo-Assyrian siege of Lachish in 701 BCE are considered to rank among the greatest finds to date in biblical archaeology.

After his successful capture of Lachish, Sennacherib and his army headed for Jerusalem. The Judean king Hezekiah laid in supplies and established a number of defensive mechanisms, or so it is written in the Hebrew Bible (2 Chron. 32 and Isa. 22:10). According to archaeologists, these defensive mechanisms may have included the construction of a wall more than 20 feet thick and 130 feet in length, for the Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad found a long segment of just such a wall (the so-called Broad Wall) in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem in the 1970s.

From the biblical account, it is unclear whether the defensive measures taken by Hezekiah actually succeeded, for two different

tales are presented within the Hebrew Bible. In one instance (2 Kings 19:32–36; repeated, with slight differences, in Isa. 37:33–37 and 2 Chron. 32:20–21), the Bible says that a plague ravaged the Assyrian troops besieging the city, so that 185,000 died in a single night and the Assyrians subsequently retreated. However, in another instance (2 Kings 18:14–16), the biblical account states that Hezekiah sent a bribe to Sennacherib, who was still besieging Lachish at the time, to leave Jerusalem in peace, paying him three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold.

Sennacherib's own records seem to corroborate the latter story, for in one of his inscriptions he records that a bribe was paid, but that it was in fact eight hundred talents of silver and thirty of gold. Moreover, he stated: "As for Hezekiah, the Judaean, he did not submit to my yoke. I laid siege to forty-six of his strong fortified cities, and countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered them . . . I brought out of them 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself [Hezekiah] I shut up as a prisoner within Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage" (Oriental Institute Prism).

A little more than one hundred years later, Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians—successors to the Neo-Assyrians—attacked Jerusalem and captured the city in 597 and again in 586 BCE. The biblical account states, "Against him [King Jehoiakim of Judah] came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters to take him to Babylon" (2 Chron. 36:6). Elsewhere it states, "In his days, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up . . . and the Lord sent against him [Jehoiakim] bands of the Chaldeans [Neo-Babylonians] . . . and sent them against Judah to destroy it" (2 Kings 24:1–2).

These accounts are substantiated by an entry for the seventh year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign, found in the Babylonian Chronicles—contemporary records kept on clay tablets in Mesopotamia by

the Neo-Babylonian priests of the chief events for each year, which have been recovered and translated by archaeologists. The records state: "In the seventh year [598/597 BCE], the month of Kislev, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and encamped against [i.e., besieged] the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Adar he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent [them] to Babylon" (Chronicles of the Chaldaean Kings).

In other words, Nebuchadnezzar's scribes stated that Jerusalem was conquered and the vanquished peoples of Judah were transported to Babylon in 597 BCE, thereby corroborating the biblical account. Nebuchadnezzar and his army did the same thing again in 586 BCE, as mentioned, and for this attack and destruction we have archaeological evidence, in the form of ash, arrowheads, and toppled stones found in the Jewish Quarter of Jerusalem by Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad, excavating in the years after 1967.

Although it is likely that Nebuchadnezzar carried off the Hebrew royalty and the leading citizens of Jerusalem, as the Bible says—and initiated the Babylonian Exile of the Jews, which was to last for approximately fifty years (586–538 BCE)—recent archaeological surveys have shown that the land of Judah was not completely emptied of its inhabitants. This is contrary to what had been previously thought based upon the biblical account. Although there was a grave demographic crisis, as Oded Lipschits of Tel Aviv University has phrased it, archaeological surveys have confirmed that upwards of 70 percent of the population remained on the land during the years following the conquest—that is, sites continued to be occupied and there was no widespread abandonment of cities, towns, or villages as might have been expected. The majority of those left behind were probably peasants and members of the lower classes, for the members of the upper classes had all been taken off to Babylon.

Overall, the relevant extrabiblical inscriptions represent crucial confirming evidence for archaeologists that the biblical account does contain accurate details concerning first millennium BCE people, places, and events. These inscriptions have confirmed the existence of various kings of Israel and Judah mentioned in the biblical account and, in some cases, have corroborated the entire biblical account—such as the conquest of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 597 BCE. In no case has the biblical account of an event in the early first millennium BCE yet been shown by an extrabiblical inscription to be completely false.

Chapter 9
From the Silver Amulet Scrolls to the Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1979, Gabriel Barkay, then a professor at Tel Aviv University, was able to illuminate the biblical account from a unique perspective, while excavating a number of tombs in Jerusalem in an area overlooking the Hinnom Valley. The tombs are located at the site of Ketef Hinnom (the "Shoulder of Hinnom"), an Iron Age cemetery situated to the south of the King David Hotel and next to the Scottish Presbyterian Church of St. Andrew.

One of the tombs—actually a burial cave (Cave 24)—had multiple chambers. In one of the chambers (Room 25) were the remains of more than ninety-five individuals, along with more than one thousand objects. At least seven hundred of the objects were found in a single repository, left undisturbed for at least 2,500 years under one of the burial benches. Among 263 intact pots and other vessels, numerous gold objects, one hundred or more pieces of silver jewelry, arrowheads, and axeheads was a silver coin minted in the sixth century BCE on the Greek island of Kos. It is one of the earliest coins ever found in Israel, for coinage had only just been invented at the beginning of the seventh century BCE in Turkey.

Even more interesting were two small amulets, each consisting of a small rolled-up strip of silver: one approximately four inches long by one inch wide; the other approximately one and a half inches

long by half an inch wide. It took three years of painstaking work at the Israel Museum before the strips were fully unrolled. When that was finally accomplished, it was apparent that they were inscribed with minuscule writing. One word on the longer inscription jumped out at Yaakov Meshorer, curator of numismatics at the Israel Museum: *YHWH*, the tetragrammaton for the Divine Name Yahweh (Lord). Later it was established that the same word, *YHWH*, was inscribed on the smaller piece as well.

The two inscriptions appeared to contain priestly blessings in Hebrew, similar to the Priestly Benediction found in the Bible in Numbers 6:24–26, which says: "The LORD bless you and keep you; the LORD make his face to shine upon you, and be gracious to you; the LORD lift up his countenance upon you, and give you peace" (NRSV).

However, it was still not clear exactly what was written on the two amulets, for the writing on them was nearly illegible, due to the ravages of time. It took the combined efforts of the members of the West Semitic Research Project at the University of Southern California, headed by Bruce and Kenneth Zuckerman, to tease out the full text of the inscriptions, using a combination of photographic and computer imaging techniques, including fiber-optic technology.

Eventually it became clear that the inscription on the smaller piece reads "May he/she be blessed by Yahweh, the warrior [or helper] and the rebuker of [E]vil: May Yahweh bless you, keep you. May Yahweh make his face shine upon you and grant you p[ea]ce." The inscription on the longer piece is similar, reading

> . . .]YHW . . . the grea[t . . . who keeps] the covenant and [G] raciousness towards those who love [him] and those who keep [his commandments . . . . .]. the Eternal? [. . .]. [the?] blessing more than any [sna]re and more than Evil. For redemption is in him. For

YHWH is our restorer [and] rock. May YHWH bles[s] you and
[may he] keep you. [May] YHWH make [his face] shine . . .

Barkay suggested that the two amulets may have been deposited soon after the city's destruction by Nebuchadnezzar and the Neo-Babylonians in 586 BCE, since most of the pottery and other objects found associated with them date to just after this period. It is, however, impossible to tell exactly how old the amulets are, although the paleography—the script used in the inscriptions—suggests that they were inscribed sometime during the seventh or sixth centuries BCE. What is clear, though, is that they have a singular importance, for they are the oldest biblical texts currently extant. The fact that they so closely repeat what is said in today's versions of the Hebrew Bible only adds to their importance.

It is noteworthy that the amulets were found in what was essentially a routine, albeit very carefully conducted, excavation by a traditional team of archaeologists and students. What makes their story so compelling—in addition to their inscriptions—is the manner in which sheer ingenuity coupled together with modern technology enabled determined scholars to unroll the amulets and study the inscriptions.

Similar ingenuity and modern technology are now being used on the Dead Sea Scrolls, which William Albright once called the greatest manuscript discovery of modern times. Found more than sixty years ago, these scrolls, written mostly between the third century BCE and the first century CE, are relevant to both Jews and Christians. The initial discovery of these famous scrolls was not made by archaeologists but by Bedouins, who sold them to antiquities dealers.

According to the traditional account of the story, back in 1947 three young men from a local Bedouin tribe were watering their sheep and goats in the harsh desert area near the western side of the Dead Sea. One of them began idly tossing rocks at the mouth of

a cave high up on a cliff above him. One of the stones sailed through the cave entrance, and the young boy standing below heard a crash. With evening rapidly approaching, the boy made his way back to camp and told his two acquaintances what had happened. In the morning, they climbed the cliff and entered the cave, where they found pieces of a shattered jar and several intact jars. At least one of the jars contained several tightly wrapped leather scrolls. Disappointed that they had not found gold, the boys gathered up the scrolls and returned to their camp.

Sometime later, the boys rejoined the rest of their tribe and hung the scrolls from a tent pole until the tribe's wanderings brought them close to the town of Bethlehem. There they brought the scrolls to an antiquities dealer named Kando, who bought them thinking that if he could not sell them as antiquities he could always sell the leather to be made into sandals. Kando, in turn, contacted Professor Eliezer Sukenik of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, who traveled down to Kando's shop in Bethlehem to examine the scrolls. Sukenik purchased the three scrolls that Kando offered him and returned to Jerusalem just hours before fighting broke out in the Israeli War for Independence. The scrolls proved to be extremely important. One was a copy—at least one thousand years older than any previously known copy—of the book of Isaiah from the Hebrew Bible. The second scroll, now known as the Thanksgiving Scroll, contained hymns of thanks. The third scroll, known as the War Scroll, described an apocalyptic war between the "Sons of Light" and the "Sons of Darkness."

Subsequently, four more scrolls appeared on the antiquities market. These were eventually purchased by Yigael Yadin, Eliezer Sukenik's son (who had taken a Hebrew name by this time), through an intermediary after he saw a classified advertisement for them in the *Wall Street Journal*. The discovery of these first Dead Sea Scrolls touched off a race between the archaeologists and the Bedouins to find more scrolls. In the end, primarily between the years 1947 and 1960, both intact scrolls and thousands of

fragments were discovered in at least eleven different caves located in the cliffs along the northwest shore of the Dead Sea, behind the archaeological ruins of the site of Qumran. All told, more than eight hundred scrolls, both intact and fragmentary, were found in these caves, most dating between 200 BCE and 70 CE. Other scrolls, and material artifacts as well, including leather sandals and woven baskets, were found in other caves located farther away from this region, some dating to the later period of the Second Jewish (or Bar Kokhba) Rebellion from 132 to 135 BCE, but it is these more than eight hundred scrolls from the Qumran region that are most well known to the general public.

The discovery of the scrolls was only the beginning of the story, for although they had been recovered from the depths of the caves in which they had lain for nearly two thousand years, the scrolls in

9. The Dead Sea Scrolls caves, located in the hills behind Qumran on the shores of the Dead Sea, held more than eight hundred whole and fragmentary scrolls written primarily during the second century BCE through the first century CE. The scrolls contained both biblical and nonbiblical material, including virtually all the books of the Hebrew Bible.

their entirety were still far from being translated and published. In fact, while some of the scrolls were published very quickly, a logjam of unpublished material still existed as recently as the early 1990s, with a number of scrolls from Cave 4 still being studied by a small group of senior scholars who had been granted the publication rights decades earlier. Their work had been complicated by the fact that the scrolls from that cave had disintegrated into some 15,000 small fragments, essentially rendering their work similar to a jigsaw puzzle enthusiast trying to work on an unknown number of puzzles simultaneously and without the help of the puzzle-box cover pictures to aid reconstruction.

The delay in publication led to all sorts of outlandish conspiracy theories, including the accusation that the Vatican was suppressing publication of the scrolls because they contained texts that would undermine the very tenets of Christianity. Suffice it to say, there was no such conspiracy and no such texts within the Dead Sea Scrolls, as was revealed when the publication logjam was finally broken and the final volumes with photographs, translations, and analyses began to appear in the late 1990s. Work on the scrolls continues today with techniques such as infrared photography and fiber-optic technology being used to help read and reconstruct the most damaged of the fragments, especially by the same West Semitic Research Project team members who had worked on the Ketef Hinnom silver amulets. Eventually, high-resolution digital photographs of all the fragments will be placed on the Internet for all to see.

Excavations at the nearby site of Qumran, located in front of the caves in which the Dead Sea Scrolls were found, were first begun in the 1950s by Father Roland de Vaux, of the École Biblique et Archéologique Française. He believed that Qumran had been a monastery and that the monks who lived there had written the Dead Sea Scrolls. The scrolls themselves, he thought, were hidden by their owners in the caves behind the site when the Romans

invaded the area in 68 CE, destroying the site and removing its inhabitants. The scrolls then remained undisturbed for the next two thousand years.

Later scholars and excavators of the site have frequently disagreed with de Vaux's conclusions, suggesting instead that the site served as either a Roman villa, or a place of pottery manufacture, or a fortress. They have argued over whether the inhabitants were Essenes, a Jewish religious group that flourished from the second century BCE to the first century CE, as the Roman historian Josephus seems to imply, or some other Jewish group such as the Sadducees or Pharisees. It is also a matter of debate as to whether the scrolls came from Jerusalem or other parts of Judaea and were later deposited in the area of Qumran.

Regardless of such academic discussions, it is clear that the Dead Sea Scrolls are an extremely important part of the history of both Judaism and Christianity. The biblical texts they contain are a millennium older than the oldest ones previously known, which date to ca. 900 CE and were found in 1896 in a synagogue in Cairo. They therefore provide insights into the textual history of the Hebrew Bible and how the texts evolved over time. It is clear, however, that they represent merely one of at least three versions of the Hebrew Bible in existence at that time (different versions were known in Babylon, Palestine, and Egypt), demonstrating how fluid the situation was before the Hebrew Bible was canonized in its present form.

The nonbiblical texts among the Dead Sea Scrolls are fascinating as well. For instance, documents detailing the precise rules of the community that wrote the Dead Sea Scrolls provide an example of one type of Judaism that was practiced in that era, including instructions and prohibitions about eating, drinking, and congregating, and recording the fact that the people who wrote the scrolls were waiting for an Armageddon and the coming of a messiah.

One of the scrolls is written on copper, found separated into two pieces in Cave 3. It took years before the scroll was able to be unrolled, using distinctly old-fashioned technology in the form of a metal lathe at the Manchester Institute of Technology in England. This was used to cut the scroll into small segments, which were then pieced back together again and read. The scroll turned out to contain directions to sixty-four different buried treasures consisting of gold, silver, and other precious objects. Despite repeated attempts, primarily by amateur archaeologists, not one of the treasures has ever been located. In part this is probably due to the vagueness of the instructions; for instance, the directions to the first treasure are given simply as: "In the ruin which is in the valley, pass under the steps leading to the East forty cubits . . . there is a chest of money and its total [is] the weight of seventeen talents."

It is unclear what these treasures represent, if they even existed in the first place. If the scroll does reflect reality, then most likely they either were precious objects from the treasury of the Second Temple in Jerusalem, which had been hidden at the outbreak of the First Jewish Revolt in 66 CE, or were the annual tithes that had been destined for the Temple but which could not be brought to it because of the ongoing rebellion. Alternatively, the scroll may not reflect reality, but if that is the case, then one wonders at the reason for its existence.

Taken as a whole, the Dead Sea Scrolls contain copies—and in some cases multiple copies—of every book in the Hebrew Bible except for the book of Esther, and even its absence is probably an accident. However, there is not a single copy of any book from the New Testament to be found among them. There are, though, in the scrolls, a number of statements and ideas that would eventually evolve into portions of the Christian canon and that anticipated the religious developments that were to come very soon. This is especially evident when comparing the War Scroll, in which God and his angels are described as joining the "Sons of

Light" (the Essenes) in wiping out their enemies the "Sons of Darkness," with the Gospel of Paul that says, "But you, brethren, are not in darkness . . . For you are all sons of light and sons of the day . . . " (1 Thess. 5:4–5) and with the Letters of John that say " . . . he who walks in the darkness does not know where he goes. While you have the light, believe in the light, that you may become sons of light" (John 12:35–36).

Both the Silver Amulet Scrolls and the Dead Sea Scrolls demonstrate the importance of discovering ancient texts. Most material artifacts found by biblical archaeologists are mute, without a voice, and must be interpreted by those who find them. Ancient texts and inscriptions, if able to be translated, literally speak volumes to both the archaeologists and the general public.

Chapter 10
From Herod the Great to Jesus of Nazareth

Just as there are many questions remaining to be answered, from an archaeological point of view, regarding the account in the Hebrew Bible, so there are many remaining to be answered regarding the account in the Christian Bible. Of primary interest to New Testament biblical archaeologists and the general public are topics such as archaeological evidence for the historical Jesus; whether Herod's and Jesus' tombs have been discovered; if John the Baptist could have been an Essene; what it was like to live in cities such as Caesarea, Capernaum, and Sepphoris during this time; and what archaeology can tell us about the lives of the apostles.

Biblical archaeology of the New Testament generally is concerned with events that occurred immediately before, during, and after the life of Jesus, from the time of Herod in 40 BCE until the death of the apostles toward the end of the first century CE. The archaeology of the New Testament must cover the lands of Israel and Jordan (the Holy Land), as well as Turkey, Greece, and Italy in order to accommodate the voyages of Paul around the Mediterranean and the death of Peter in Rome. Overall, the archaeology of the Christian Bible covers a much shorter period of time (approximately two hundred years) and a much smaller geographical area (the Mediterranean region) than does

archaeology of the Hebrew Bible (which covers about 1,500 years and most of the ancient Near East).

To begin with Herod the Great, we know that Herod's father, Antipater, was appointed commissioner of Judaea by Julius Caesar after the year 49 BCE. At the same time, Herod and his brother Phasael were appointed district commissioners. When their father died, Herod and his brother took over as commissioners of Judaea, but they soon faced a rebellion in the year 40 BCE. Herod's brother was captured and eventually killed, but Herod escaped across the desert to the fortress of Masada. There he left his family and his fiancée, Mariamne, along with eight hundred troops, and continued on to Rome to seek the assistance of Mark Antony and the Roman Senate. The Senate viewed his entreaties favorably, and it designated Herod as the "King of the Jews." Thus confirmed, Herod returned to Judaea, retrieved his family and fiancée, took over Jerusalem, and proceeded to rule Judaea for the next several decades.

Herod continued to fortify Masada over the course of his reign. Although he never had to take refuge at Masada, his building activities there marked the beginning of a reign filled with construction projects across the length and breadth of the land over which he ruled. Of these, one of the best known is the city and port he built at a coastal site south of modern-day Haifa.

Herod named the city Caesarea Maritimae ("Caesarea by the Sea") to honor his patron, the Roman emperor Caesar Augustus. The city was built on top of the remains of earlier construction and took approximately twelve years to build, from 22 to 10 BCE. In 6 CE, after Herod's death, Caesarea became the capital of the Roman province of Palestine. It retained that status for more than six hundred years, until 641 CE when Islamic armies overran the city. Even after that date, the city continued to play an important role, especially through the Crusader (1099–1271 CE) and Mamluke (1250–1517 CE) periods.

Excavations at the site have revealed an amphitheater, a theater (now restored, in which modern musical and theatrical events are held), a hippodrome, a palace, an aqueduct, and marketplaces, as well as warehouses and harbor facilities. These excavations have taken place nearly continuously for much of the past half-century by various Italian, American, and Israeli archaeological teams. That work continues to the present.

Thus far, the discovery at Caesarea of perhaps the greatest importance to biblical archaeology is an inscription in Latin dating to 30 CE that mentions Pontius Pilate, the prefect (or governor) of Palestine infamously connected with Jesus in the New Testament. The inscription was found in the theater at Caesarea during the Italian excavations in 1961. It records a dedication by Pontius Pilate to the Emperor Tiberius. Three of the fragmentary lines read: *Tiberieum/[Pon]tius Pilatus/[Praef]ectus Iuda[eae]*— which translates as "Tiberius/Pontius Pilate/Prefect of Judaea." The full inscription is believed to have read: "Pontius Pilate, the Prefect of Judaea, has dedicated to the people of Caesarea a temple in honor of Tiberius." This is the only inscription on stone known to mention Pontius Pilate and confirms the title given to him, previously known only from the New Testament.

Herod undertook a number of other building projects besides Masada and Caesarea. The one for which he is most famous was in Jerusalem—the renovation of the Temple Mount and the alterations to the Second Temple that stood upon it. On the same site had stood Solomon's Temple (the First Temple), which was destroyed by the Neo-Babylonians in 586 BCE. As described in the book of Ezra, Cyrus the Great of Persia authorized the rebuilding of the destroyed structure. Construction of the Second Temple began by 535 BCE and was completed about 516 BCE. With relatively little alteration, the Second Temple then stood on the same site for the next five centuries. In one sense, when Herod undertook his rebuilding project he was constructing what was really the third Hebrew temple on the site; however, because ritual sacrifices

continued during the building process, it maintained continuity with the Second Temple and retained that name.

Herod's constructs enormously expanded the Temple Mount during the years 19–10 BCE, so that it covered an area the size of fifteen American football fields. It is still approximately the same size today. His renovations to the Second Temple made it the eighth wonder of the ancient world, and it is often referred to as Herod's Temple. According to Josephus, it appeared to travelers "like a mountain covered with snow."

Many of the events attributed to Jesus in the New Testament occurred in and around this Temple complex. Jesus even prophesized the destruction of the Temple (Matt. 21:12–14, 24:1–3)—a prophesy that came to pass at the hand of the Romans under Titus in 70 CE—but only a few traces of the Temple have been uncovered to date, probably because the destruction of this area by the Romans was so thorough.

One of the most exciting Herodian discoveries in recent years was made by Ehud Netzer of the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, at the site of Herodium, Herod's desert fortress located some seven miles south of Jerusalem. Netzer has been excavating at Herodium since 1972, as part of a long career in which he has uncovered remains of Herod's building program at many sites. Until recently, Netzer's excavations had focused on the lower palace built at the site. This is a huge palace, essentially the size of a small town, known as Lower Herodium. The excavators uncovered palatial buildings, gardens, warehouses, pools, and stables.

The most prominent feature at Herodium is a cone-shaped artificial mountain that Herod had constructed by adding fill to a much-smaller natural hill and raising it artificially until it was so high that it could be seen from Jerusalem. The top was fully 2,460 feet above sea level and was shaped so that it appeared to be a volcanic crater. Within this crater, Herod built a second, fortified

palace consisting of a huge circular courtyard with buildings, a reception area, and a Roman bath, all surrounded by four guard towers.

The Roman historian Josephus says that Herod's body was brought to Herodium after he died at Jericho in 4 BCE. In a long and winding procession, Herod's sons and relatives marched next to the bier upon which Herod's body lay clothed in a purple robe, with a diadem and a crown of gold upon his head and a scepter lying beside his right hand. The bier was made of solid gold and studded with precious stones. As Josephus tells us, Herod's relatives "were followed by the guards, the Thracian contingent, Germans and Gauls, all equipped as for war. The reminder of the troops marched in front, armed and in orderly array, led by their commanders and subordinate officers; behind these came five hundred of Herod's servants and freedmen, carrying spices. The body was thus conveyed for a distance of two hundred furlongs to Herodium, where, in accordance with the directions of the deceased, it was interred. So ended Herod's reign."

Josephus does not describe the location of Herod's grave or mausoleum. After having searched for years without success in the area of the lower palace, Netzer refocused his attention in 2006 on an area midway up the artificial hill, between the upper and lower palaces. Almost immediately he and his staff found indications that they were finally looking in the proper place. They uncovered pieces of a monumental limestone sarcophagus and mausoleum, including various architectural elements such as decorated urns. Unfortunately, both the sarcophagus and the mausoleum were badly shattered, and they found only a portion of the ten-meter-square podium, built of large white ashlars (squared-off stones, a basic building block of masonry), on which the mausoleum would once have rested.

Netzer has suggested that the tomb was that of Herod the Great, based on the architectural fragments recovered as well as its

general location, and believes that it was destroyed by Jewish zealots during the First Jewish Revolt against Rome from 66–70 CE when, according to Josephus, the rebels took over the site. Only a small number of human bones have been found at the site, and no identifying inscriptions have yet come to light, so while most scholars agree that Netzer has now solved one of the great New Testament mysteries—where was Herod's tomb?—complete confirmation is not yet available.

It was during the reign of King Herod, from 37 to 4 BCE, that Jesus was born—sometime between 7 and 4 BCE. According to the account in the New Testament, Herod attempted to dispose of this new "King of the Jews" by ordering the massacre of all male children in Bethlehem. But Jesus and his parents escaped to Egypt, where they remained until they received the news of Herod's death (Matt. 2:1–18).

Archaeology has not yet been able to shed any direct light on the birth, life, or death of Jesus. That is to say, there is not yet any archaeological evidence for the historical Jesus—or any of the apostles for that matter. Archaeology deals with the physical residue of the past, whether the remains of buildings, pottery fragments, or inscriptions on stone or papyrus. Therefore, unless one finds the actual remains of a body, the tools of archaeology can rarely provide evidence for the existence of a specific individual or group of individuals who lived in the distant past.

However, the failure of biblical archaeologists and pseudo-archaeologists to provide confirmatory evidence of the life of Jesus and the apostles has not been for lack of trying. The most recent attempt in this regard concerns the so-called Lost Tomb of Jesus, which was in the headlines in 2007 and 2008 as the result of a book and a documentary film with the same title. The documentary, by filmmakers Simcha Jacobovici and James Cameron, was featured on the Discovery Channel. The book was written by Jacobovici and Charles Pellegrino. In both the film and

the book, Jacobovici claimed that the tomb of Jesus had been discovered in Jerusalem three decades earlier, in 1980.

In fact, the tomb—better known to archaeologists as the Talpiot Tomb—had indeed been accidentally discovered in 1980, during demolition work by construction workers laying the foundations for an apartment complex. Amos Kloner, district archaeologist for the Israel Department of Antiquities (now the Israel Antiquities Authority) in the area of Jerusalem, arranged for a quick salvage excavation of the tomb, directed by Yosef Gath. The final report of the excavations was published in 1996 by Kloner, now an associate professor of archaeology at Israel's Bar-Ilan University. There was no mention in the report of any possible connection of the tomb to Jesus or any members of his family, nor was there any reason that there should have been, for there was no link to be made.

Jacobovici's documentary was extensively criticized by archaeologists, who protested the manipulation of data and the leaps of faith involved in making such a claim. Jodi Magness, a biblical archaeologist and professor of religious studies at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, said that the claim was sensationalistic and without any scientific basis or support. Joe Zias, a former curator of anthropology and archaeology at the Israel Antiquities Authority who was involved in the original excavation of the tomb, described the film as intellectually and scientifically dishonest. As far as professional archaeologists are concerned, the tomb of Jesus and his family remains undiscovered and, in fact, is more likely to have been located in their home town of Nazareth than in Jerusalem.

Apart from debunking the claims of irresponsible filmmakers, archaeologists can shed light on what the material culture was like at the time that Jesus and the apostles lived—for instance, what people ate, what they wore, and what their houses and buildings looked like in the cities of the Galilee, Sepphoris, Capernaum, and Jerusalem. In this way, archaeology can, to a certain extent, flesh

out the details found in the writings of the apostles and of the historian Josephus. For instance, the excavators of the city of Sepphoris—located just four miles from Nazareth in the Galilee—describe life there during the first century CE as largely Jewish, rather than Hellenistic or Roman, as had previously been thought.

Sepphoris served as the capital of the Galilee first in 20 CE and then again from 61 CE. In the intervening four decades, the new city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee served as the capital. Sepphoris was no backwater. As Eric Meyers, a biblical archaeologist at Duke University and one of the excavators of Sepphoris, has said, it was architecturally sophisticated, "with paved and colonnaded streets; water installations, possibly including a bathhouse on the eastern plateau and some sort of public water works nearer the acropolis; multistory buildings; and major public structures, including a large columned building also on the eastern plateau."

Similarly, the excavators of Capernaum, the town by the Sea of Galilee where Jesus settled and preached in the years before he left for Jerusalem, have found not only specific buildings—such as the synagogue and churches built on top of the traditional location for the house of St. Peter—but have produced evidence that life in Capernaum was fairly prosperous in the first century CE. John Laughlin, a professor of religion at Averett University, notes that "far from being a poor, isolated village, Capernaum, the center of Jesus' Galilean ministry, was quite prosperous . . . In the centuries that followed, Capernaum expanded and continued to prosper, in part as a Christian pilgrim center. . . . " It seems that the tourist trade then, like now, provided the local economy with a boost, from which it has benefited ever since.

Chapter 11
From the Galilee Boat to the Megiddo Prison Mosaic

Archaeological discoveries relating to the Bible frequently come about in unexpected ways. For instance, in 1985 and 1986, the country of Israel was stricken with a severe drought. During the drought, the Sea of Galilee—otherwise known as Lake Tiberias—dropped dramatically, and great stretches of the lakebed became visible for the first time in hundreds of years. Near Capernaum, the receding waters of the Sea of Galilee left exposed an important artifact that lay waiting to be discovered.

Moshe and Yuval Lufan, two brothers from nearby Kibbutz Ginnosar, jumped at the chance to explore the newly revealed stretches of muddy land. As Shelley Wachsmann, a biblical and nautical archaeologist now at Texas A&M University, tells the story, a tractor that had become stuck in the mud of the lakebed churned up a few ancient coins while trying to break free of the muck. The two young men scoured the area and discovered a few ancient iron nails before spying a boat buried so deeply in the mud that only its outline was visible. Wachsmann, who at the time was an inspector of underwater antiquities for the Israel Antiquities Authority, was sent to investigate the find. A few days of digging in and around the boat uncovered a cooking pot and an oil lamp, both of which dated to the Roman period. Because the discovery of the boat had been leaked to the media and because the water level of

the lake was once again rising, a more formal excavation had to begin without delay; that is to say, without the usual preplanning and fund-raising, which can take months and even years.

The entire excavation lasted only eleven days. In that span of time, working night and day, the archaeologists, conservators, and numerous volunteers from around the country managed to unearth what was left of the hull and superstructure of the boat. They encased all of the remains in a polyurethane "straitjacket," as Wachsmann calls it, and floated it over to the Yigal Allon Museum at Kibbutz Ginnosar. There, a pool was quickly built and the encased boat was lifted into it. After years of conservation work by Orna Cohen and her team at the museum, the boat went on display to the public, where it can be seen today in a special wing of the building.

10. The Galilee Boat, on display in the Yigal Allon Museum at Kibbutz Ginnosar, was discovered in Lake Tiberias during a drought in 1986. Probably dating to a period from the late first century BCE to the late first century CE, it may shed light on the New Testament stories concerning Jesus' activities in and around the Sea of Galilee.

The excavators concluded that the boat was made primarily of cedar planking with an oak frame, although five other types of wood were also used in its construction. The boat was 26.5 feet long, 7.5 feet wide, and 4.5 feet high, with a rounded stern. It probably had a sternpost, which served to support a rudder and a mast, so that it could be sailed as well as rowed. It most likely had a crew of five, with two rowers per side plus a helmsman, and could perhaps have accommodated as many as ten passengers. Wachsmann hypothesizes that the boat, after possibly having a long and useful life, had ended up being used as scrap, with many of its still-usable timbers removed. The remaining part of the hull was pushed out into the lake, where it sank and then remained, until it was discovered nearly two thousand years later.

Seventeen datable pieces of pottery—including the intact lamp and cooking pot discovered during the first days—were found during the excavation. All point to a period from the late first century BCE to ca. 70 CE, that is, from a few decades before until a few decades after the lifetime of Jesus. Radiocarbon dating confirmed these results. The wood from the boat was dated to between 120 BCE and 40 CE. At the very latest, the boat sank some time around the First Jewish Revolt against Rome, which lasted from 66 to 70 CE. At the earliest, it may have gone down during Jesus' own lifetime.

The discovery of the boat—the only one known from this time period in the region—has already shed light on the sailing and boat-building practices of the day, since archaeologists are able to physically examine its features and the method of its construction, rather than simply hypothesizing about them based only on pictures from mosaics or written descriptions in the Bible. Unfortunately, it is not clear who owned the boat or whether it was ever actually related to any of the events depicted in the New Testament stories concerning Jesus' ministry in and around the Sea of Galilee.

Other objects associated with New Testament stories have been found by biblical archaeologists working in the Holy Land. Some

are found during regularly scheduled excavations at sites like Sepphoris or Capernaum; others are initially found by accident, with the archaeologists quickly called in. In the latter category is the burial tomb and ossuary of Caiaphas, one of the most infamous figures associated with the life of Jesus. Caiaphas was high priest in Jerusalem in the years from 18 to 36 CE, which spans the time that Jesus was said to have been arrested and put on trial (John 18:12–14, 24–28; Luke 3:1–2). He is perhaps best known for saying of Jesus that it was better "to have one man die for the people than to have the whole nation destroyed" (John 11:49–53 [NRSV]; 18:14).

In 1990, the so-called Ossuary of Caiaphas—a stone box that may contain the bones of Caiaphas or members of his family—was discovered when a heavy dump truck broke through the roof of a burial cave during construction of a water park in Jerusalem's Peace Forest, located to the south of the Temple Mount and just below the Haas Tayelet (Promenade). Subsequently excavated by Zvi Greenhut of the Israel Antiquities Authority, the tomb is in a large cemetery, which has rock-cut burial chambers dating from the first century BCE through the first century CE.

There were a dozen ossuaries found in this one family tomb. All contained bones collected from bodies that had decomposed. The bones had been subsequently placed into these stone boxes as a secondary burial. This practice allowed the bodies of those who had died more recently to be laid out in the limited number of rock-cut niches in the tomb—there to decompose and eventually be moved into stone boxes of their own. One of the ossuaries had the word "Qafa" (Aramaic for the Greek name Caiaphas) scratched on the outside of the stone box. This was the first indication to archaeologists that they may have stumbled upon the tomb of the Caiaphas family.

Several of the ossuaries in the tomb contained the bones of more than one body. One ornately decorated limestone ossuary held the

remains of six different individuals. Five of the bone sets contained within it were from an adult woman, a teenage boy, a young child, and two infants, but one set was from a man thought to have been about sixty years old when he died. It is this set of bones that has been tentatively identified as those of Caiaphas of the New Testament. An inscription incised two times on the outside of the stone box, "Yehosef bar Qafa" and "Yehosef bar Qayafa," can be translated as Aramaic variations on the Greek words "Joseph, son of Caiaphas" or perhaps even "Joseph, of the family Caiaphas."

The Roman historian Josephus says that Caiaphas' full name was Joseph Caiaphas, but that he was commonly referred to simply as Caiaphas—"Joseph, who was also called Caiaphas, of the high priesthood" (Josephus, *Antiquities of the Jews* 18.2.2, 18.4.3). Thus, the Joseph named in the ossuary inscription may be Caiaphas of the New Testament. However, this identification is by no means conclusive, for bodies could frequently be switched around in antiquity and even placed into ossuaries not originally meant for them.

Still, if this is the body of Caiaphas, he would be one of the few individuals described in the New Testament whose physical remains have been identified by archaeologists. Such individuals are surprisingly rare, so this discovery is more significant than it would be if the ossuary were uninscribed and the individual inside were unidentified. At the very least, if it is Caiaphas, the discovery would confirm that the people who play a role in the stories of the New Testament were real and not fictitious.

Even some of the most important people from the New Testament, such as John the Baptist, have left behind few traces of their existence. Thus, there was tremendous public interest when Shimon Gibson, a British archaeologist based in Jerusalem, announced that he had found a cave associated with John the Baptist. Gibson set out his evidence in a book titled *The Cave of*

John the Baptist: The Stunning Archaeological Discovery that has Redefined Christian History (2004).

Gibson had found pictures of a man with a staff, a dog, and a head incised onto the walls of a cave located near the village of Ain Kerem, the traditional birthplace of John the Baptist. He interpreted these as depictions of the story of the life of John the Baptist. In addition, he found an oval stone with a foot-shaped indentation, which he identified as having been used for ritual foot-washing. However, after spending five years excavating the cave, Gibson, and his colleague James Tabor, a Bible scholar from the University of North Carolina at Charlotte, admit that the cave drawings were not carved until at least the Byzantine period (fourth to seventh centuries CE) or later and that there is no direct link to John the Baptist. Gibson suggests that the cave may have been used by Christian monks or other religious advocates who believed that it was associated with John the Baptist, thus explaining the graphic depictions.

Although Gibson's interpretations are interesting, few scholars agree with them. In 2008, Joe Zias, formerly of the Israel Antiquities Authority, suggested instead that most of the images date to the Crusader period and that they are related not to John the Baptist but rather to Lazarus, the patron saint of leprosy. The treatment of leprosy included the washing of diseased feet.

Other interesting but unproven suggestions made in recent years concerning John the Baptist revolve around the emphasis that he placed on baptism and the fact that there are a large number of pools—probably Jewish ritual bathing pools used for purification (*miqva'ot*)—at the site of Qumran. The combination of the existence of these probable *miqva'ot* at Qumran, the idea that there may have been Essenes living at the site, and the suggestion that the idea of Christian baptism may have been derived from the Jewish practice of ritual immersion in *miqva'ot* has led a few scholars to suggest a three-part theory: that John may have lived at

Qumran at one point in his life; that he may have been an Essene (even though he is never identified as such either in the New Testament or by the historian Josephus); and that he may have gotten the idea of baptism from his use of the ritual pools at Qumran. Obviously there is much speculation involved in these suggestions, but little archaeology.

As for the actual ministry established by Jesus and his followers, some of the most interesting archaeological evidence was uncovered in November 2005 within a maximum-security prison located a few hundred yards away from the famous site of Megiddo (biblical Armageddon) in the Jezreel Valley. During construction work to expand the prison, workers uncovered an intriguing mosaic. It is in a building apparently used by Roman soldiers and currently thought to date to the third century CE.

The mosaic was placed into the floor in four separate sections, to the north, south, east, and west of what was probably once a table in the middle of the room that was used for the Eucharist. The eastern and western panels have only geometric patterns, but the northern and southern panels contain inlaid inscriptions in Greek. The northern panel records the name of the Roman soldier—Gaianus, a centurion—who paid for the mosaics, and the name Brutius, the craftsman who laid the mosaic. It features two fish, an early Christian image perhaps reflecting the miracle of loaves and fishes, which was used as a reference to Jesus for several centuries before the cross was adopted as a universal symbol for the religion. In translation, the inscription reads as follows: "Gaianus, also called Porphyrius, centurion, our brother, has made the pavement at his own expense as an act of liberality. Brutius carried out the work."

The southern panel contains two inscriptions. On the right (or eastern) side of the panel is an inscription with four women's names. It asks the viewer to remember "Primilla and Cyriaca and Dorothea, and moreover also Chreste." On the left (or western) side

of the panel is the most interesting inscription. It says that the Eucharistic table in the middle of the room was paid for by a woman named Akeptous: "The God-loving Akeptous has offered the table to God Jesus Christ as a memorial." This is the earliest inscription ever found in Israel—and perhaps anywhere in the world—that mentions Jesus Christ.

The people named in the inscriptions have not been identified, but they probably belonged to a Christian community thriving among the soldiers of the Roman Sixth Legion, who were based in the area during those centuries. Scholars have debated whether the building in which the mosaic was found was a church. It was unlikely to have been the type of church structure with which we are now familiar, since Christian churches as we know them did not exist during the third century CE. They did not appear until the fourth century CE, after Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan in 313 CE, which declared that Christianity was a tolerated religion and could be practiced without fear of punishment. It was at this later time that buildings such as the Church of the Holy Sepulcher in Jerusalem and the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem were first built.

Some scholars argue that the building housing the mosaic may have been a so-called house church. These were apparently in use during the second and the third centuries CE, when Christianity was a forbidden religion; at that time, it was prudent to make places of Christian worship as inconspicuous as possible. In that era, places of worship were known by various names, including *ecclesi* and *domus Dei* (House of God).

At the time the mosaics were apparently laid, Christianity was considered to be an illegal religion in the Roman Empire, and its practitioners could be punished. However, the Roman authorities frequently turned a blind eye to the activities of adherents of a variety of outlawed religions—including the so-called mystery religions such as the worship of Eastern gods Mithras, Osiris, or

Orpheus—so long as the adherents of these religions revered the official Roman pantheon of gods and goddesses as well. Nevertheless, the province of Syria Palestine, as it was called at the time, including the region around Megiddo, was within the domain of the Roman Empire in the third century CE, and those named in the mosaic inscriptions may have been putting their lives in jeopardy by revealing their identity. That their names were so prominently inscribed perhaps speaks to the depth of their personal faith. On the other hand, if the dating of the building is off by a century, then it would have existed when it was allowable to practice Christianity without fear of punishment, and the story would not be quite as dramatic.

By this point, however, we are beyond the events depicted in the New Testament and have moved past the furthest boundaries of biblical archaeology and into the archaeology of the Byzantine and Late Antique period, which is another topic altogether.