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## Question 96 - What supernatural elements may be seen regarding the historical accuracy of the Bible?

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## 101 MOST ASKED QUESTIONS ABOUT THE BIBLE

### 96. What supernatural elements may be seen regarding the historical accuracy of the Bible?

#### A. The testimony of scholars

Less than a century ago, the agnostic took great glee in sneeringly referring to the “hundreds of historical mistakes” in the Bible. But then came the science of archaeology, and with each shovelful of dirt the sneers have become less visible, until today they scarcely can be seen. When one thinks of historical scholarship and the Bible, three brilliant scholars of giant intellect and achievement come to mind. These three are:

1. **Sir William Ramsay** – For many years Ramsay was professor of humanity at the University of Aberdeen, Scotland. He was, in his time, the world’s most eminent authority on the geography and history of ancient Asia Minor (Turkey today). In his zeal to study every available early document concerning that period and area, he undertook an intensive research of the New Testament book of Acts and also the Gospel of Luke. This study, however, was approached with much skepticism. At that time he penned the following description of the book of Acts: “A highly imaginative and carefully colored account of primitive Christianity.”

But after many years of intensive study, this scholar, who began an unbeliever, became a staunch defender of the Word of God. The absolute historical accuracy of Luke’s writings, even in the most minute details, captured first his brain and then his heart. Ramsay authored many books, but one of his better known is entitled *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament*. Ramsay’s overall opinion of the Bible is perhaps best seen in the following quote: “I take the view that Luke’s history is unsurpassed in regard to its trustworthiness . . . you may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian’s and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment.”

2. **William F. Albright** – One of the greatest and most respected oriental scholars who ever lived was William F. Albright. The list of his earned doctorate degrees reminds one of the “New Deal” alphabetical organizations. These degrees included the Ph.D., Litt.D., D.H.L., Th.D., and LL.D. Dr. Albright writes the following concerning the Bible and his historical findings: “The reader may rest assured: nothing has been found to disturb a reasonable faith, and nothing has been discovered which can disprove a single theological doctrine . . . We no longer trouble ourselves

with attempts to 'harmonize' religion and science, or to 'prove' the Bible. The Bible can stand for itself." (Robert Young, *Young's Analytical Concordance to the Bible*, p. 51)

3. **Robert Dick Wilson** – Probably the most qualified Old Testament linguist of all time was Robert Dick Wilson. His skill along this line staggers the imagination. Dr. Wilson was born in 1856 and took his undergraduate work at Princeton University, graduating in 1876. He then completed both the M.A. and the Ph.D. After this, two years were spent at the University of Berlin in further postgraduate studies. Wilson taught Old Testament courses at Western Theological Seminary in Pittsburgh and returned to Princeton, where he received international fame as a Hebrew scholar without peer. He was perfectly at home in over 40 ancient Semitic languages. Dr. Wilson writes the following about himself:

"If a man is called an expert, the first thing to be done is to establish the fact that he is such. One expert may be worth more than a million other witnesses that are not experts. Before a man has the right to speak about the history and the language . . . of the Old Testament, the Christian Church has the right to demand that a man should establish his ability to do so. For 45 years continuously, since I left college, I have devoted myself to the one great study of the Old Testament in all its languages, in all its archaeology, in all its translations, and as far as possible in everything bearing upon its text and history. I tell you this so that you may see why I can and do speak as an expert. I may add that the result of my 45 years of study of the Bible has led me all the time to a firmer faith that in the Old Testament we have a true historical account of the history of the Israelite people; and I have a right to commend this to some of those bright men and women who think that they can laugh at the old-time Christian and believer in the Word of God . . . I have claimed to be an expert. Have I the right to do so? Well, when I was in the seminary I used to read my New Testament in nine different languages. I learned my Hebrew by heart, so that I could recite it without the intermission of a syllable . . . as soon as I graduated from the Seminary, I became a teacher of Hebrew for a year and then I went to Germany. When I got to Heidelberg, I made a decision. I decided – and did it with prayer – to consecrate my life to the study of the Old Testament. I was 25 then; and I judged from the life of my ancestors that I should live to be 70; so that I should have 45 years to work. I divided the period into three parts. The first 15 years I would devote to the study of the languages necessary. For the second 15 I was going to devote myself to the study of the text of the Old Testament; and I reserved the last 15 years for the work of writing the results of my previous studies and investigations, so as to

give them to the world. And the Lord has enabled me to carry out that plan almost to a year." (*Which Bible?* pp. 40-41)

Thus did Robert Dick Wilson write. One of the stirring moments in the experience of his students occurred when, after a dissertation on the complete trustworthiness of Scripture, the renowned scholar said with tears: "Young men, there are many mysteries in this life I do not pretend to understand, many things hard to explain. But I can tell you this morning with the fullest assurance that –

"Jesus loves me, this I know  
For the Bible tells me so." (ibid, p. 42)

Of course, it must be admitted that no human intellect, however brilliant or accomplished, is infallible. But this fact should be kept in mind – no three other men among the many, who have criticized and ridiculed the Bible, were probably even half as qualified to speak with the authority as possessed by Ramsay, Albright, and Wilson.

A. The testimony of archaeology (A general overview)

The fact is, many biblical events and places are strongly supported by archaeological finds. These would include:

1. Creation (Gen. 1:1)
2. Original monotheism (Gen. 1:1)
3. The Garden of Eden (Gen. 2:8-17)
4. The fall of man (Gen. 3)
5. Earliest civilization (Gen. 4:1-26)
6. Pre-flood longevity (Gen. 5:1-32)
7. The universal flood (Gen. 6-8)
8. Mount Ararat as the site of Noah's ark (Gen. 8:4)
9. The table of nations (Gen. 10)
10. The tower of Babel (Gen. 11:1-9)
11. Ur of the Chaldeans (Gen. 11:31)
12. Haran (Gen. 12:5)
13. The battle route of Chedorlaomer (Gen. 14:1-12)
14. The Hittite empire (Gen. 15:20)
15. Nahor (Gen. 24:10)
16. The employment of camels in patriarchal times (Gen. 24:11)
17. The cities of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen. 19)
18. The commonness in inscriptions of biblical names such as Adam, Eve, Lamech, Jabal, Noah, Hagar, Keturah, and Bilhah (Gen. 2:19; 3:20; 4:19-20; 5:29; 16:1; 25:1; 29:29)
19. The abundance of food in Gerar in time of famine (Gen. 26:1)

20. Joseph and Potiphar's wife (Gen. 39)
21. The bricks without straw (Exod. 5:7-19)
22. The death of the firstborn in Egypt (Exod. 12)
23. The destruction of Pharaoh and his armies in the Red Sea (Exod. 14)
24. The parting of the Jordan River (Josh. 3)
25. The destruction of Jericho (Josh. 6)
26. The altar used by Joshua when Israel crossed into the promised land (Josh. 8:30-35)
27. The wealth of Gibeon (Josh. 10:2).
28. The springs of Kirjath-sepher (Josh. 15:13-19)
29. Shiloh, where the tabernacle resided after Israel crossed into the promised land (Josh. 18:1)
30. The use of the hornet in conquering Palestine (Josh. 24:12)
31. The burial of Joshua (Josh. 24:30)
32. Cities in the book of Judges (Judg. 1:21-29)
33. The Philistine's use of iron weapons (Judg. 1:19)
34. The Deborah and Barak battle (Judg. 4)
35. Gideon's hidden grain pit (Judg. 6:11)
36. The destruction of Gibeah (Judg. 20)
37. The taking of the Ark (1 Sam. 4)
38. Saul's house in Gibeah (1 Sam. 10:26)
39. Jonathan's victory over the Philistines (1 Sam. 14)
40. The music of David (1 Sam. 16:18, 23; 1 Chron. 15:16)
41. The pool of Gibeon (2 Sam. 2:13)
42. The capture of Jerusalem (2 Sam. 5:6-10)
43. The wealth of Solomon (1 Kings 4:26; 9:26; 10:22)
44. Solomon's fortresses, built to defend his cities in the Negev (1 Kings 9:15)
45. The invasion of Judah by Pharaoh Shisak of Egypt (1 Kings 14:25-28; 2 Chron. 12:2-9)
46. The reign of northern King Omri (1 Kings 16:22-28)
47. The rebuilding of Jericho (Josh. 6:26; 1 Kings 16:34)
48. The victory of Elijah on Mount Carmel (1 Kings 18)
49. Ahab's house of ivory (1 Kings 22:39)
50. The pool of Samaria (1 Kings 22:37-38)
51. The war between Israel and Moab (2 Kings 3)
52. The building where the Judean king Joash was murdered (2 Kings 12:20-21)
52. The punishment of King Jehu (2 Kings 10:29-33)
53. The official seal of the servant of Jeroboam II (2 Kings 14:23-29)
54. Repentance of Nineveh (Jon. 3)
55. The tribute money King Menahem of Israel paid to Assyrian King Pul (2 Kings 15:19)

56. The accomplishments and judgment of King Uzziah (2 Chron. 26)
57. The capture of Israel by Assyrian King Shalmaneser (2 Kings 17)
58. Ahaz's money tribute to King Tiglath-pileser (2 Kings 16:5-9)
59. The seal and tomb of Shebna, Hezekiah's scribe (Isa. 22:15-16)
60. A seal bearing the name "Gemariah, the son of Shaphan," who served as official scribe to the Judean king Jehoiakim (Jer. 36:9-12)
61. The destruction of Lachish by Sennacherib (2 Chron. 32:9)
62. Sennacherib's failure to capture Jerusalem (2 Kings 18-19; 2 Chron. 32; Isa. 36-37)
63. The murder of Sennacherib by his own sons (Isa. 37:37-38)
64. The imprisonment of King Manasseh by the Assyrians (2 Chron. 33:11)
65. The discovery of the book of the law in the temple during Josiah's reign (2 Chron. 34:8-32)
66. Hezekiah's water tunnel (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:30)
67. Hezekiah's wall repairs (2 Chron. 32:5)
68. The destruction of Lachish by Nebuchadnezzar (Jer. 34:7)
69. The captivity of Jehoiachin and the appointment of Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:10-19; 25:27-30)
69. The futile hope of Zedekiah in looking to Egypt to aid against Babylon (Jer. 37:1, 5-11)
70. The treachery of Ishmael against Gedaliah and his officials (Jer. 41:1-15)
71. The great stones buried by Jeremiah in Tahpanhes, Egypt (Jer. 43:8-13)
72. The great statue and fiery furnace of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 3)
73. The pride of Nebuchadnezzar and the greatness of Babylon (Dan. 4)
74. The insanity of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan. 4)
75. The capture of Babylon and execution of Belshazzar (Dan. 5)
76. Daniel and the lions' den (Dan. 6)
77. Ahasuerus, the Persian king (Esther)
78. The edict of King Cyrus (Ezra 1:1-4)
79. The wall constructed by Nehemiah (Neh. 1-6)
80. The enemies of Nehemiah (Neh. 2; 4; 6)
81. The synagogue in Capernaum where Jesus preached (Mark 1:21-25; Luke 7:1-10)
81. Simon Peter's home in Capernaum (Mark 1:21, 29)

C. The testimony of archaeology (some detailed examples)

1. **Mount Ararat**

A unique coin, now on display at the Israel Museum, presents new evidence for the antiquity of the tradition associating the mountains of Ararat in Turkey with the landing place of Noah's ark, according to Yaakov Meshorer (see *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sept./Oct., 1981). This large

bronze medallion was struck 1,700 years ago at Apameia Kibotos in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) near the mountains of Ararat. The town was named for Apameia, mother of Antiochus I (280-261 B.C.). The Greek word *kibotos*, which means "ark," was added to differentiate this Apameia from two nearby towns of the same name. Its use shows that, in the third century B.C., the Jewish people of Apameia associated their town with the ark. "Kiboto"s is inscribed on the coin.

The coin depicts events of the story of Noah's Ark (Gen. 6-8), the only coin known to bear biblical scenes. Three events are depicted on one side of the coin. In the center, the ark, depicted as a box with an open lid, floats on water. The heads and shoulders of Noah and his wife protrude from the ark while the lid shelters them from the rain. The side of the ark is inscribed with the three Greek letters NOE (Nu, Omega, Epsilon). Above the ark's lid, a dove with an olive spray in its beak is landing on the cover of the ark, symbolizing the subsidence of the Flood. The third event is shown to the right of the ark. Noah and his wife are standing with arms upraised in an attitude of grateful prayer for their salvation.

## 2. Sodom and Gomorrah

Have Sodom and Gomorrah been found? Walter R. Rast, of Valparaiso University, and R. Thomas Schaub, of Indiana University of Pennsylvania, excavated two sites near the eastern shore of the Dead Sea in Jordan and say they strongly believe these are the biblical cities destroyed by fire (see *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Sept./Oct. 1980, p. 27).

The principal site, Bab edh-Dhra, lies less than one mile east of the Lissan, a tongue-like peninsula that protrudes into the Dead Sea on the eastern shore. It was occupied during the Early Bronze Age (third millennium B.C.). Overlooking the Dead Sea from a height of 550 feet, Bab edh-Dhra was no doubt built on a bluff for defense purposes. The site consists of a town and a large cemetery. One scholar estimated that the cemetery is composed of more than 20,000 tombs in which more than 500,000 people were buried along with more than three million pottery vessels. A large rectangular structure found inside the town is thought to be a temple. The archaeologists also uncovered the remains of what they believe was the altar associated with the temple.

It is significant that there are only five sites located in the Dead Sea area, each near a flowing spring; that all five date to the same time, the Early Bronze Age; and that there is no other evidence of occupation in the area until the Roman period more than 2,000 years later.

If Bab edh-Dhra and the four other sites are indeed the remains of the five “cities of the plain,” it is also significant that the foundations of some of the buildings were buried under tons of rubble, and that beneath the rubble there is clear evidence of a fiery conflagration.

### **3. Oldest Biblical Text**

In June 1986 archaeologists in Jerusalem announced the discovery of the oldest biblical text ever found. On two small silver amulets was part of the text of Numbers 6:24-26. The find was actually made about three years earlier in a dig conducted by Gabriel Barkay of Tel Aviv University, on the grounds of the Scottish Presbyterian Church across the Hinnom Valley from Mount Zion and the Old City of Jerusalem.

The age of the text may prove to be a nail in the coffin of theories that the Pentateuch was not written by Moses nor even in Moses’ time. Those theories generally place large portions of the first five books of the Bible in the period of Ezra, 400-500 B.C. In this debate, some of the argument revolves around the use of YHWH, the divine name of God (sometimes transliterated “Jehovah”), which was supposedly not in use before 400-500 B.C. The silver scrolls, dating from before 586, contain that name. In fact, this was the first time that the name had been found in any dig in Jerusalem.

### **4. Mount Ebal**

Just prior to his death, Moses commanded that after crossing the Jordan and entering the Promised Land, the Law should be read for the congregation of Israel upon two mountains. The promised blessings for keeping the Law were to be proclaimed from Mount Gerizim, and the judgments for disobeying God’s commandments were to be read from Mount Ebal (Deut. 27-28), just east of Gerizim.

The actual ceremony on Mount Ebal, in obedience to Moses’ command, is described in Joshua: “Then Joshua built an altar to the Lord, the God of Israel, on Mount Ebal. He followed the instructions that Moses the Lord’s servant had written in the Book of the Law: ‘Make me an altar from stones that are uncut and have not been shaped with iron tools.’ Then on the altar they presented burnt offerings and peace offerings to the Lord” (Josh. 8:30-31).

In 1980 Adam Zertel began excavating on Mount Ebal. This 3,000-foot-high mountain, the highest in Samaria, is located some 30 miles due north of Jerusalem. Before the initial project ended some three years later, strong evidence suggested that Zertel and his team may have uncovered the altar built by Joshua some 1,400 years before Christ. He discovered a rectangular



altar once filled with alternating layers of earth, ash, and field stones. It was approximately 9 feet high, 25 feet wide, and 30 feet long, with walls 5 feet thick. Its large stones were uncut, just as prescribed in Joshua. Around the altar were the burned bones of young bulls, sheep, and goats. The altar had a ramp leading up to it, instead of steps like most pagan altars. This would correspond to Exodus 20:26, which requires a ramp rather than steps. Pottery shards found near the altar suggest a date concurrent with the time of Joshua.

**5. Warren's Shaft**

It is commonly believed that, much earlier than Hezekiah built his tunnel to ensure Jerusalem's water supply someone else had a similar plan and had a shaft cut to the Gihon Spring. This shaft was discovered in 1867 by Charles Warren. It was explored again in 1909-1911 by M. B. Parker and most recently in the early 1980s by Yigael Shilo. Some scholars have suggested that this shaft is the "water tunnel" through which David's officer Joab first penetrated the city to take it from the Jebusites (2 Sam. 5:6-8; 1 Chron. 11:4-6, KJV).

**6. The city of David**

One of the most fascinating archaeological finds in recent years came in the summer of 1983 at the "City of David" (2 Sam. 5:9) dig just a few hundred yards from the southern wall of Jerusalem's Old City. Twenty-six clay seals were unearthed, bearing the names of dozens of people who lived in Jerusalem in the time of the first Temple, 960-586 B.C. (The seals were on the floor of a building dating back to 600-800.) Some of the names of Jewish merchants and citizens mentioned in the seals may be those of people mentioned in Scripture.

Yigael Shilo and his team also came across the debris left by the Babylonians' destruction of Jerusalem. Some of the piles of rubble were reportedly nearly 10 feet high. Probing beneath the ruins, Shilo found remnants of the original Canaanite wall that had surrounded the city when young King David took Jerusalem and made it his capital. Shilo also found tools and pottery used by the people of Jerusalem in the time of David and Solomon.

**7. Fortresses Built by Solomon**

One of Solomon's first projects after securing Israel's throne was to build fortified cities in the central Negev to protect the southern flank of his kingdom (1 Kings 9:15-19). During the reign of Solomon's son Rehoboam, Shishak, ruler of Egypt, destroyed these southern strongholds

(1 Kings 14:25-26; 2 Chron. 12:1-12). In the 1960s and 70s, archaeologists Rudolph Cohen, Z'ev Meshel, and others discovered 11 of Solomon's oval fortresses. Some were 406 feet in circumference, with walls 6 feet high, and 6 feet thick. The architecture of the houses found in the settlements near the fortresses was of standard Israelite origin. Pottery discovered in the area suggests a 10<sup>th</sup>-century period, the time of Solomon and Rehoboam.

#### 8. **The Black Obelisk**

When the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III made a successful campaign into Syria, he left a boastful record of his success on a 6½-foot-high black sandstone pillar. The pillar was found at Calah (modern Nimrud) in 1946 by archaeologist Austen Henry Layard, and is today known as the Black Obelisk. It bears five rows of bas-relief panels on each of its four sides, with a descriptive inscription over each panel. One panel in the second row from the top shows a bearded Semite kneeling before the king while his servants standing behind him present tribute. This kneeling figure is identified by the inscription: "Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri." (Jehu was not actually the son of Omri but may have been called that because he took the kingship from the house of Omri – 1 Kings 16:23-28; 2 Kings 9:1-13; 10.)

The Black Obelisk is important for several reasons. It is our only extant graphic representation of an Israelite king (or perhaps his representative). It bears another reference to Jehu's predecessor, Omri. It presents a graphic description of Israelite dress. And it supplements Scripture by telling us of Jehu paying tribute to Shalmaneser. Perhaps it was this action of Jehu that ward off an invasion by Assyria during his reign.

#### 9. **The Moabite Stone**

Both Ahab and his father, Omri, are named on the Moabite Stone (sometimes called the Mesha Stele). This monument, which is probably dated between 840 and 820, was found about 13 miles east of the Dead Sea at Diban by a missionary, F. A. Klein, in 1868. Mesha, king of Moab

(2 Kings 3:4), writes that Omri, king of Israel, and his son Ahab had subdued Moab because Chemosh, the national god, was angry with his land. Mesha, however, claims to have found favor with Chemosh and to have been enabled to rebel and reclaim the land lost to Israel. His rebellion against Israel and Ahab's son, Jehoram, is attested to in Scripture

(2 Kings 3:5-27), but the successful outcome that he reports is fanciful and contradictory to the biblical record. It is interesting that Mesha mentions Chemosh's counterpart, Israel's God, Yahweh, in his account of the events.

#### 10. **Mazar's Discoveries at the Temple Mount**

Since 1968, Benjamin Mazar has been directing excavation of a section of the Temple Mount, near its southwestern corner, on behalf of the Hebrew University of Jerusalem. Excavators found a huge stone on the southwest corner of the Herodian Temple Mount retaining wall. Inscribed on the stone were Hebrew words translated, "The place of the trumpeting." Doubtless this was the actual location where the priest stood when he blew the *shofar* to announce to all Jerusalem the arrival and departure of the Sabbath (Lev. 23:24; 25:9). Mazar may also have uncovered the building where Joash (835-795) was murdered by his own palace guard (2 Kings 12:20-21).

**11. Sennacherib, Taylor Prism**

Scripture reports that in the 14<sup>th</sup> year of Hezekiah (701), the Assyrian king Sennacherib (705-681) invaded Judah and marched against Jerusalem (2 Kings 18:13). Having held the city in siege and threatened Hezekiah, he retreated to Assyria after the death angel killed 185,000 of his men (2 Kings 19:35). It was then that he recounted his version of the event on a hexagonal cylinder discovered at Kuyunjik (ancient Nineveh) in 1830 by J. E. Taylor. Sennacherib boasted of taking 46 walled cities in Judah. And concerning Hezekiah he stated, "He himself I shut up like a caged bird within Jerusalem, his royal city." What Sennacherib conveniently failed to admit was that Hezekiah remained quite safe and protected from the Assyrians inside his city, while Sennacherib's men were miraculously killed.

**12. Hezekiah's Tunnel, Siloam**

Hezekiah made preparations for Sennacherib's invasion in 701 by seeking to maintain an adequate water supply within the safety of the city walls (2 Kings 20:20; 2 Chron. 32:2-5). He had a conduit cut underground through the rock to channel water from the Gihon Spring outside the city wall to the Pool of Siloam inside the city. This channel, known as Hezekiah's Tunnel, runs a very crooked course for approximately 1,700 feet. One can visit it and even walk through it today. A six-line Hebrew inscription (called the "Siloam Inscription") was found in 1880 in the channel near the Pool of Siloam. It describes the workers cutting through the rock, beginning from both ends and meeting triumphantly at the midpoint.

**13. The Ridge South of the Temple Mount**

In 1978 Yigael Shilo began excavating the eastern portion of the ridge south of the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. Shilo's dig has produced the most extensive information available thus far on the last years of the Judean monarchy. Several houses of the late pre-exilic period were found. Built on terraces, these structures become progressively poorer the closer in time they came to the Babylonian destruction. The most sensational find was a

hoard of 50 clay seals, among them one belonging to “Gemariah the son of Shaphan” – certainly the same individual mentioned in Jeremiah 36:9-12 as scribe to King Jehoiakim. Shilo believes that the building where this seal was found may have been part of the royal chancellery.

#### **14. The Nabonidus Chronicles**

Until 1854 the Bible was the lone witness to a person known as Belshazzar, the Babylonian king named in Daniel 5. Greek historians claimed that the last king of Babylon, who fell to Cyrus in 539, was Nabonidus (555-539). In 1854 J. G. Taylor found several small clay cylinders bearing inscriptions in temple ruins at Ur in southern Iraq. The inscriptions contained prayers for Nabonidus and his firstborn son, Belshazzar. But then in 1882 T. G. Pinches published what is known as the Nabonidus Chronicles. From this record it was learned that Nabonidus fell into disfavor with the priests of Marduk, the patron deity at Babylon, because of his zeal for the moon god Sin. Consequently, he spent many years away from Babylon in self-imposed exile at a remote oasis in Teima in Arabia. He left his son Belshazzar as regent in Babylon, which explains Belshazzar’s offer to make Daniel the “third highest ruler in the kingdom” if he could interpret the handwriting on the wall (Dan. 5:16).

#### **15. The Cyrus Cylinder**

The Cyrus Cylinder answers doubts raised by Ezra 1:2-4. Ezra states that, in his first year after conquering Babylon, Cyrus acknowledged the Lord God of heaven, who had commanded him to build the Temple in Jerusalem and permit God’s people (the Jews) to return. Scholars of the past century had serious doubts that the Persian Cyrus would pay any honor to the God of the Jews, or grant them special privileges to return to their homeland.

In the nineteenth century, Hormuzd Rassam found at Babylon a nine-inch, baked clay cylinder. Its inscription gives Cyrus’ account of how Marduk had blessed his efforts to capture Babylon. Then Cyrus tells how he had made it his policy to permit all former Babylonian captives to return to their homelands and restore the temples of their national deities. In reality, Cyrus was exploiting the occasion to his advantage. He understood that happy and satisfied subjects would be loyal subjects. So Cyrus’s act of benevolence was simply part of his international policy. He was, however, unwittingly fulfilling Isaiah’s prophecy concerning him (Isa. 44:28-45:1), that he would be the Lord’s “shepherd” and “anointed one” who would perform his pleasure.

#### **16. Simon Peter’s House**

In 1968 archaeologists V. Corbo and S. Loffreda turned their attention to an octagonal-shaped building near the Capernaum synagogue. The discovery of an apse and baptistery identified the building as a church. It was dated to the middle of the fifth century A.D. It is known that a similar octagonal-shaped church in Bethlehem marks the spot where Jesus is believed to have been born. Therefore, it has been concluded that this church in Capernaum was also a memorial to something. But what?

It was discovered that the church was situated over a house, the layout of which was similar to others in Capernaum, except that it alone had plastered walls and floors. Over 100 Christian graffiti were found scratched in the plaster fragments, some of which mention Jesus as “Lord” and “Christ.” Peter’s name appears several times. One very indistinct inscription has been interpreted by the Franciscan archaeologists to read, “Peter, the helper of Rome,” though other scholars are not so certain of this.

It does appear, though, that the house was originally built in the first century B.C. and used as a house church in the first century A.D. But why was this house selected as a meeting place for Christians? In the fourth century Christian pilgrims on visits to Capernaum claimed to have seen Peter’s house. Is the octagonal-shaped church a memorial to the Apostle Peter’s home (Matt. 8:14; Mark 1:29)? Corbo and Loffreda think it is.

#### **17. The Burial Plot of Caiaphas the High Priest**

During the creation of a water park in Jerusalem’s Peace Forest (just south of the Dome of the Rock) in 1990, workers accidentally uncovered a burial cave. It was clearly a Jewish burial cave, as indicated by the 12 ossuaries found there. Ossuaries are limestone boxes used for storing human bones after the flesh has decomposed; such burial procedures occurred mainly at the end of the first century B.C. and in the first century A.D. Five of the ossuaries were inscribed with names, supposedly the names of those whose bones had been placed inside. The two that drew the most attention, however, were those which were inscribed with a form of the name *Qafa*, (Caiaphas). One ossuary was inscribed simply *Qafa*, but the other had a more complete inscription, *Yehosef bar Qayafa* (Joseph, son of Caiaphas). One is surely curious whether this is the burial plot for the high priest who presided over the trial of Jesus (Matt. 26:57; John 18:28) or at least a family member. A preliminary dating of the burial cave (by a coin found in one of the other ossuaries) suggests an early first-century A.D. burial. The biblical name Caiaphas seems definitely confirmed. However, the positive identification of the name with the New Testament high priest, though quite possible, remains uncertain at this date.

#### **18. The Second Temple “Golden Gate”**

In April 1969 archaeologist James Fleming was standing in front of the Jerusalem Golden Gate. Suddenly the rain-soaked earth gave way, and he fell into a hole eight feet deep. Disoriented but uninjured, Fleming surveyed his surroundings in the dim light that came through the hole above his head. As reported in *Biblical Archaeology Review* (Jan./Feb. 1983, p. 24), he saw an ancient wall below the Golden Gate. He comments:

“The gate itself is built into a turret that protrudes about six feet from the wall. The underground stones of the wall south of the turret were large and imposing. . . On the eastern face of the turret wall, directly beneath the Golden Gate itself, were five wedge-shaped stones neatly set in a massive arch spanning the turret wall. Here were the remains of an earlier gate to Jerusalem, below the Golden Gate, one that apparently had never been fully documented.” (p. 30)

Could the Lower Gate Fleming discovered have been the gate through which Jesus entered the Holy City (Mark 11:11)? Unfortunately, it is difficult to date this underground gate precisely. However, according to Fleming’s comparison of masonry in the gate with that in other parts of the wall, a date earlier than the time of Christ, and possibly as early as the time of Solomon, is possible.

Fleming concludes:

“Perhaps the most important implication of the presence of the Lower Gate below the threshold of the Golden Gate is that this area has long been identified as a location for the eastern entrance into the Temple Mount. Many Jerusalem maps show a Temple gate due east of the Dome of the Rock in the Haram esh-Sharif. The Golden Gate, however, is located about 350 feet north of this point. We now know that the location of the present Golden Gate was determined by an earlier gate.” (p. 37)

## 19. **The Second Temple Rabbinical Tunnel**

Since 1967 Israel’s Ministry of Religious Affairs, in cooperation with its Department of Antiquities, has cleared out an ancient passage in Jerusalem that they named the Rabbinical Tunnel. Undoubtedly it dates back to the time of Christ. The tunnel runs north along the Western Wall and is more than 600 feet long. Meir Kusnetz, an American-born civil engineer, has been in charge of the project. Since 1967, more than 17,000 cubic meters of fill have been excavated. The tunnel stops just short of the northwest corner of the Temple Mount. Its starting point is in the hall under Wilson’s Arch, directly to the left of the present-day men’s prayer section of the Western Wall.

The finished stones inside the tunnel are still beautifully preserved, and some are of unbelievable size. For example, near the beginning of the tunnel is a gigantic chiseled limestone rock 46 feet long, 10 feet wide, and 10 feet high, weighing more than 415 tons! By comparison, the largest megalith at Stonehenge, England, is a mere 40 tons, and the rocks used by the Egyptians to build the pyramids were only 15 tons. Other similar stones weighing more than 300 tons have been uncovered in the tunnel. The massive rocks are so well cut that although there is no mortar holding them together, even a thin knife blade cannot fit between their joints!

Christ's disciples were understandably impressed by the size of these stones (Mark 13:1).

Note: These 19 detailed examples have been taken from *Willmington's Bible Handbook*. Tyndale House Publishers. Wheaton, Ill. 1997)

20. As a final example, consider one of the most exciting archaeological finds ever made, or reported in the November/December issue of *Biblical Archaeological Review*:

After nearly 2,000 years, historical evidence for the existence of Jesus has come to light literally written in stone. An inscription has been found on an ancient bone box, called an ossuary, that reads, "James, son of Joseph, brother of Jesus." This container provides the only New Testament-era mention of the central figure of Christianity and is the first-ever archaeological discovery to corroborate Biblical references to Jesus.

The Aramaic words etched on the box's side show a cursive form of writing used only from about 10 to 70 A.D. The ossuary has been dated to approximately 63 A.D.

Ancient inscriptions are typically found on royal monuments or on lavish tombs, commemorating rulers and other official figures. But Jesus, who was raised by a carpenter, was a man of the people; so finding documentation of his family is doubly unexpected.

In the first century A.D., Jews followed the custom of transferring the bones of their deceased from burial caves to ossuaries. The practice was largely abandoned after the destruction of the Jewish Temple in 70 A.D. No one knows for certain why the practice started or stopped, but it provides a rare period of self-documentation in which commoners as well as leaders left their names carved in stone.

The new find is also significant in that it corroborates the existence of Joseph, Jesus' father, and James, Jesus' brother and a leader of the early Christian church in Jerusalem. The family relationships contained on the

new find helped experts ascertain that the inscription very likely refers to the Biblical James, brother of Jesus (see, for example, Matthew 13:55-56 and Galatians 1:18-19). Although all three names were common in ancient times, the statistical probability of their appearing in that combination is extremely slim. In addition, the mention of a brother is unusual—indicating that this Jesus must have been a well-known figure.

Laboratory tests performed by the Geological Survey of Israel confirm that the box's limestone comes from the Jerusalem area. The patina, a thin sheen or covering that forms on stone and other materials over time, has the cauliflower-type shape known to develop in a cave environment; more importantly, it shows no trace of modern elements.

The 20-inch-long (51 cm.) box resides in a private collection in Israel. Like many ossuaries obtained on the antiquities market, it is empty. Its history prior to its current ownership is not known.

“The James ossuary may be the most important find in the history of New Testament Archaeology,” says Hershel Shanks, editor of *Biblical Archaeology Review*. “It has implications not just for scholarship, but for the world’s understanding of the Bible.”