

Bible History and Archeology

4. Amazing Discoveries in Israel

Old Testament Prophecies Proving Jesus as the Messiah

Israel cannot boast the massive remains of the pyramids, the towers of Egypt, or the palaces of Nineveh or Babylon, or even the classical remains of Greece; but there is an emotional attachment to the land that is unparalleled anywhere else in the world. It alone can be called the holy land. Here Arabs, Jews, and Christians all have their sacred shrines and to the Jews and Christians this is the land of the Bible. Here literally every stone has a story to tell.

Beginning with Bethlehem where Ruth gleaned in the fields of Boaz and David the shepherd boy tended his sheep; not very far from there, by the road is the tomb of Rachel the wife of Jacob. Bethlehem is best known as the birth place of Jesus who according to Scripture was a direct descendant of Ruth and David.

Today you can look down King David's Street and imagine Mary and Joseph coming on their donkey into Bethlehem for the first time. The Church of the Nativity is located at the end of this street in the square, This church was erected on the presumed sight of the nativity in the early 4th century by Saint Helena the mother of Constantine.

The present structure was erected by Justinian in the early 6th century, as Palestine was destroyed by the Persians around about the year 614 AD and they demolished all the churches there except this one. They didn't touch it because on the inside there is a Mosaic of the three wise men, and the Persians believed they were Persians so they didn't touch that church.

To get into the church you must stoop very low. The doorway is only about four feet high. One tradition suggests that the reason why they made the door low is so that everyone that goes into it has to stoop low in reverence. Although on the outside it appears a bit like a grim fortress nevertheless it's one of the most beautiful Byzantine cities in the whole world. They'll take you inside and show you the spot where Christ was born, even show you the supposed place of the manger.

A mile or two from the church you can find the shepherds' fields where the shepherds were minding their sheep when the angels announced Christ's birth. Many remarkable prophecies concern Jesus of Nazareth. Over 500 years before the baby cry of Jesus broke the stillness of the Bethlehem air it was predicted that Christ would be born in Bethlehem, The prophecy said, "But thou Bethlehem Ephrathah though thou be little among the thousands of Judah, yet out of thee shall He come forth unto Me that is to be ruler in Israel, whose goings forth have been from of old from everlasting." Micah 5:2.

Joseph and Mary lived up in Nazareth and it seemed that's where Christ would be born, but Christ wasn't born in Nazareth. He was born In Bethlehem about 70 miles south of the place that Mary and Joseph lived. Nazareth was north and Bethlehem was down south.

Just before He was born, a Roman emperor comes onto the scene and he decides he's going to tax people. Now he didn't think his taxation idea would catch on very well. We've had taxation now for thousands of years and still it's not popular. Caesar Augustus decided that he was going

to tax the people and he thought that there would be a little trouble, so he decided that all the people had to register in the town of their birth. So the parents of Christ who were born in Bethlehem but now living in Nazareth had to travel all the way down to Bethlehem to register.

There were four districts in Palestine where He could have been born; Syria, Galilee, Samaria and Judea, but the prophet said that He would be born in Judea. There are many towns in Judea that He could have been born in, but the prophet said that He would be born in Bethlehem of Judea. Then a Roman emperor comes onto the scene and passes a decree that causes the mother of Christ to travel down to Bethlehem, and Jesus is born there. There are about 300 prophecies relating to Christ, and so striking are these prophecies that many have even suggested that they must have been written after the events were fulfilled because they're so accurate.

There are two major reasons that we know today that these prophecies were not written after the event. First of all there is the Septuagint, the Greek translation of the Old Testament Scriptures, which goes back to about 300 BC. Then secondly there are the Dead Sea Scrolls. They were discovered in Qumran down by the Dead Sea. No one who understands the facts would suggest today that these prophecies were written after the event, because we have confirming evidences which clearly show they were written at least two to three hundred years before Christ was born. These prophecies give the strongest evidence that indeed the Bible is what it claims to be; the living Word of God.

Some people have trouble accepting the idea of the virgin birth, but is it harder for the God of the stars to work a miracle and have a baby born without an earthly father or is it harder to actually make a statement five or six hundred years before the baby was born that He would be born that way? And there's no doubt that's what the prophecy said in Isaiah 7:14. "Therefore the Lord himself shall give you a sign; Behold, a virgin shall conceive, and bear a son, and shall call his name Immanuel," which being interpreted means God with us.

Then Joseph and Mary were warned in a dream of the danger confronting them if they continued to stay in Bethlehem. "When he arose, he took the young child and his mother by night, and departed into Egypt: And was there until the death of Herod: that it might be fulfilled which was spoken of the Lord by the prophet, saying, Out of Egypt have I called my son." Matthew 2:14, 15. So they journeyed down to Egypt.

After Joseph and Mary returned from Egypt after the death of Herod, they traveled toward the hills of Galilee to a city called Nazareth. Galilee is in the hill country and the city of Nazareth lies on the slopes of the mountain. From here you have a beautiful panoramic view of the whole fertile Esdralon Valley which stretches out before you.

Many of the homes of Nazareth look like what they did 2,000 years ago, built of mud, brick and stone. On the outside you usually find the stairs which lead to the flat tops of the homes. The streets are narrow with their drainage sometimes flowing right down the centre of the streets. The shops open out onto the streets and the goods are stacked high along side on the pavement.

Jacob's well is the spot where tradition says that Christ Himself would have come down to draw water for the family. In those narrow streets carpenters work, and we think of the young lad

who worked there in Joseph's shop looking not too much different to what the shops look like today.

Leaving Nazareth, a few miles to the northeast is the Sea of Galilee. A twisting road, the highway looks right down to the City of Tiberius on the edge of the Sea of Galilee. Tiberius has two distinct parts; the new city on the hillside and the old city on the shores of the lake. It's actually the present day capital of Galilee and one of the foremost cities in the whole of Palestine. In the year 20 AD Herod Antipas began to build here on the ruins of an older city and he named it in honor of Tiberius, the Emperor of Rome.

On the shores of the Sea of Galilee is the little town of Capernaum. Its ruins are spread out over half a mile along the northern shore of the lake about 10 miles from the City of Tiberius. Anciently this town was on the main road from Damascus right down to Jerusalem. In 1905 archaeologists were able to identify the ruins of the synagogue of Capernaum, While much of the structure dates from the second and third century AD the foundation stones are unquestionably the stones that Christ would have walked on in that synagogue.

Then in 1968 further investigation uncovered the remains of a house dating back to Herod's time and the inscriptions on this house indicate that it was the home of a fisherman. We believe today that this was the home of the Apostle Peter, for you remember how that Jesus came down to Capernaum and healed Peter's wife's mother.

At the southern end of Galilee is where the Jordan River leaves the Sea of Galilee. You read and hear so much about the Jordan River that you imagine it is a raging river. At its widest it is only about 90 to 100 feet below in width and between 3 and 12 feet in depth. It runs down to the Dead Sea which is about 65 miles away but because it twists and turns so much it covers a distance of about 200 miles. The Sea of Galilee is about 690 feet below sea level and the Dead Sea is about 1,295 feet below sea level. So in the wet season it can become a raging torrent.

Among the cities of the Decapolis, one of the most thriving and best preserved is Jeresh, second in size to Damascus among the ten. Whether Jesus actually visited this city we are not sure, possibly He did. It is the best preserved of all the Roman cities in Palestine today. At the end of the town is a theatre with 32 tiers of seats sufficient to accommodate between four to five thousand spectators. In 1974 they found two inscriptions that date the building to the reign of Domitian round about 91-92 AD. Not very far away from Jeresh is Jericho with its palm trees and its gardens watered by the living springs. This city was the centre of traffic end Roman officials and soldiers; the city of the customs, where the tax collectors lived. Zacchaeus lived there. It was a well populated place. King Herod had a summer residence there.

Jerusalem is very cold even though it's only about 15 miles away, but it's elevated above sea level about 2,700 feet. In the winter it snows there. While it is snowing in Jerusalem you can ripen bananas 15 miles away. Jericho is about 800 feet below sea level.

Here in Jericho are the famed Elisha Springs, just opposite the Old Testament city of Jericho. No place in the whole of Palestine has been dug up more than this city has and the well-known archaeologist Kathleen Kenyan was the one responsible for so much work that's been done on Jericho.

From Jericho it's about 15 miles up a steep hill up towards Jerusalem, passing by the inn of the Good Samaritan where tradition says that the man was taken after being beaten by robbers.

The last stop before Jerusalem there's a little town of Bethany where Mary, Martha and Lazarus lived.

Today there's a church erected over the site of their home. Although the houses are not exactly as they were 2,000 years ago, life is not very different in that little place today.

Jesus made a prophecy regarding Jerusalem and the temple.

“And as some spake of the temple, how it was adorned with goodly stones and gifts, he said, As for these things which ye behold, the days will come, in the which there shall not be left one stone upon another, that shall not be thrown down.” Luke 21:5, 6.

Jerusalem's very name means Peace, but it has scarcely known peace over the last 2,000 years. In 70 AD the Roman, Titus, came down with 60,000 trained soldiers. It was the time of the Passover and there were a million people inside the city. The destruction and the slaughter that followed is one of the bloodiest pages of human history.

Titus wanted to spare the temple, but the prophecy had said it would be destroyed. A crazed soldier picked up a lighted torch and threw it inside one of the windows and it caught the cedar lining of the place alight and it blazed uncontrollably. The entire city was ravaged; its population slaughtered. Over a million people died. Indeed, not one stone was left standing upon another in the temple. The last statement Jesus made regarding Jerusalem was it would be a point of conflict and bloodshed and political turmoil until the end of time.

“For the days shall come upon thee, that thine enemies shall cast a trench about thee, and compass thee round, and keep thee in on every side, And shall lay thee even with the ground, and thy children within thee; and they shall not leave in thee one stone upon another; because thou knewest not the time of thy visitation.” Luke 19:43, 44.

In the year 638 AD, the Moslems come down and took over Jerusalem. They regard Jerusalem as the third most holy place in the whole earth after Mecca and Medina. Today on the site of Solomon's temple you can see the dome of the rock built over the traditional site where Abraham was going to offer Isaac. The Moslems say it's where Mohammed left to ride his horse to heaven from.

One can never understand the political turmoil of the Middle East today without knowing something of the background of the Jew and the Arab. They both descend from Abraham, the same father. So the Jew and the Arab are really half brothers.

The squabble that is still going over there in the Middle East is really a family squabble of Abraham that's continued over the last three and a half thousand years. The Arabs and the Jews have existed as a distinct race down through the stream of time since the time of Abraham.

The story in brief is that Abraham had been promised children and so far in his life he had none. In a moment of sagging faith, he and his wife decided to help God out and Abraham had a son by Hagar, an Egyptian slave. This was Ishmael. Then when Isaac, the real son of promise was born, there was trouble in the home and God told Abraham to send Hagar away, which he did.

Hagar found herself alone in the wilderness and believed that her son and herself would perish. Then an angel appeared to her and made this very interesting statement. (Genesis 16) "The angel of the Lord said unto her (Hagar) I will multiply thy seed exceedingly and it will not be numbered for multitudes." All today would bear witness to the truthfulness of that amazing prophecy. There are hundreds of millions of Arabs in the world today. Then the angel went on to say, "He will be a wild man." That's true. For no nation has ever subjugated and controlled the Arabs. They are a wild people. You only have to travel in their country for a little while to be convinced that they are a very, very wild people. The Arabs have a saying among themselves, "We are united on only one thing and that is we'll never be united." They just can't agree among themselves.

The angel continued: "His hand will be against every man and every man's hand against him." How true that is: The whole world seems to be against the Arabs, and the Arabs seem to be against other nations.

"And he shall dwell in the presence of all his brethren." The Arabs are nomads, a wandering people, but they have always wandered within their boundaries. Today they're still living in that area where they were born.

Jerusalem is a city that's a powder keg; at any moment someone or something could set it alight. For the Jews, the closest that he can get to their original history is down by the temple wall, called the western wall or the Wailing Wall; this is a very emotional experience. They come up to this wall and you'll see them saying their prayers and reading their Scriptures. They regard this as the most sacred place because this bit of wall is the only remnant of Solomon's temple.

In Jerusalem is the street called the Via Dolorosa or the Way of Sorrow; the street that Jesus walked down on His way to Calvary. It is dark and gloomy for it's so narrow the sun seldom shines into it.

Impressive are the incredible prophecies made over 500 years before Christ was born, which pinpoint every event that happened on that fateful day.

"And I said unto them, If ye think good, give me my price; and if not, forbear. So they weighed for my price thirty pieces of silver. And the LORD said unto me, Cast it unto the potter: a goodly price that I was prized at of them. And I took the thirty pieces of silver, and cast them to the potter in the house of the LORD." Zechariah 11:12, 13.

Here it was predicted that the thirty pieces of silver that was used to betray Christ to pay Judas would be cast down in the temple and then used to buy the potter's field to bury strangers in.

Judas promised to betray Jesus to the priests and they paid him 30 pieces of silver. When Judas realized what he had done, he took that 30 pieces of silver and he threw it down at the feet of the priests.

Because it was blood money, they could not put it into the treasury, so they decided that they would use it to go out and buy a field. It so happened the field they bought had been owned by a Potter, so was called the Potter's field. The prophecy had even told who they would buy the

field from; hundreds of years before, it was predicted that He would be sold for 30 pieces of silver and the money would be used to buy the potter's field.

In Psalms it was predicted a thousand years before it happened that it was going to be one of the inner circle of Christ's friends that would betray Him

"Yea, mine own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, which did eat of my bread, hath lifted up his heel against me." Psalm 41:9.

Again in the Psalms, written a thousand years before Christ we see;

"For dogs have compassed me: the assembly of the wicked have inclosed me: they pierced my hands and my feet. I may tell all my bones: they look and stare upon me. They part my garments among them, and cast lots upon my vesture." Psalm 22:16-18.

How could David, 1,000 years before, know that Christ was going to be crucified? The form of capital punishment for the Jews was stoning. The Romans weren't even on the scene at that stage. But the prophecy was clear, that they would pierce His hands and His feet.

Another prediction fulfilling Bible prophecy, says that they would gamble for His clothes.

"Then the soldiers, when they had crucified Jesus, took his garments, and made four parts, to every soldier a part; and also his coat: now the coat was without seam, woven from the top throughout. They said therefore among themselves, Let us not rend it, but cast lots for it, whose it shall be: that the scripture might be fulfilled, which saith, They parted my raiment among them, and for my vesture they did cast lots. These things therefore the soldiers did." John 19:23, 24.

"And they bring him unto the place Golgotha, which is, being interpreted, The place of a skull." Mark 15:22.

There's still some dispute as to which was the exact site of Christ's death and burial. From 'Gordon's Calvary', discovered by General Gordon in 1882, can be seen what looks like a skull, the two eyes and mouth, and he said that this must be Golgotha, the place of the skull. Not far away he found the tomb and the winepress and it convinced him that this must be the place of Christ's crucifixion.

Following the resurrection, the record says that Jesus spent another 40 days on earth. At the end of those 40 days He led His disciples up there on top of the Mount of Olives. This was the last time that He would stand there with His disciples on the mount. Today a church has been erected over the supposed spot where Christ last touched His feet on that mount. Along side this little church is a road that leads down to the little town of Bethany.

Can any other religious leader equal or supersede Christ? No other being will ever surpass Christ, because no other human being has ever had his life story told before he was born. No other human being was born of a virgin; born as God with us. No other rose from the dead.

You can go to China today and they will show you, where Confucius was buried. You can go over to Madeira near the Red Sea and they'll show you the tomb of Mohammed. Go to Thailand in Burma and Rangoon and they will show you relics of Buddha, but where is Buddha today? He's dead.

There's only one Person that has ever broken the bonds of death and the tomb and you can visit Jerusalem and see there the empty tomb. He is the only religious leader that is alive today. What is more, millions around the world today believe it.

But that is not the end of the story, for as those disciples were up there on the Mount of Olives, Jesus was taken up from them into heaven. Then two angels stood by them and said, Acts 1:9-11, "And when He had spoken these things, while they beheld. He was taken up and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And while they looked steadfastly toward heaven as He went up, behold two men stood by them in white apparel; which also said, Ye men of Galilee why stand ye gazing up into heaven? This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." Those angels assured the disciples that Christ would come back.

Paul wrote "And so Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many. And unto them that look for Him shall He appear the second time without sin unto salvation." He came once to offer Himself a ransom for sin, but next time He's coming to take us home to where our dreams will come true. I tell you that to miss that would be to miss the most important thing in this life.

"The Stranger of Galilee.

"In fancy I stood by the shore one day, Of the beautiful murmuring sea;
I saw the great crowds as they thronged the way Of the Stranger of Galilee;
I saw how the man who was blind from birth, In a moment was made to see;
The lame were made whole by the matchless skill Of the Stranger of Galilee,

"His look of compassion. His words of love, They shall never forgotten be.
When sin-sick and helpless He saw me there. This Stranger of Galilee;
He showed me His hand and His riven side. And He whispered was all for thee.
My burden fell off at the pierced feet Of the Stranger of Galilee,

"I heard Him speak peace to the angry waves. Of that turbulent raging sea;
And lo at His word are the waters stilled, This Stranger of Galilee;
A peaceful. a quiet end holy calm. Now and ever abides with me;
He holds my life in His mighty hand This Stranger of Galilee,
"And I felt I could love Him for ever So gracious and tender was He!
I claimed Him that day as my Savior This Stranger of Galilee.

"Come you who are driven and tempest-tossed. And His gracious salvation see;
He'll quiet life's storms with His 'Peace be still', This Stranger of Galilee.
He bids me to go and the story tell What He ever to you will be,
If only you let Him with you abide, This Stranger of Galilee,
"Oh my friend won't you love Him for ever, So gracious and tender is He:
Accept Him today as your Savior This Stranger of Galilee."