

LIBERTY UNIVERSITY  
JOHN W. RAWLINGS SCHOOL OF DIVINITY

**AN EXAMINATION OF THE GEOGRAPHICAL  
AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVIDENCE WHICH SUPPORTS  
THE HISTORICAL RELIABILITY  
OF THE GOSPEL OF JOHN**

A Thesis

Submitted to Liberty University

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the completion of

Master of Arts in Biblical Studies

by

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April 15, 2024

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All figures were produced with Bible Mapper software registered to this author.

## Introduction

The question of the historical reliability of the New Testament is one of the central issues in Christian apologetics. This is an area that keeps agnostics and atheists from believing in the Bible and hence God. Few are willing to undertake an in-depth study to ferret out the truth; a simple Google internet search to confirm their secular presuppositions. For example, the top search result using Google for “historical reliability of gospel of John” brings up the following reply “The Gospel of John is a relatively late theological document containing **little accurate historical information that is not found in the three synoptic gospels [sic]**, which is why most historical studies have been based on the earliest sources Mark and Q.”<sup>1</sup>

The skepticism surrounding the historical reliability of John’s Gospel expands beyond agnostics and atheists, however. Many New Testament scholars also ascribe little if any historical weight to the Gospel of John.<sup>2</sup> In writing about the trial of Jesus before Pilate, Gibson wrote, “There are even those who would discount the historical accuracy of the basic storyline of the trial narrative, particularly the version given in the Fourth Gospel, on the grounds that the trial must have taken place behind closed doors and therefore could not have been witnessed by supporters of Jesus but only by a handful of Roman officials. This has led some researchers to take the extreme stance of dismissing the entire trial narrative—except for some of the very basic elements of the story—as a literary creation devoid of historical content.”<sup>3</sup> In *An Introduction to the New Testament*, Edgar Goodspeed wrote,

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<sup>1</sup> “Historical Reliability of Gospel of John - Google Search,” n.d., accessed September 18, 2023.

<sup>2</sup> Paul N. Anderson, “Aspects of Historicity in the Gospel of John: Implications for Investigations of Jesus and Archaeology,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006), 587; Wilson Paroschi, “Archaeology and the Interpretation of John’s Gospel: A Review Essay,” *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 20, no. 1 (2009): 67.

<sup>3</sup> Shimon Gibson, “The Trial of Jesus at the Jerusalem Praetorium: New Archaeological Evidence,” in *The Trial of Jesus at the Jerusalem Praetorium: New Archaeological Evidence* (Peabody, MA: Tyndale House Publishers, 2011), 98.

It must be remembered that topography and chronology were among the least of the author's concerns. His head was among the stars. He was seeking to determine the place of Jesus in the spiritual universe and his relations to the eternal realities. These were the matters that interested and absorbed him, not itineraries and timetable, so that practical mundane considerations that might apply to Mark, Matthew, or Luke have little significance for his work.<sup>4</sup>

As noted by Anderson,

two disjunctions of David F. Strauss of Tübingen a century and a half ago were largely accepted by Jesus researchers and New Testament scholars in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. First, Strauss argued that the Jesus of history must be divorced from the Christ of faith, Second, given some irreconcilable differences between the Synoptics and John, and the three-against-one reality, one must choose between the Synoptics and John. While John may serve theological purposes, so critical scholars have since assumed, the Synoptics trump the Johannine presentation of Jesus on nearly all historical accounts – at least the important ones.<sup>5</sup>

Andreas Köstenberger notes, “In the recent history of interpretation, Clement’s reference to John as a “spiritual gospel” has frequently been taken to imply that John is less interested in historical matters than the Synoptics, and a chasm began to open up between John as a “spiritual” (i.e., nonhistorical) gospel and the Synoptics as more reliable historical accounts.”<sup>6</sup> Köstenberger states that, “the last half millennium of human thought has bequeathed several unfortunate dichotomies on biblical scholarship. The separation between history and theology has led to a gradual disparagement of John's historical reliability and moved the gospel’s genre closer to myth and legend... salvaging John’s spiritual message appeared possible only by jettisoning his historical reliability, whether through Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologization program (on which see further below) or the setting aside of the

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<sup>4</sup> Edgar J. Goodspeed, *An Introduction to the New Testament* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1937), 310.

<sup>5</sup> Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Aspects of Critical Views* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 1.

<sup>6</sup> Andreas J. Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2009), 38–39.

gospel in historical Jesus research.”<sup>7</sup>

However, this paper seeks to demonstrate that many archaeological discoveries have confirmed the reliability of many of the landmarks and place names in the Gospel of John and thereby, lends support to the historicity of the Gospel of John.

### Statement of the Problem

The Gospel of John is widely accepted as the last Gospel written after the Synoptic Gospels of Matthew, Mark, and Luke.<sup>8</sup> Because John is more theological than the Synoptic Gospels and because John also extensively uses symbolism and uses metaphoric language when referring to when Jesus is speaking, too little emphasis has been placed on understanding the historical reliability of the Gospel of John.<sup>9</sup> As previously noted, Köstenberger states, “the last half millennium of human thought has bequeathed several unfortunate dichotomies on biblical scholarship. The separation between history and theology has led to a gradual disparagement of John’s historical reliability and moved the gospel’s genre closer to myth and legend.”<sup>10</sup>

The historicity of the Gospel of John, however, has received more focus in recent scholarly discussions. In 2002, the John, Jesus and History Group in the Society of Biblical Literature was founded. The purpose of the group was “to create a venue for serious reconsideration of the historical character of the Johannine tradition and the role that the Fourth Gospel might play in future quests for the historical Jesus.”<sup>11</sup> The group held a symposium from

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid., 39–40.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid., 82; Walter A Elwell and Robert W. Yarbrough, *Encountering the New Testament : A Historical and Theological Survey*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2013), 96.

<sup>9</sup> Urban C. von Wahlde, “Archaeology and John’s Gospel,” in *Jesus and Archaeology*, ed. James H. Charlesworth (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006), 523.

<sup>10</sup> Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 39.

<sup>11</sup> Tom Thatcher, “Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel: Phase Two of the John, Jesus, and History Project,” in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 1.

2002-2004. The presentations of these symposiums were published in one volume titled *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Aspects of Critical Views* in 2006.<sup>12</sup> After the initial three years, the group continued to meet for an annual symposium for another nine years, for twelve years total.

### Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this thesis is to bolster the historical reliability of the Gospel of John by demonstrating the archaeological accuracy of the place-names mentioned in the Gospel of John. The work will examine each of the geographical locations mentioned in the Gospel of John using archaeological studies from those locations. Cyril, the first Bishop of Jerusalem, is said to have written “Geography is the fifth gospel.”<sup>13</sup> A curator at the Rockefeller Museum in Jerusalem has been quoted as saying, “Absolute truth in archaeology lasts about 20 years!”<sup>14</sup> The archaeological evidence presented in this paper, therefore, will examine the most recent developments in archaeology.

### Statement of Importance of the Problem

Viewing the Gospel of John as historically accurate impacts how we might view the ministry of Jesus. The historical realism in the Gospel of John contributes a more plausible view of Jesus and the setting of his ministry. Prior to 2002, research on the historical Jesus followed Bultmann’s comment, “the Gospel of John cannot be taken into account at all as a source for the teaching of Jesus.”<sup>15</sup> One of the problems, as pointed out by Anderson, is that the Johannine

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<sup>12</sup> Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Aspects of Critical Views*.

<sup>13</sup> David G. Hansen, “Geography: Who Cares?,” *Geography: Who Cares?*, October 27, 2016, <https://biblearchaeology.org/research/contemporary-issues/3549-geography-who-cares>.

<sup>14</sup> Randall Price, *The Stones Cry Out* (Eugene, Or: Harvest House Publishers, 1997), 332.

<sup>15</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *Jesus and the Word* (New York: Scribner, 1958), 12.



perspective is “cosmic, beginning with the advent of the eternal Logos and concluding with the ongoing ministry of the resurrected Jesus. How could that reflect an earth-fettered historical perspective?”<sup>16</sup>

Another problem is the critical view that the Gospel of John is “idealized theology” while the Synoptic Gospels are viewed as “factual history.”<sup>17</sup> But, as Anderson contends, the Gospel of John “has more archaeological content and topographical detail than all of the other Gospels put together.”<sup>18</sup> The place-names mentioned in the Gospel of John have been the subject of many archaeological excavations and the majority have been confirmed.

The importance of the problem on the view of the historicity of the Gospel of John was demonstrated after the first three symposiums of the John, Jesus and History Group. Following extensive feedback from members concerning the need for more extensive historical research, the decision was made to extend their project by another six years.<sup>19</sup> The presentations from the symposiums were subsequently published in two additional volumes that covered each entire symposium.<sup>20</sup> The Group continued holding symposiums for another six years after the first six-year extension. Furthermore, the group has created a website (<https://johannine.org/JJH.html>) to disseminate information about their results.

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<sup>16</sup> Paul N. Anderson, “Prologue: Critical Views of John, Jesus, and History,” in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1* (Boston, MA: Brill, 2006), 1.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Thatcher, “Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel: Phase Two of the John, Jesus, and History Project,” 4.

<sup>20</sup> Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, vol. 2 (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2009); Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher, eds., *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*, vol. 3 (Williston: SBL Press, 2015).

### Statement of Position on the Problem

The view that the Gospel of John is purely theological and, therefore, has little historical value is misguided and overstated. Greater credit should be and can be given to the historical reliability of the Gospel of John, as this paper will demonstrate, through archaeological research. Since the Gospel of John contains more geographical and topological references than all other Gospels combined, archaeological research seems to be the natural voice to shed the most light on the issue.<sup>21</sup> Archaeological research and interest in the historical validity of the Gospel of John is ongoing as is evidenced by a forthcoming book, edited by Paul Anderson, entitled *Archaeology, John, and Jesus*, set for publication in late 2023 or early 2024.<sup>22</sup>

### Limitations of Thesis

Archaeology is a science that relies on interpretation as part of the normal academic process. As such, there can be many ways for interpreting the same data and yet still get contradicting results. Secondly, historical events are not repeatable and must therefore rely on the testimony of individuals, the interpretations of archaeology, and other interpretive research. Because of these limitations, it must be understood that archaeology cannot be used to “prove” the historicity or reliability of the Bible. Archaeology can only be used to “provide data” from which one may reach a conclusion about any given biblical event or location through the interpretation of the material remains.

### Research Methods

With the recent interest in the re-examination of the historicity of the Gospel of John,

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<sup>21</sup> Paul N. Anderson, “The John, Jesus, and History Project and a Fourth Quest for Jesus,” in *Jesus, Skepticism, and the Problem of History: Criteria & Context in the Study of Christian Origins* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 2019), 223.

<sup>22</sup> The author of this paper is thankful to Dr. Scott Stripling for an advance copy of his chapter in the forthcoming book.

various methods, such as source, redaction, and textual criticisms, have been used to demonstrate historical reliability.<sup>23</sup> In this paper, the historical reliability for the Gospel of John will be examined by use of archaeological data for each location in the Gospel of John. As Keith Schoville has been quoted:

All of us who love the Bible...sometimes fail to realize is that despite all the work that scholars do in interpreting the Bible, the only real new light that we have coming into our study of the Bible is what archaeology provides, So, archaeology and the interface between archaeology and biblical text is an important consideration for everyone who is a biblical scholar, whether they be a professor in seminary or a lay person going to a Sunday school class.<sup>24</sup>

De Vaux notes, “Archaeology is an auxiliary science of history in general, and archaeology of the ancient Near East has become an auxiliary science indispensable for biblical studies.” Dr. Daniel A. Warner has said, “archaeology is the only “science” contributing any new information to the study of the Bible.”<sup>25</sup> It is for these reasons that archaeology will be used to support the historical reliability of the Gospel of John.

### Understanding Archaeology

The term “archaeology” comes from two Greek words: *αρχαιος* (*archaios*), which means old or ancient and *λογος* (*logos*), which means word, speech, or study. For ancient Greeks, archaeology referred to the discussion of ancient legends or traditions. The first known appearance of the word archaeology appeared in 1607 where “it was used to refer to the

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<sup>23</sup> Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 1: Critical Aspects of Critical Views*; Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*; Anderson, Just, and Thatcher, *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 3: Glimpses of Jesus through the Johannine Lens*; Anderson, “The John, Jesus, and History Project and a Fourth Quest for Jesus.”

<sup>24</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 332–33.

<sup>25</sup> Daniel A. Warner, email message to author, 5/11/2022.

“knowledge” of ancient Israel from literary sources such as the Bible.”<sup>26</sup> Thus, as Randall Price notes, archaeology has been associated with the Bible from the beginning.

Archaeology can mean different things depending on the goals and presuppositions of the archaeologist. For Gibbon, the meaning of what archaeology is depends on the aim of the archaeologist. For example, Gibbon describes three different aims in simplistic terms:

- The aim of archaeology is the “study of the human past, principally through material culture.”
- The aim of archaeology is the “scientific study of material remains (as fossil relics, artifacts, monuments) of past human life and activities.”
- The aim of archaeology is the “study of human existence through unwritten, material remains.”<sup>27</sup>

The well-known archaeologist, William Foxwell Albright, originally “called the discipline *Syro-Palestinian* archaeology, but later (in 1950s) he adopted and popularized the more specific term *biblical archaeology*.”<sup>28</sup> Up until nearly fifty years ago biblical archaeology was considered a combination of biblical studies in general and theological studies in particular.<sup>29</sup> Dever (among others) argued for the separation of the two to establish biblical archaeology “as an independent, professional, secular discipline with its own aims and methods.”<sup>30</sup>

Since the 1980s, archaeologists have taken one of two approaches, either a science or a humanities approach.<sup>31</sup> Today, biblical archaeology is considered a sub-specialty of archaeology that deals with biblical events and history. Graves defines it as “the discipline involved with biblical sites from these two regions [sites around the Mediterranean Sea and sites in the Middle

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<sup>26</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 25.

<sup>27</sup> Guy E. Gibbon, *Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology: An Introductory Guide* (Lanham, Maryland: AltaMira Press, a division of Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc, 2014), 10.

<sup>28</sup> William G. Dever, *My Nine Lives: Sixty Years in Israeli and Biblical Archaeology*, 1st ed. (Society of Biblical Literature, 2020), 105.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 189.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Gibbon, *Critically Reading the Theory and Methods of Archaeology: An Introductory Guide*, 9.

East].”<sup>32</sup> Price refers biblical archaeology as “the science of excavation, decipherment, and critical evaluation of ancient material records related to the Bible.”<sup>33</sup>

### **The Limits of Archaeology**

1. **Archaeology is a science of destruction.** An archaeological excavation can only be done once, after which the site has been disturbed. Therefore, it is very important that the excavation is extremely well documented while it is in progress.
2. **Archaeology is an interpretive science.** Graves writes, “While archaeology is a science, it is not an exact science.”<sup>34</sup> Rarely is any archaeological evidence found that has a ‘born-on’ date. The primary method of dating is through pottery.<sup>35</sup> Pottery development throughout the centuries was consistent and reliable. Matching those pottery developments with other data, such as written records or known events such as earthquakes, has become a fundamental method for dating the occupation layers of a site. Dever credits Albright for being the first archaeologist to demonstrate true mastery of pottery in the ancient Levant.<sup>36</sup>
3. **Archaeology is an incomplete record.** Archaeology has only “scratched the surface” on potential digs. Very few of the sites that have been identified have been excavated. Of the sites that have been excavated, only 2% of the site has been excavated.<sup>37</sup> This means

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<sup>32</sup> David E Graves, *Digging Up The Bible: Introduction and Brief History of Biblical Archaeology* (Moncton, New Brunswick: Electronic Christian Media, n.d.), 16.

<sup>33</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 26.

<sup>34</sup> Graves, *Digging Up The Bible: Introduction and Brief History of Biblical Archaeology*, 70.

<sup>35</sup> J. Randall Price and H. Wayne House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 1st ed. (Grand Rapids: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, 2017), 35.

<sup>36</sup> Dever, *My Nine Lives: Sixty Years in Israeli and Biblical Archaeology*, 104.

<sup>37</sup> David E. Graves, *Biblical Archaeology: An Introduction with Recent Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible* (New Brunswick: Electronic Christian Media, 2014), 59.

conclusions must be drawn over the entire site based on a small percentage of the site being excavated.

4. **Not everything survives.** Archaeology is, by nature, the study of that which survives! Not everything will survive for thousands of years. Organic material, such as papyri or parchment from animal skins, do not last unless under the best of conditions, such as the Dead Sea Scrolls. What is often left behind is pottery and metal-working.
5. **Presuppositions and Interpretations.** These two categories are inter-related. Presuppositions will affect interpretations. However, presuppositions are not the only thing that will affect the interpretations. Sometimes a general lack of knowledge on a particular subject will mislead one's interpretation.

#### Unique and Distinctive Johannine References

Von Wahlke lists a number of sites that have unique or distinctive references found only in John. The following topographical sites, taken from Urban von Wahlke, are unique to John:

1. Bethany Beyond the Jordan (1:28, 10:40)
2. Bethsaida (1:44)
  - Galilee (1:43)
  - Nazareth (1:45-56)
3. Cana in Galilee (2:1, 11; 4:46-54; 21:2)
4. Capernaum
5. Area of the Cleansing of the Temple (2:13-16)
6. Aenon near Salim (3:23)
7. Sychar (4:45)
8. Jacob's Well (4:4-6)
9. Mount Gerizim (4:20)
  - Jerusalem for Feast (5:1)
10. The Sheep Gate / Pool (5:2)
11. The Pool of Bethesda (5:2)
12. Tiberias (6:1, 23; 23:21)
  - The Place of Multiplication (6:1-15)
  - A Crossing of the Sea of Galilee to Capernaum

- The Synagogue in Capernaum
- The Temple in Jerusalem for Tabernacles (7:14, 28, 37)
- Bethlehem (7:42)
- The Treasury in the Temple (8:20)
- 13. The Pool of Siloam (9:1-9)
  - Solomon's Portico in the Temple (10:22-39)
- 14. Bethany Near Jerusalem (11:1-7; 12:1-11)
  - The House of Lazarus (11:1-7)
  - The Tomb of Lazarus (11:3-44)
- 15. Ephraim (11:54)
  - Jerusalem (12:12-18)
  - The House of the Last Supper (13:1-17:26)
- 16. The Winter-Flowing Kidron (18:1)
  - The Mount of Olives (18:13)
  - The House and courtyard of Annas (18:13)
  - The House of Caiaphas (18:24)
- 17. The Praetorium (18:28, 33; 19:9)
- 18. The Lithostrotos (19:13)
- 19. Golgotha (19:17-19, 20 41)
- 20. A Tomb in the Garden (19:41-42)
- 21. The Room Where the Disciples Were Gathered (20:19-29)<sup>38</sup>

A number of these sites have been identified by archaeologists over the years, confirming the reliability of John. In the next section, we will examine a number of these discoveries.

### Summary

To summarize the research methods, this paper intends to show that the reliability and historicity of the Gospel of John should not be dismissed as easily as scholars once did. Through the archaeological data accrued from the numerous archaeological locations unique to the Gospel of John, this work will demonstrate the historical reliability of the Gospel.

### Place -Names in the Gospel of John

Reading through the Gospel of John, the following place-names can be derived:

1. Bethany on the other side of Jordan (1:28)

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<sup>38</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 526–27.

2. Bethsaida (1:43; 12:21)
3. Cana in Galilee (2:1-2; 4:46; 21:2)
4. Capernaum (2:12; 4:46; 6:16; 6:59)
5. Jerusalem temple courts (2:13-14; 7:14,28; 8:2, 20; 11:56)
6. Aenon near Salim (3:23)
7. Sychar (4:5)
8. Jacob's Well (4:6)
9. Mount Gerizim (4:20)
10. Sheep Gate (5:2)
11. The Pool of Bethesda (5:2)
12. Far shore of Sea of Galilee (6:1-3)
13. Mount of Olives (8:1)
14. The Pool of Siloam (9:7,11)
15. Solomon's Colonnade (10:22-23)
16. Across the Jordan where John had been Baptizing (10:40)
17. Bethany (by Jerusalem) (11:1,18; 12:1)
18. Tomb of Lazarus (11:1,18; 12:1)
19. Ephraim (11:54)
20. Garden of Gethsemane (18:1)
21. Palace of Roman Governor (18:28)
22. Judge's Seat (19:13)
23. Gabbatha (19:13)
24. Golgatha (19:17)
25. Garden / Garden Tomb (19:41-42)
26. Sea of Galilee (21:1-14)

### **Evidence for Historicity of Place-names in the Gospel of John**

In this section, we will briefly survey a select number of sites where archaeological evidence has been uncovered that supports the historicity of John. While some of the sites have competing evidence to lay claim to the actual site, the mere fact that there are multiple sites alone, which could be considered the actual site, attests to the historicity of John.

#### **Bethany Beyond the Jordan (1:28)**

This location is only mentioned in the Gospel of John as the place where John the Baptist baptizes Jesus. While the site is often disputed, from the context of John, it can be placed in the Transjordan region. Two sites have been proposed for its location. The first site is



located on the east side of the Jordan about five miles from Jericho at a pilgrim site known as Bethabara. The second site is that depicted in the Madaba mosaic map.

Kopp notes, “Bethabara, or *bēt 'abārāh*, means “house of the crossing.””<sup>39</sup> The site at Bethabara has been of archaeological interest since 1899 when Father Federlin first investigated the site.<sup>40</sup> For many years, the site could not be explored because it was on the Jordanian side of the Jordan, but after the 1994 Jordan-Israel peace treaty, the site was excavated from 1995 to 2002 under the Jordanian Department of Antiquities.<sup>41</sup> The Jordanian’s had to clear nearby mines first to make this happen.<sup>42</sup> Archaeological evidence found at the site includes coins, pottery, stone vessels, inscriptions and other artifacts, along with the remains of a church confirms that the site was occupied from the second century BC to the second century AD. Some of the strongest evidence for occupation at the time of Jesus comes from remains from heavy stone jars, such as would have been used at the wedding feast in Cana. Located at this site are four churches / chapels, including one built in early the fourth century by St. Helena.

While archaeologists have yet to discover a sign that reads “You have discovered the site of \_\_\_\_\_”, all evidence points to this being the site of Bethany Beyond the Jordan. According to Stripling, Murphy-O’Connor correctly establishes beyond a reasonable doubt that John initially baptized on the east bank of the Jordan River, near Elijah’s Hill (Tell el-Kharrar), and southeast of Jericho.”<sup>43</sup> Murphy-O’Connor based much of this on the writings of Origen, who

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<sup>39</sup> Clemens Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1963), 113–14.

<sup>40</sup> Rami Khouri, “Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan,” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 31, no. 1 (2005): 41.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 35; von Wahlde, “Archaeology and John’s Gospel,” 530.

<sup>42</sup> Khouri, “Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan,” 35.

<sup>43</sup> Scott Stripling, “Jerome Murphy-O’Connor’s Place Names in John Revisited,” in *Archaeology, John, and Jesus*, ed. Paul Anderson (Eerdmans, forthcoming).

personally investigated and verified sites associated with events in Jesus' life.<sup>44</sup> Origen used early manuscripts that nearly all placed Bethany at Bethabara. These were second century manuscripts, but Craig Evans has shown that some could have easily been dated from the first century and thus be actual eyewitness testimony or autographs.<sup>45</sup> As Stripling points out, if John intentionally chose the spot on the Jordan where the Israelites first crossed into Jordan, the waters of the Jordan would represent a new beginning both in entering the promised land and through baptism. This is the generally accepted site.<sup>46</sup>

The second site, supported by Pixner and Reisner, is in the far northeastern part of the country, but supported by literary evidence not archaeology. Still, two widely used dictionaries list the site as "unknown" and the famous Madaba mosaic map appears to locate the site on the west side of the Jordan.<sup>47</sup> Based on all of the evidence, however, the site of Bethabara appears the most likely site for Bethany Beyond the Jordan.

#### Bethsaida (1:43; 12:21)

The mention of Bethsaida is not unique to the Gospel of John, but John provides more detail than any of the other Gospels. Bethsaida is the home of Peter, Andrew, and Philip and would have been known as a fishing village. There are two main sites proposed for the site of Bethsaida; the first is known as et-Tell located approximately 1.5 miles north of the Sea of Galilee and the second is known as el-Araj, which is closer to the shoreline and located southeast of the et-Tell site. Much of the confusion for the location of Bethsaida has been because of conflicting testimonies between Flavius Josephus and the Gospel of John. Josephus

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 529.

<sup>47</sup> Khouri, "Where John Baptized: Bethany beyond the Jordan," 35.

places it in the Lower Golan on the eastern side of the Jordan Rift Valley near the Jordan River and the Sea of Galilee. Josephus wrote that Herod's son Philip renamed Bethsaida Julia after transforming it into a Greek city and reinforcing it. John simply places it in Galilee. In December 1995 Bargil Pixner wrote an article in *Biblical Archaeologist* suggesting that Et-Tell was Julia and that el-Araj was the Bethsaida of the Gospels.<sup>48</sup>

Et-Tell is the older of the two sites. Around 1983, German traveler Ulrich Jasper Seetzen suggested in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century that Et-Tell was Bethsaida. After two American scholars agreed, it became commonly accepted. Israel's Government Naming Committee renamed Et-Tell as Bethsaida.<sup>49</sup>

However, there were problems with the location of Et-Tell. It was some distance (1.5 miles) from the Sea of Galilee, the site is 20 feet above the level of the lake in the first century, it lacked any remains from the first century, such as pottery or coins, and after thirty years of digging, only one Roman house and one possible Roman temple have been uncovered. Scholars began suggesting there might be two Bethsaidas.

After a shovel survey in 2014, the El-Araj Excavation Project was launched in 2016. In 2017, a mosaic floor was uncovered that was ten feet below what was generally assumed to be the level of the lake in the first century. The mosaic floor design is similar to the floor of a synagogue recently excavated in Magdala.<sup>50</sup> Other finds from El-Araj include coins and pottery from the first through the third century and limestone molds for casting lead fishing weights.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Richard Freund, "The Two Bethsaidas," in *Bethsaida in Archaeology, History and Ancient Culture: A Festschrift in Honor of John T. Greene* (Newcastle upon Tyne, England: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 40.

<sup>49</sup> Rami Arav, "Searching for Bethsaida: The Case for Et-Tell," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 2 (2020): 41.

<sup>50</sup> R. Steven Notley and Mordechai Aviam, "Searching for Bethsaida: The Case for El-Araj," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 46, no. 2 (2020): 36.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 38.

More recently in 2021, Notley and Aviam uncovered a significant Byzantine basilica dating to the sixth century. The basilica measured roughly seventy feet by sixty feet and followed a typical plan with a central nave, two side aisles, and a single apse, which contained the main altar. Next to the basilica was a bathhouse and a number of rooms that Notley and Aviam attributed as living quarters for a monastery.<sup>52</sup> They believe the significance of the Byzantine basilica and monastery is to commemorate the location of the apostle Peter's house. Support for this view is based on the large Greek medallion mosaic found in the diaconicon of the basilica. The inscription "names a local benefactor with an entreaty for intercession on his behalf from "the chief of the apostles and the keeper of the key to heaven.""<sup>53</sup> Peter is often called the chief among the apostles and the keeper of the key to heaven echoes Matthew 16:19. In their next archaeological season, the mosaics in the church's eastern apse will be removed as there are indications of a structure beneath which may be associated with the house of Peter.

John 1:44 is the only Gospel passage that clearly states that Peter was from Bethsaida. Luke 4:38 mentions the home of Simon, but Simon was a very common name in the first century and belongs to several Gospel figures (Matt. 10:4, Mark 3:18, Luke 6:15). Mark, however, describes the same event as entering the "home of Simon and Andrew" (1:29) in Capernaum. This discrepancy may be similar to our understanding of Jesus. He was described as from Nazareth, but born in Bethlehem; Simon Peter may have lived in Capernaum, but born in Bethsaida.

As more work is done at these two sights, a clearer picture of where the village of Peter, Andrew, and Philip may emerge. However, there is good reason that Bethsaida does exist, confirming another site recorded in the Gospel of John.

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<sup>52</sup> Steven Notley, "The House of Peter Capernaum or Bethsaida?," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 49, no. 4 (2023): 42.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 47.

## Cana in Galilee (2:1-2; 4:46; 21:2)

In understanding the life and times of Jesus, son of Joseph (a reference found only in the Gospel of John), James Charlesworth asks if it is “relevant to ask numerous questions about how and in what ways, if at all, archaeological discoveries can help us.”<sup>54</sup> The town of Cana only appears in the Gospel of John.<sup>55</sup> However, the historian Josephus also mentions it as a place where he also dwelt, lending support for the town’s existence.<sup>56</sup> Perhaps the most well known reference to Cana is the wedding feast where Jesus turned the water into wine. However, John also mentions Jesus healing a boy’s fever in Cana (John 4:46-54) and that the disciple Nathanael came from Cana (John 21:2).

C. Thomas McCollough claims there has been at least five sites proposed for Cana without listing them.<sup>57</sup> One site in southern Lebanon, southeast of Tyre, is supported by both Eusebius and Jerome and celebrated by early pilgrims.<sup>58</sup> This Cana is mentioned in Joshua 19:28 when describing the allotment for the tribe of Asher. Eusebius also associates this site as Cana in his *Onomasticon*, describing the place-names of the Bible.<sup>59</sup> However this site is not supported by archaeological evidence. Jack Finegan notes that the Cana of Galilee is clearly

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<sup>54</sup> James H. Charlesworth, ed., *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2006), xxiv.

<sup>55</sup> von Wahlde, “Archaeology and John’s Gospel,” 538.

<sup>56</sup> Flavius Josephus, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged*, trans. William Whiston, New Updated Ed. (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 6.

<sup>57</sup> Tom McCollough, “Searching for Cana: Where Jesus Turned Water into Wine,” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 41, no. 6 (2015): 31.

<sup>58</sup> James H. Charlesworth, “Jesus Research and Archaeology: A New Perspective,” in *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 39.

<sup>59</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea Bishop of Caesarea and Stefan Timm, *Das Onomastikon der biblischen Ortsnamen: Kritische Neuausgabe des griechischen Textes mit der lateinischen Fassung des Hieronymus*, vol. Band 24; neue Folge; n.F., Bd. 24.; (Göttingen, [Germany]: De Gruyter, 2017), 147.

distinguished “from “Kana, as far as Sidon the Great” (Jos 19:28).”<sup>60</sup> As Finegan notes, Eusebius, along with Jerome, “has to be incorrect,” although Jerome does refer to a greater and lesser Cana.<sup>61</sup>

Kefr Kenna (or Kafr Kanna) is located less than four miles northeast of Nazareth and 2.5 miles from Sepphoris, on the road to Tiberias. It is still inhabited. In Jerome’s Latin translation of Eusebius’ *Onomasticon*, Jerome refers to a “greater” and “lesser” Cana, with the “greater” referring to the site near Tyre and the “lesser” to a site near Nazareth.<sup>62</sup> Finegan notes that when Jerome invited Marcella to visit the Holy Land, Jerome stated: “We shall go to see Nazareth, as its name denotes, the flower of Galilee. Not at all far off we will see Cana, where the water was turned into wine.”<sup>63</sup> Since Kefr Kenna is close to Nazareth, Finegan believes Jerome was indicating Kefr Kenna as the site for Cana.

Several pilgrimages also seem to indicate Kefr Kenna as the site of Cana. The first is by Anonymous of Piacenza in 570 AD where he indicates that it is three miles from Sepphoris.<sup>64</sup> Kefr Kenna is 2.5 miles east of Sepphoris. The second is by Willibald in 725 AD, where he mentions visiting the church mentioned by Anonymous of Piacenza during his visit. From Cana, Willibald traveled to Tabor, which, according to Finegan, fits well with a Nazareth – Kefr Kenna – Tabor itinerary. Finally, Epiphanius the Monk in the later part of the eighth century traversed the same route as Willibald, but in reverse. Epiphanius reports that the church is now

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<sup>60</sup> Jack Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, Revis (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1992), 62.

<sup>61</sup> Ibid.

<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 63.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.; Price and House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 282.

a monastery.<sup>65</sup> In 1998, the monks wanted to renovate the monastery, so they hired archaeologist Fr. Eugenio Alliata from Studium Biblicum Franciscanum to explore the area under the monastery. Underneath remains of buildings dating from the fifth and sixth centuries, they found a “small stone cistern” in the floor dating to the first century containing stone jars.<sup>66</sup> The monks claim that this is evidence for the authenticity of Kefr Kenna as the location of Cana from the Gospel of John. Ignazio Mancini quotes Fr. Bagatti, writing: “The building would have been turned into a church when the owners, grateful for the benefit granted them by the Lord, had given up their home for it to be transformed into a place of worship. It would thus have become a Jewish-Christian synagogue, and subsequently a church.”<sup>67</sup>

However, Price notes that “other scholars doubt the veracity of these claims and argue, “There is at present no archaeological evidence to demonstrate the antiquity of Kefr Kenna.””<sup>68</sup>

Yet archaeological excavations by Bellarmino Bagatti and Stanislao Loffreda from 1955 to 1969 found coins dating from Herod the Great to Constantine, along with ceramics from the Roman and Byzantine periods.<sup>69</sup> Archaeologists also found two ruins of synagogues, one at Kefr Kenna and the other at Karm er-Ras, a nearby village which may have formed one larger village with Kefr Kenna in ancient times. According to Finegan, one of the synagogues may have been Jewish and the other at Karm er-Ras a Judeo-Christian synagogue-church with the two

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<sup>65</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 64.

<sup>66</sup> Price and House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 282.

<sup>67</sup> Ignazio Mancini, “Excavations Confirm Village at Cana,” *L’Osservatore Romano*, August 26, 1998, <https://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=507>.

<sup>68</sup> Price and House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 282.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*

communities living next to each other.<sup>70</sup> Mancini suggests that this demonstrates that Cana was much larger during the time of Jesus' ministry.<sup>71</sup>

According to McCollough, the most likely site for Cana is Khirbet Qana (also spelled Khirbet Cana).<sup>72</sup> Peter Richardson agrees, writing "Recent excavations have tipped the scales decisively in favor of Khirbet Cana as the location of Cana."<sup>73</sup> Khirbet Qana is an uninhabited ruin located six miles north of Sepphoris and nine miles north of Nazareth.<sup>74</sup> It is situated on a limestone outcropping, rising 330 feet above the floor of the Bet Netofa valley.<sup>75</sup> It sits at an important junction in Roman times between Akko on the Mediterranean Sea and Tarichaea on the Sea of Galilee. Because of its vantage point overlooking the Bet Netofa valley, it is the more likely site where Josephus resided.

Khirbet Qana was excavated by Douglass Edwards and a team from the University of Puget Sound from 1997 to 2004. However, perhaps due to the untimely death of Edwards in 2004, the work has never been published.<sup>76</sup> The archaeological evidence shows occupation from the Neolithic to the Ottoman periods, with the bulk of the evidence from the Roman period. The evidence uncovered included streets, plazas, house foundations, and several cisterns. One discovery was particularly interesting. A cave complex consisting of a number of

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<sup>70</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 65.

<sup>71</sup> Mancini, "Excavations Confirm Village at Cana."

<sup>72</sup> McCollough, "Searching for Cana: Where Jesus Turned Water into Wine," 31.

<sup>73</sup> Peter Richardson, "Khirbet Qana (and Other Villages) as a Context for Jesus," in *Jesus and Archaeology* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), 120.

<sup>74</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 62–63.

<sup>75</sup> McCollough, "Searching for Cana: Where Jesus Turned Water into Wine," 32.

<sup>76</sup> Price and House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 282n112.



interconnecting shafts and rooms suggested a deliberate procession through the caves, with two stone water jars and room for four more, as a veneration of the Cana wedding miracle.<sup>77</sup> This is consistent with reports from the Byzantine period of early pilgrimages to Cana, “some of which presuppose Khirbet Qana was the pilgrim site.”<sup>78</sup> Von Wahlde notes that in the careful study by Julian Herrojo of these pilgrimage reports, Herrojo notes that all of the earliest reports by Josephus, Eusebius, and Jerome all locate Cana as Khirbet Qana.<sup>79</sup> In reviewing Herrojo’s book, Moisés Mayordomo notes modern scholarship, greatly influenced by the geographical work of Gustav Dalman (*Orte und Wege Jesu*, Gütersloh, 1924), is unanimous in identifying Khirbet Qana as Cana.<sup>80</sup> As Mayotdomo notes, Herrojo began his work with the firm conviction that Kefr Kenna was the site of Cana, Herrojo eventually ends up proving Khirbet Qana as the actual site.<sup>81</sup>

Another piece of evidence pointing to Khirbet Qana as the actual site is the lack of reference in ancient literature to Kefr Kenna prior to until the time of the Crusades. As Price notes, J. Carl Laney argues that, “The tradition which supports the identification of Kefr Kenna with Cana of Galilee is quite late, not beginning until the early 17<sup>th</sup> century when Quaresmius, guardian of the Holy Sepulchre... investigated the two sites and decided in favor of Kefr Kenna.”<sup>82</sup> It was after the Crusades that the Fransescans began to purchase buildings in the village of Kefr Kenna, establishing the notion of Kefr Kenna as the biblical Cana. As Laney

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 283.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 282.

<sup>79</sup> von Wahlde, “Archaeology and John’s Gospel,” 540.

<sup>80</sup> Moisés Mayordomo, “Cana de Galilea y Su Localización. Un Examen Crítico de Las Fuentes. (Cahiers de La Revue Biblique, 45.),” *Journal of Theological Studies* 52, no. 2 (2001): 809–10.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid., 810.

<sup>82</sup> Price and House, *Zondervan Handbook of Biblical Archaeology: A Book by Book Guide to Archaeological Discoveries Related to the Bible*, 282–83.

maintains, the traditional location of Cana was Khirbet Qana.

Despite the fact that there are two competing sites for the location of Cana, the mere fact that we have more than one site that supports the location and existence of Cana in the Gospel of John bolsters the historical reliability of the Gospel of John.

#### Capernaum (2:12; 4:46; 6:16; 6:59)

Cana is mentioned again in John 4:46 where Jesus was once again visiting Cana. While in Cana, Jesus was approached by royal official who had a sick son who was close to death and lay in Capernaum. Jesus had just arrived from Judea when the royal official sought him out. The official begged Jesus to come to Capernaum to heal the son, but Jesus replied “Go... your son will live” (John 4:50 NIV). Both Matthew (Matt 8:5-24) and Luke (Luke 7:1-20) record this as Jesus entered Capernaum, yet John records this event as occurring while Jesus was still in Cana.

Matthew provides a general description of the location of Capernaum, “Leaving Nazareth, he went and lived in Capernaum, which was by the lake in the area of Zebulun and Naphtali” (Matt. 4:13 NIV). Capernaum, which was known as Tel-Hum, was unoccupied for nearly 100 years.<sup>83</sup> American scholar Edward Robinson was the first to discover and identify the remains of a synagogue in 1852, but failed to identify the city as Capernaum. Robinson believed Capernaum was located at a site known as Khirbet Minya, located about two miles southwest of Tel-Hum. British explorer and engineer Captain Charles Wilson identified the site as the city of Capernaum in 1866. Laughlin mentions that, “Capernaum is the Greek form of the Hebrew Kfar Nahum, which means the village of Nahum. (The Hebrew form is not attested before the fourth or fifth century A.D.) The end of the name Nahum is easily recognized in the Arabic Tal-

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<sup>83</sup>J. C. H. Laughlin, “Capernaum from Jesus’ Time and After,” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 19, no. 5 (1993): 54.

Hum.”<sup>84</sup> Thus, Tel-Hum preserves the final syllable of Nahum in Tel-Hum. Indeed, Kopp uses the spelling of Capharnaum for Capernaum, preserving the pronunciation of the Hebrew spelling כפר נחום.<sup>85</sup> This spelling is also visible on signs leading into Capernaum.<sup>86</sup>

Under the direction of Fr. Gaudentius Orfali, the synagogue was excavated by the Franciscans from 1921 to 1926. As Strange and Shanks mention, “Orfali dated the synagogue to the early first century A.D. It was, he said, the synagogue in which Jesus had preached.”<sup>87</sup> However, there were obvious issues with his conclusions. The synagogue that was standing in Capernaum was built with shining white limestone, yet the entire surroundings were built with black basalt stone, thus generating universal rejection on the dating. In 1968, the Franciscans began a second excavation under Fr. Vigilio Corbo, the results of which “touched off one of the most spirited debates in archaeological history.”<sup>88</sup> Corbo dated the synagogue to the fourth century or early fifth century. One faction, the Israelis, contended that the structure was clearly late second or third century based on its “artistic and stylistic parallels.”<sup>89</sup> Corbo, however, based his conclusions on the greater than 10,000 bronze coins they found beneath and embedded (“hermetically sealed”) in the pavement of the synagogue.<sup>90</sup> Because of the dating of the bronze coins, Corbo’s dating is generally accepted.

While excavating the synagogue in 1968, the Franciscans also excavated the

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<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels*, 171–79.

<sup>86</sup> *CAFARNAO: LA CITTA' SCELTA DA GESU'*, 2016, sc. 2:00, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBASo\\_naeZg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sBASo_naeZg).

<sup>87</sup> James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, “Synagogue Where Jesus Preached Found at Capernaum,” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 9, no. 6 (1983): 24.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 25.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

surrounding area to uncover the town. It was during this excavation where they possibly uncovered the house of Peter, the apostle of Jesus. The site had partially been surveyed and excavated in 1905 and 1921 by Orfali, but not recognized as potentially the house of Peter at that time. What was discovered was three concentric octagonal buildings eighty-four feet south of the synagogue. Local guides identified it as the house of Peter, but scholars did not accept the archaeological evidence as a residence. Friar Orfali identified it as a Byzantine baptistry. It was during the 1968 excavations of Corbo that an apse and a baptistry was discovered on the east side of the middle octagon.<sup>91</sup> Because of the unusual placement of the baptismal font located within the apse, and other peculiar plans and features, Tzaferis believes the church was meant to commemorate a holy site (such as Peter's house) and not used for ritual purposes.<sup>92</sup> Churches build in an octagon shape were meant to commemorate "special events in Christian history," such as the Church of the Nativity in Bethlehem.<sup>93</sup>

While excavating the octagonal church, Corbo found evidence of a previous church upon which the octagonal church was built. This was based on the religious graffiti left on the walls by past pilgrims. For example, one graffito scratched on the wall reads, "Lord Jesus Christ help thy servant \_\_\_\_." <sup>94</sup> The last word, which appeared to be a proper name, was not legible. The graffiti was written predominantly in Greek with crosses also appearing in the graffiti. This first church was built over the remains of a residence, starting around 63 A.D. The original house, dated to around 60 B.C., was built with two inner courtyards surrounded by several smaller rooms on the north and west sides. The largest room, located on the south side, showed

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>92</sup> Vasillios Tzaferis, "New Archaeological Evidence on Ancient Capernaum," *The Biblical Archaeologist* 46, no. 4 (1983): 204.

<sup>93</sup> James F. Strange and Hershel Shanks, "Has the House Where Jesus Stayed in Capernaum Been Found?," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 8, no. 6 (1982): 31.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.

evidence of having an arch built over it at a later date, as two pilasters were found in the excavations. The unworked stone used for the house would not have supported a second floor, but would most likely have had a roof of branches, mud, and straw.

The function of the residence changed around the middle of the first century, as domestic pottery such as cooking pots and bowls disappeared and the walls and floor of the large room were plastered and re-plastered. Plastering in poor homes at this time was only undertaken in rooms used for large gatherings, as the plaster reflects light and aids in illumination. The lack of pottery and the plastering suggest the room was used for public display. The two pilasters supporting the arch would also have supported a new high masonry roof.<sup>95</sup>

Early pilgrimage accounts add support to a church being build over the site of Peter's home. A Spanish nun named Egeria (or Etheria) reported in her diary that she had visited the house of St. Peter, which had now been converted into a church, on her visit sometime between 381 A.D. and 395 A.D. She wrote in her diary, "In Capernaum a house-church (domus ecclesia) was made out of the home of the prince of the apostles, whose walls still stand today as they were."<sup>96</sup> This would refer to the original church found under the octagon church which was built in the fourth century. An anonymous pilgrim, known as the Pilgrim of Piacenza, visited the site in the sixth century and found the octagon church. He reports, "We came to Capernaum to the house of St. Peter, which is now a basilica."<sup>97</sup> Thus, from an early date, the literature and archaeology agree that this is most likely the site of the Apostle Peter's home.

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<sup>95</sup> Ibid.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

### Jerusalem Temple Courts (2:13-14; 7:14,28; 8:2, 20; 11:56)

The temple courts are mentioned in all four Gospels, recording the event of Jesus overturning the tables of the money changers. John also mentions Jesus secretly going to the Festival of Tabernacles after his brothers' urging and teaching in the temple court (7:14,28; 8:2,20), and during Passover during the final week (11:56). It is generally believed that the temple courts were on the Temple Mount. However, due to current ownership, archaeological excavations are impossible to confirm this. This is true to this day.<sup>98</sup>

### Aenon Near Salem (3:23)

In John 3, the apostle reports that John the Baptist was baptizing at Aenon (Αινών) near Salem (Σαλείμ). The Full Notes Edition of the *NET Bible* note the precise location of Aenon is not known, but suggests that there are three possibilities.<sup>99</sup> The first location is in Perea in the Transjordan region, which extends “in length from Machaerus to Pella, in breadth from Philadelphia to the Jordan.”<sup>100</sup> When Jesus had to flee during the Feast of Dedication in Jerusalem (John 10:22-39), John 10:40 says “Jesus went back across the Jordan River again to the place where John had been baptizing at an earlier time” (John 10:40 *NET*). This would be near Bethany Beyond the Jordan as mentioned above and in John 1:28. This is outside of the jurisdiction of Jerusalem yet still close enough for Martha and Mary to visit (John 11:3).

The second location identified is in the northern Jordan valley on the western bank around eight miles south of Scythopolis. This agrees with the Madaba Map, which shows the second Aenon located upstream. Murphy-O'Connor notes that the mosaic artist deferred to the

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<sup>98</sup> Brent Nagtegaal, “Excavating the Pool of Siloam—An Interview With Ze’ev Orenstein,” *ArmstrongInstitute.org*, accessed March 12, 2024, <https://armstronginstitute.org/879-excavating-the-pool-of-siloam-an-interview-with-zeev-orenstein>.

<sup>99</sup> Thomas Nelson, ed., *NET Bible, Full Note Edition* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2019), 2003.

<sup>100</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, “Place-Names in the Fourth Gospel (I): Aenon Near Salem (JN 3:23),” *Revue Biblique* (1946-) 119, no. 4 (2012): 568.

authority of Eusebius, who wrote:

The place [Aenon] is still shown today, eight milestones south of Scythopolis near Salem and the Jordan (καί δεικνυται εις ἔτι νυν ὁ τόπος ἀπό η σημειον Σκυθοπόλεως πρὸς νότον πλησιον Σαλείμκαί τοθ Ἰορδάνου).<sup>101</sup>

However, with its close proximity to the Jordan river, the reference in John 3:23 to the abundance of water would not make sense.

The third location identified in the *NET Bible* is a location in Samaria, approximately four miles east of Shechem. There is a town located here called Salim and eight miles northeast is the modern town of Ainun. There are many springs located in the area of Ainun. However, this puts John the Baptist baptizing Jews in Samaria for the coming Jewish Messiah, making it a less likely site.

Murphy-O'Connor proposes two locations in Palestine east of Nablus as the best attested location for Salem.<sup>102</sup> The first is the Aenon to the north, which corresponds with the second location identified above.

The second location proposed by Murphy-O'Connor is in Samaria.<sup>103</sup> Murphy-O'Connor proposes that John was baptizing in parallel with Jesus (John 3:22-24) and must have gone further north.<sup>104</sup> This was but a stop for John the Baptist as he traveled to Galilee. Murphy-O'Connor quotes Lt. Claude R. Conder as follows:

Now, due east of Nablus is the village of Salim..., and north of this, as Dr. Robinson pointed out, are copious springs in a broad open valley.... The most satisfactory confirmation of the theory is found in the preservation of the name Aenon in the modern village of 'Aynún, which is marked on Vandervelde's map at a distance north of the springs (three or four miles) about equal to that of Salim on the south. Thus the requisites of two names and an abundant supply of water are

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid., 572.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 564.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid., 574.

<sup>104</sup> Ibid.

satisfied, although the existence of 'Aynún appears hitherto to have escaped notice.... The position of Aenon, or rather of the springs frequented by the Baptist, may therefore with some degree of certainty referred to the upper source of the Wady Far' ah stream lying, as has been shown, between Salim and 'Aynún.<sup>105</sup>

This was based on a report by Robinson in 1852 that noted, “We looked down into the plain of Sâlim, which lies east of Nablus.... The village of Salim is directly north of Beit Fûrik, on a low hill on the north side of the plain. It is said to have two sources of living water; one in a cavern, and the other a running fountain called “Ai.” However, Robinson did not associate this with John 3:23. This error was perpetuated by Albright when he suggested,

Now Conder pointed out long ago that Aenon near Salim must be modern 'Ainûn, with identically the same name, nearly eight miles northeast of Sâlim. It is true that the modern site has no water, but the name alone shows that the ancient village of this name lay nearer the head of the Wadī Far'ah, either at Hirbet es-Smeit, or at Tammûn.<sup>106</sup>

One of the things Albright failed to account for is why the village had moved three miles north of its springs to its present site. It was de Vaux who provided the possible explanation, “This long interruption and its ultimate abandonment are not to be explained by purely historical causes; the spot is unhealthy, with a great deal of malaria, and this has perhaps been a contributing factor.”<sup>107</sup>

Unfortunately, this destroys the hypothesis that this was the Aenon where John the Baptist baptized, as the site was a home to malarial mosquitoes until the mid-twentieth century. Few people would be enticed to be immersed in malarial-infested mosquito waters to be baptized. However, there is even a more decisive reason why this is not the site of Aenon near Salem. The two springs of Aenon are separated by two mountain ranges, Jebel Tammun and

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<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 575.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 576.



Jebel el-Kabir, and an impassible section of Wadi Fat'ah.<sup>108</sup> Thus, there is little reason to believe this is the Aenon near Salem, according to Murphy-O'Connor.<sup>109</sup>

### Sychar (4:5)

Sychar is mentioned only in the Gospel of John in association with the Samaritan woman at the well. It is located in the vicinity of Jacob's Well and Mount Gerizim, two locations, also only mentioned in the New Testament in the Gospel of John, that are generally well accepted and discussed in the next two sections. The location of Sychar, however, is still disputed.

Since Jacob bought the land where he dug his well at Shechem (Genesis 48:22), one thought is that Shechem of the Old Testament is Sychar of the New Testament.<sup>110</sup> This is based on the hatred Jews had for Samaritans at the time. Sychar may have been a nickname given to Shechem, "perhaps from שֶׁקֶר, *sheker*, "falsehood," spoken of idols in Hab 2:18; or from שִׁכּוֹר, *shikkor*, "drunkard," in allusion to Isa 28:1,7."<sup>111</sup>

Eusebius, however, locates Sychar before the city of Neapolis, near the field Jacob gave to Joseph.<sup>112</sup> Eusebius identifies this with the town of Askar.<sup>113</sup> Askar is located east of Nablus and Tel Balata, which is the site of ancient Shechem. The problem with Askar as the site of Sychar is that Askar has its own well and there would be no need for the Samaritan woman to

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid.

<sup>110</sup> "Sychar from the McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia.," McClintock and Strong Biblical Cyclopedia Online, accessed November 26, 2023, <https://www.biblicalcyclopedia.com/S/sychar.html>.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.

<sup>112</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomasticon: Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.*, ed. Joan E. Taylor, trans. G.S.P. Freeman-Grenville (Jerusalem: Carta, 2003), 90.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid., 158.

travel to Jacob's well for water. It is also a considerable distance from Askar to Jacob's well.<sup>114</sup> The argument is not a strong one, however, as the Samaritan woman was shunned by the local women of Sychar and she may have avoided the local well, instead traveling further to Jacob's well. In addition, W. F. Albright dates the town of Askar from the medieval times.<sup>115</sup> Von Wahlde, however, points out that that does not preclude a city from an earlier period. He points out that the author of the book of *Jubilees* in the second century B.C. mentions the king from Sakir who waged war on Jacob and his sons at Shechem.<sup>116</sup> Von Wahlde suggests that this could have been Sychar.

One of the earliest accounts of a pilgrimage to the area is by the anonymous Bordeaux Pilgrim in 333 A.D. In his account, he records the following:

City of Neapolis (Nablus)-

Here is the Mount Gerizim. Here the Samaritans say that Abraham offered sacrifice, and one reaches the top of the mountain by steps, three hundred in number. Beyond this, at the foot of the mountain itself, is a place called Sichem. Here is a tomb in which Joseph is laid, in the 'parcel of ground' (villa) which Jacob his father gave to him. From thence Dinah, the daughter of Jacob, was carried off by the children of the Amorites. A mile from thence is a place named Sichar, from which the woman of Samaria came down to the same place in which Jacob dug the well, to draw water from it, and our Lord Jesus Christ talked with her; in which place are plane-trees, which Jacob planted, and a bath (balneus) which is supplied with water from the well.<sup>117</sup>

Thus, according to this account, Sichem (Shechem) and Sichar (Sychar) are two separate villages, located a mile apart. The footnote offered in the translation suggests Sichem is identified with the small village of Balata, east of Nablus and near Jacob's well. Tel Balata is a low, 15-acre mound just east of Nablus. A group of German archaeologists under the direction

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<sup>114</sup> James C. VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, vol. no. 14;no. 14.; (Missoula, Mont: Published by Scholars Press for Harvard Semitic Museum, 1977), 226.

<sup>115</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 558.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid.

<sup>117</sup> "The Bordeaux Pilgrim," *Itinerary from Bordeaux to Jerusalem*, trans. Aubrey Stewart (London: Palestine Pilgrims' Text Society, 1887), 18.

of H. Tiersch excavated Tel Balata in 1903 and concluded it was ancient Shechem. It was excavated in 1913 and 1914 by Austro-German E. Sellin before it was interrupted by World War 1. He resumed work in 1926 and continued until 1936. In 1956, Americans G. E. Wright and B. W. Anderson resumed excavations. The last excavation work was done by W. G. Dever in 1973.<sup>118</sup> In 107 B.C., John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim and leveled the city of Shechem. It lay in ruins until Tierschin identified it in 1901.<sup>119</sup> Shechem did not exist at the time of Jesus, supporting the claim that Shechem and Sychar are separate cities. VanderKam asserts that virtually all sources agree that Sychar and Shechem are two distinct villages.<sup>120</sup> There also appears to be evidence for a site named *mḥnh* in the vicinity of Shechem.<sup>121</sup>

Nablus (Neopolis) is not a possible site for Sychar, either, as Vespasian built the city in 72 A.D. a short distance from Shechem.<sup>122</sup> Thus, Nablus did not exist at the time of Jesus.

#### Jacob's Well (4:6)

When Jesus traveled through Samaria, he stopped at a well outside of the town of Sychar. While not stated explicitly, the well Jesus stopped at is the very well that Jacob established in the Old Testament. The Samaritan well is described as deep in verse 12. G. E. Wright measured the depth of this well and found it to be 151 feet deep. In John 4:6. the well of Jacob is identified as a *πηγή* (*pēgē*), which is a spring or fountain. BDAG defines this as “a source of something that

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<sup>118</sup> David G. Hansen, “Shechem: Its Archaeological and Contextual Significance,” *Bible and Spade* 18, no. 2 (Spring 2005): 35.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

<sup>120</sup> VanderKam, *Textual and Historical Studies in the Book of Jubilees*, no. 14;no. 14.;225.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, no. 14;no. 14.;226.

<sup>122</sup> von Wahlde, “Archaeology and John’s Gospel,” 558.

gushes out or flows.”<sup>123</sup> Several verses later in 11 and 12, John identifies this as a φρεαρ (phrear), which is a well that is dug out. BDAG defines this as “a construction consisting of a vertical shaft, covered with a stone, for water supply, a well.”<sup>124</sup> There is a well located about 250 feet outside the ruins of Shechem which has precisely both of these features, demonstrating the archaeological accuracy of the Gospel of John and bolstering its historical reliability.

Today, the well is located in an Eastern Orthodox church in the village of Balata, just outside the city of Nablus.

#### Mount Gerizim (4:20)

Of all the sites associated with the Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John, Mount Gerizim is the least contested. Mt. Gerizim is first mentioned in Deuteronomy 11:29-30 (NIV), “When the Lord your God has brought you into the land you are entering to possess, you are to proclaim on Mount Gerizim the blessings, and on Mount Ebal the curses.” Moses gave more specific commands in Deuteronomy 27:12-13 when he said (NIV), “When you have crossed the Jordan, these tribes shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph and Benjamin. And these tribes shall stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce curses: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan and Naphtali.” Mt. Gerizim is again mentioned in Joshua 8:33 after Joshua had built an altar on Mount Ebal, and in Judges 9:7 when Jotham climbed Mount Gerizim and shouted down to the people of Shechem, who were about to crown Abimelech king.

As previously mentioned, John Hyrcanus destroyed the Samaritan temple on Mt. Gerizim in 107 B.C. Therefore, the temple that the Samaritans worshiped at did not exist at the time of

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<sup>123</sup> Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker, and William F. Arndt, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*, Third (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 810.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid.*, 1065.

Christ. The temple was originally built by Sanballat around 450 B.C., similar to the one in Jerusalem, and was in continuous use until its destruction.<sup>125</sup> A city was also built just south of the sanctuary and grew to about 100 acres with a population of around 10,000 people in the second century B.C.<sup>126</sup> After the destruction, the temple and city were not rebuilt. In 135 A.D., Hadrian built a temple to Jupiter on Mount Gerizim. According to Finegan, coins minted in nearby Neapolis (sometimes spelled Neapolis) showed a “colonnaded street at the foot of the mountain and a long stairway that leads up to the temple on the summit. It is evidently this stairway to which the Bordeaux Pilgrim (333) refers when he notes concerning Mount Gerizim.”<sup>127</sup> Finegan indicates that, from the Pilgrim’s text, some part of Mt. Gerizim was still being used for worship by the Samaritans. In 484 A.D. the Samaritans attacked a Christian church in Neapolis while celebrating Pentecost and killed their bishop. In retaliation, emperor Zeno drove the Samaritans from the mountain and built an octagonal church dedicated to Mary as the Mother of God.<sup>128</sup>

The church built by Zeno sits on the higher southern peak of Mount Gerizim and was excavated by A. M. Schneider in 1928. The Hadrian temple ruins sit on the northern spur of the mountain and were excavated by Drew-McCormick in 1966. In their excavation, they found the great stairway leading down from the temple to the eastern edge of Neapolis. Underneath the Hadrian temple they found walls of a different type of building and Hellenistic pottery, possibly

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<sup>125</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 67; Anne Katrine de Hemmer Gudme, “Reactivating Remembrance,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 45, no. 4 (2019): 66.

<sup>126</sup> de Hemmer Gudme, “Reactivating Remembrance,” 66.

<sup>127</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 67.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid.*, 68.

indicating the site of the Samaritan temple. As Finegan points out, if this is true, Hadrian built temples over both the Jerusalem and Mount Gerizim temple sites.<sup>129</sup>

### The Sheep Gate (5:2)

The reference to the Sheep Gate comes with two textual problems.<sup>130</sup> The first problem is whether the text reads *epi* (or *en*) *te probatike*. According to von Wahlde, the Nestle-Aland text preferred the reading is *epi* (at).<sup>131</sup> The second, being more substantive, is whether to consider *probatike* as a dative adjective or not. If *kolybethra* (pool) is taken also as a dative, then sheep would be associated with pool and there is no subject for the verb.<sup>132</sup> However, if pool is nominative, then sheep would refer to the gate. Supporting this conclusion is that there is no record of a sheep pool, but there is a Sheep Gate in Nehemiah 3:1, 32 and 12:39 located on the northeast wall of Jerusalem, near where the Pool of Bethesda has been found.

There is some confusion even today where the Sheep Gate was located. Many websites claim that the Sheep Gate is the Lion's Gate.<sup>133</sup> However, the Lion's Gate was built in 1538, well after the first century. The Sheep Gate was located in close proximity to the Pool of Bethesda on the northern wall.<sup>134</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Ibid.

<sup>130</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 559.

<sup>131</sup> von Wahlde, 560.

<sup>132</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 560.

<sup>133</sup> Alamy Limited, "Lions' Gate (Also St. Stephen's Gate or Sheep Gate) Is a Gate in the Walls of the Old City in Jerusalem. It Is One of Seven Open Gates in the Old City Stock Photo - Alamy," accessed May 6, 2023, <https://www.alamy.com/lions-gate-also-st-stephens-gate-or-sheep-gate-is-a-gate-in-the-walls-of-the-old-city-in-jerusalem-it-is-one-of-seven-open-gates-in-the-old-city-image351729942.html>; Berthold Werner, "Lions Gate," Lion's Gate, November 10, 2008, [https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Lions\\_Gate](https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/Lions_Gate).

<sup>134</sup> Derek Kidner, *Ezra and Nehemiah: An Introduction and Commentary*, vol. 12;12.; (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2009), 92–93.

### The Pool of Bethesda (5:2)

There were two pools in Jerusalem where Jesus performed two healing miracles. One was the Pool of Siloam where Jesus sent the man blind from birth to bathe after applying a mixture to his eyes. The other is the Pool of Bethesda where Jesus healed the man crippled for 38 years. The Pool of Bethesda, according to ancient manuscripts, was believed to have healing powers. It was thought that an angel stirred up the waters and whoever was first to enter the pool would be healed.<sup>135</sup> The cripple, however, did not need to enter the pool, but was healed by the words of Jesus alone.

The pool is described in John 5:2 as being near the Sheep Gate and surrounded by five covered colonnades. Because the pool had not been discovered, scholars thought for centuries that the pool was purely symbolic, representing the five books of Torah.<sup>136</sup> However, in the 1880s archaeologists discovered a pool north of the Pool of Israel that indeed was surrounded by four porticoes with a fifth one in the middle. The discovery was difficult to see because a Byzantine basilica was built over the eastern end of the pool and a Crusader chapel was built on the central wall. In addition, houses surround three sides of the pool, making excavation difficult. This is another site that once was thought to be symbolic but has since been shown to exist through archaeology, once again demonstrating the archaeological accuracy of the Gospel of John and bolstering its historical reliability.

### Far shore of Sea of Galilee (6:1-3)

In John 6, Jesus performed the miracle of the feeding of the five thousand from five loaves and two small fish. This, John noted, occurred on the far side of the Sea of Galilee, which

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<sup>135</sup> Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Puzzling Pool of Bethesda: Where Jesus Cured the Crippled Man," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 37, no. 5 (2011): 41.

<sup>136</sup> *Ibid.*, 42.

John also calls the Sea of Tiberias. Only in the Gospel of John is the Sea of Galilee also called the Sea of Tiberias.

Tiberias was a city on the southwestern side of the Sea of Galilee, founded by Herod Agrippa around 20 A.D. in honor of Emperor Tiberias.<sup>137</sup> It was founded on the site of the remains of Rakkath (Josh 19:35), described as a city of Naphtali, which is most likely identified with Khirbat.<sup>138</sup> While clearing the site, tombs were discovered, so devout Jews shunned the city.<sup>139</sup> Initially, the population according to Josephus, was the poor and slaves, many being forced by Herod to move to the city.<sup>140</sup> However, after the new city was declared the capital of Galilee, the more wealthy also moved to Tiberias. By 67 A.D., Tiberias was the largest and most important city on the Sea of Galilee. Jonathan Reed estimates the population of Tiberias around 24,000 people.<sup>141</sup> For this reason, it would not have been unusual for John to refer to the sea as the Sea of Tiberias. In addition, since the synoptic Gospels were written before the Gospel of John, it should not be surprising that only the Gospel of John refers to the sea as the Sea of Tiberias as the city of Tiberias gained importance in the mid to later part of the first century.

Because a modern city now sits over the site of biblical Tiberias, archaeological excavations are limited.<sup>142</sup> By 1991, there had never been a large, systematic excavation of Tiberias.<sup>143</sup> Still, as Yizhar Hirschfeld notes, a great deal was already known. The city wall has

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<sup>137</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 567.

<sup>138</sup> Michael Avi-Yonah et al., "Tiberias," *Encyclopaedia Judaica* 19 (2007): 714.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid.*, 715.

<sup>140</sup> Josephus, *Complete Works of Josephus*, 478.

<sup>141</sup> von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 567.

<sup>142</sup> Jonathan Reed, "Tiberias," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, 2019, 1307; von Wahlde, "Archaeology and John's Gospel," 567.

<sup>143</sup> Yizhar Hirschfeld, "Tiberias. Preview of Coming Attractions," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 17, no. 2 (1991): 46.



been traced, with much of it extant Gideon Foerster excavated much of the southern gate in 1973-74, with its two impressive towers. This gate lead directly to the North-South Cardo, which was the central colonnaded street bisecting the city. In 1954-1956, a portion of the Cardo was excavated by Bezalel Rabbani, revealing an eastern row of shops and the portico in front of them.<sup>144</sup> Rabbani also found a bathhouse in the center of town and a large building with columns, which appeared to be a roofed marketplace. A trial excavation in 2015, directed by O. Shalev, *et. al.*, revealed remains from the Middle Roman Period (2<sup>nd</sup> – 4<sup>th</sup> century), but mainly from the Abbasid period (9<sup>th</sup> – 10<sup>th</sup> centuries.) While the southern gate was dated to the first century, perhaps as early as 20 A.D., the bath house and marketplace were dated to the fourth century.<sup>145</sup>

After the feeding of the five thousand, the disciples got in a boat and returned to Capernaum. However, Jesus did not go with them, but appeared to them walking on the water after they had gone about three or four miles. The crowd, however, had remained behind. John records that some boats from Tiberias came to shore where the feeding miracle was performed and brought the people over to Capernaum to look for Jesus (John 6:23). With the growing importance of the city of Tiberias on the Sea of Galilee (Tiberias), it is not insignificant that John mentions Tiberias as the origin of the boats and once again bolsters the historical reliability of the Gospel of John.

#### Mount of Olives (8:1)

The Mount of Olives is located just to the east of Jerusalem's Old City, across the Kidron Valley. Its location has never been disputed. Its inclusion here is for completeness of the place-names in the Gospel of John.

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<sup>144</sup> Ibid.

<sup>145</sup> John Laughlin, "Tiberias: The Jewel Beside the Sea of Galilee," in *Fifty Major Cities of the Bible* (Routledge, 2006), 224.

### The Pool of Siloam (9:7,11)

The Pool of Siloam is where Jesus sent (Siloam means *sent*) the man blind from birth to be healed (John 9:1-7). The pool was located at the end of the Hezekiah tunnel. The traditional pool was a small pool, the Birkat al-Hamra, located immediately at the mouth of the tunnel. In 2004, however, the public works department of Jerusalem was repairing a section of sewer line and, as per protocol, allowed the Israeli Antiquities Authority to conduct a salvage dig at the site.<sup>146</sup> What they uncovered were the steps to a large pool which they estimated was 165×197 feet. They soon realized that they had discovered the Pool of Siloam from the time of Jesus.

They excavated as much as they could over the next several years, but a major portion was private property, owned by the Greek Orthodox Church.<sup>147</sup> However, in December, 2022, the Israeli Antiquities Authority announced that the entire Pool of Siloam will be excavated and restored.<sup>148</sup> The Pool of Siloam is currently undergoing a complete excavation.

Current excavations of the Pool of Siloam began in 2023. The excavation is being conducted concurrent with the excavation of the Pilgrimage Road connecting the Pool of Siloam with the Temple Mount. The excavation was conducted under the authority of the City of David with the Israel Antiquities Authority.

### Solomon's Colonnade (10:22-23)

Solomon's colonnade, or portico, was at the southern entrance to the temple. When originally built, it ran the full width of the temple, running 90 feet long, 30 feet wide, and

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<sup>146</sup> Urban C. von Wahlde, "The Pool of Siloam: The Importance of the New Discoveries for Our Understanding of Ritual Immersion in Late Second Temple Judaism and the Gospel of John," in *John, Jesus, and History, Volume 2: Aspects of Historicity in the Fourth Gospel*, ed. Paul N. Anderson, Felix Just, and Tom Thatcher (SBL Press, 2015), 155.

<sup>147</sup> *Ibid.*, 158.

<sup>148</sup> "Israel: Ancient Pool Of Siloam To Be Excavated And Opened To The Public," *Singer Island: Newstex*, 2022, <https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/jewish-business-news-ancient-pool-siloam/docview/2758253424/se-2>.

covered at 45 feet.<sup>149</sup> The temple was completely destroyed in 586 B.C. by the Babylonians.

When Herod the Great expanded the Temple Mount during his reign, he extended the platform to the south and rebuilt the colonnade in the Southern Wall. The wall was 800 feet long and towered 400 feet above the ground. Ingress and egress was through the Huldah Gates, two sets of gates, known today as the triple gate and the double gate, that have since been sealed. Pilgrims entered in the right triple gate and exited through the double gate. Only part of the double gate is visible today.

After entering the gate and climbing the steep, dark stairway, one emerges on the Temple platform. The colonnade was composed of 162 columns, three rows deep and 50 feet high. An upper colonnade was above this, which supported a wooden roof 100 feet above the stone floor.<sup>150</sup> The colonnade was enclosed on the outside, but open to the interior of the temple precinct. However, all of this was destroyed in 70 A.D. during the Jewish revolt. Because of the current situation and ownership of the Temple Mount, archaeological excavations are impossible to confirm the structure of the colonnade.

#### Across the Jordan where John had been Baptizing (10:40)

In John 10, we find Jesus once again walking in Solomon's colonnade where he is challenged to demonstrate he is the Christ by the Jewish leaders. When he refuses and they threaten to seize him, but he escapes their clutches and retreats to the place beyond the Jordan where John had been baptizing, that is Bethany beyond the Jordan. This has been previously covered.

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<sup>149</sup> Alan Balfour, *Solomon's Temple: Myth, Conflict, and Faith* (West Sussex, UK: John Wiley & Sons, 2012), 22.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid.*, 60.

### Bethany by Jerusalem (11:1,18;12:1)

The Gospel of John contains two different cities names Bethany. The first one is Bethany Beyond the Jordan where John the Baptist baptized. The second one is near Jerusalem and is home to Lazarus, Martha, and Mary. The Bethany near Jerusalem, according to the Gospel of John, is where Jesus spent the last six months of his ministry. Jesus arrived for the feast of Tabernacles (John 7:1-10) and John does not record him leaving. His intimate relationship with Lazarus, Martha, and Mary implies that Jesus stayed with them while visiting Jerusalem.

Murphy-O'Connor points out the early Christians had no doubt where Bethany was, as Eusebius confidently wrote "A village at the second milestone from Aelia on the flank of the Mount of Olives, where Christ raised Lazarus. Lazarus' place is still shown there."<sup>151</sup>

### Tomb of Lazarus (11:1,18; 12:1)

The Gospel of John is the only place in the Bible that records Jesus commanding Lazarus, who had been in the tomb for four days, to rise up and come out of his tomb. Lazarus lived in Bethany near Jerusalem, a mere two miles away from Jerusalem, according to John. Because of its proximity to Jerusalem, the Gospel of John states many of the Jews were there to console Mary and Martha. When Mary went out to meet Jesus as he approached the town, the Jews got up and followed her, thinking she was going to the tomb. When Jesus asked her where she laid Lazarus, she led him to the tomb with the multitude following. It was with this multitude of Jews watching that Jesus performed his miracle of raising Lazarus from the dead. The significance of this is that there would be a great many people who would know exactly where the tomb of Lazarus is and word would have spread. This is confirmed in John 12:9-12

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<sup>151</sup> Jerome Murphy-O'Connor, "Place-Names in the Fourth Gospel (II): Bethany (JN 1:28; 11:18) and Ephraim (JN 11:54)," *Revue Biblique* (1946-) 120, no. 1 (2013): 86.

(ESV) where John writes, “When the large crowd of the Jews learned that Jesus was here, they came, not only on account of him but also to see Lazarus, whom he had raised from the dead. So the chief priests made plans to put Lazarus to death as well, because on account of him many of the Jews were going away and believing in Jesus.” This would help establish a long tradition of pilgrimage to the tomb of Lazarus.

In *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, Murphy-O’Connor writes that there is no difficulty identifying Bethany, the location of Lazarus’ tomb. It is located on the main road from Jericho to Jerusalem and is known by its Arabic name el-Azariyeh, which “preserves the Greek *Lazarion*, ‘the place of Lazarus’, by which it was known to Eusebius (330) and all subsequent Byzantine and medieval pilgrims.”<sup>152</sup> Indeed, we see this in the accounts of early pilgrimages to the Holy Land. One such account was recorded by Paula, a Roman of high standing and wealth.<sup>153</sup> She left Rome in the spring of 382 A.D. with her pilgrimage lasting about two years.<sup>154</sup> After visiting the Mount of Olives, she records, “Afterwards, entering the tomb of Lazarus, she saw the house of Mary and Martha, and Bethphage...”<sup>155</sup> Thus, even in 382 A.D., the location of the tomb of Lazarus was well-known.

According to Murphy-O’Connor, the current village is built around the tomb of Lazarus. St. Jerome, who may have accompanied Paula in her pilgrimage, states that there was a church located there in 390 A.D.<sup>156</sup> This church was destroyed by an earthquake but was rebuilt in the

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<sup>152</sup> J. Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, ed. Barry Cunliffe, Fifth, revised and expanded (New York; Oxford; Oxford University Press, 2008), 152.

<sup>153</sup> Benjamin of Tudela et al., *The Holy Land in the Middle Ages: Six Travelers’ Accounts*, 1st ed. (New York: Italica Press, 2017), 1.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>156</sup> *Ibid.*, 2; Murphy-O’Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 152.

sixth century, but with a larger apse to accommodate the large crowds that gathered. The tomb was accessible from a courtyard to the west of these churches through a rock-cut passage. Between 1138 and 1144, Queen Melisande turned the church into a Benedictine convent for her sister Iveta. Murphy-O'Connor notes, "The conventual church of the sisters was built directly over the tomb."<sup>157</sup> By the end of the fourteenth century, however, both churches were in ruins and the original entrance to the tomb had been converted into a mosque, as the Muslims also regarded Lazarus with great respect.<sup>158</sup> Initially, the Muslims allowed Christians to visit the tomb, but this became difficult, so the Franciscans cut a second entrance between 1566 and 1575. In 1954 they erected a new church and adjoining monastery. Today, the tomb of Lazarus can still be visited, but the original entrance to the tomb is located inside of the mosque.

The tomb of Lazarus and his raising from the dead by Jesus is only mentioned in the Gospel of John. The location of this tomb has been known continuously since the time of the event, thereby lending support to the historicity of the Gospel of John.

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<sup>157</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, *The Holy Land: An Oxford Archaeological Guide from Earliest Times to 1700*, 152.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid.*

## Ephraim (11:54)

After raising Lazarus from the dead, John records that Jesus “no longer went around publicly among the Judeans, but went away from there to the region near the wilderness, to a town called Ephraim” (John 11:54 NET). The city of Ephraim is another feature unique to John; Ephraim is not mentioned anywhere else in the Bible.

The exact location of Ephraim has not been definitively located. One site that has been proposed is Khirbet el-Marjameh, located northwest of Jerusalem near the fountain of Ain es-Samiyeh on the

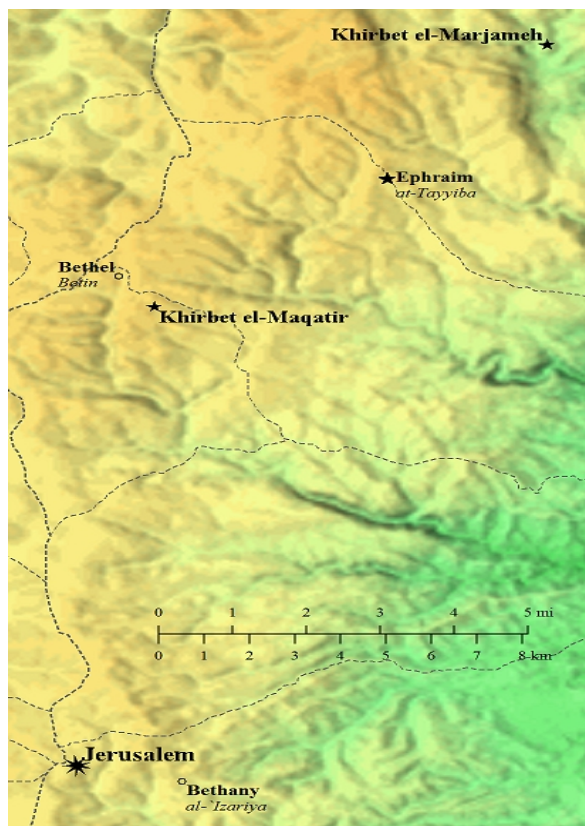


Figure 1: Possible Location of Ephraim

northeastern foot of the mountain of Baal-Hazor.<sup>159</sup> This area is located on the eastern slope of the mountain in the extension of the Judean Desert. The area is dry and mostly deserted, even today. The town was built on the steep slopes at the end of a long ridge near the fountain. Thus, it appears as an oasis in the wilderness, matching John’s description. W. F. Albright surveyed the site in 1922-23 and Z. Kallai revisited the site in 1968. Albright suggested the site was biblical Ephraim based on the passage from 2 Samuel 13:23 (NET), “Two years later Absalom’s sheepshearers were in Baal Hazor, near Ephraim.” Kallai, however, suggested it

<sup>159</sup> Amihai Mazar, “Three Israelite Sites in the Hills of Judah and Ephraim,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 45, no. 3 (1982): 171.

should be recognized as Baal Shalisha as mentioned in 2 Kings 4:42, in the land of Shalisha as mentioned in 1 Samuel 9:4. Mazar points out, however, that “[b]oth of these suggestions are based on obscure data, and the lack of any more precise source forestalls their unequivocal acceptance.”<sup>160</sup>

The second possible location for Ephraim is the modern day city of Taybeh, roughly four miles east of Bethel (modern day Beitin). Josephus mentions Ephraim in *The Wars of the Jews*:

Vespasian removed from Cesarea, on the fifth day of the month Daesius [Sivan], and marched against those places of Judea which were not yet overthrown. So he went up to the mountainous country, and took those two toparchies that were called the Gophnitick and Acrabattene toparchies. After which he took Bethel and Ephraim, two small cities; and when he had put garrisons into them, he rode as far as Jerusalem, in which march he took many prisoners, and many captives.<sup>161</sup>

Eusebius locates Ephraim twenty Roman miles north of Jerusalem and five Roman miles east of Bethel.<sup>162</sup> He mistakenly places it in the tribal region of Judah, but Graves suggests this is “a lack of awareness of basic biblical geography of the Central Hill Country.”<sup>163</sup> Since a Roman mile is slightly less than a modern mile, which is approximately 1620 yards. Taybeh, which is four miles east of Bethel, fits very well with this description. Eusebius describes this as a very large village:

Ephron [I] (Josh. 15:9) Tribe of Judah. Now it is the very large village of Ephraim about 20 milestones from Ailia, on the northern border.<sup>164</sup>

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<sup>160</sup> Ibid., 171.

<sup>161</sup> Josephus, *Complete Works of Josephus*, 690.

<sup>162</sup> Emil Schürer et al., *A History of the Jewish People in the Time of Jesus Christ*, First Division, vol. 1 (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 1994), 246.

<sup>163</sup> David E. Graves, *The Cities of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the Places of the Bible in the Steps of Jesus and the Apostles* (New Brunswick: Electronic Christian Media, 2023), 81.

<sup>164</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, *The Onomasticon: Palestine in the Fourth Century A.D.*, 51.



Ephraim (John 11:54) Near the desert, whither Christ came with the disciples. It is above as Ephron [II].<sup>165</sup>

Another possible name for Ephraim is Ophrah, as mentioned in Joshua 18:23. According to Graves, scholars disagree whether Ephron is the same site as Ophrah and Ephraim. Ephron and Ophrah may have existed at the same time and therefore may be interchangeable names for the same town. Albright believes that this to be so, but sees Ephraim as a separate city.

Murphy-O'Connor presents another factor in deciding between Khirbet el-Marjameh and Taybeh, which would be the presence of a Byzantine church commemorating a place Jesus visited just before Passover and his crucifixion. Based on a report from a survey and excavation of Khirbet el-Marhameh in the early 1970's, B. Zissu says, "During the Byzantine period a mosaic paved church was erected at the foot of the tell."<sup>166</sup> The problem with this is that in the winter of 1979-1980, M. Zohar reported, "Formerly the water [of Ain Samieh] was collected in a basin beneath the crypt of the Byzantine church which was completely destroyed when the modern pumping station was recently enlarged."<sup>167</sup> However, the pumping station was an early project under the British Mandatory Authority. When it was found to be more economical to bring water in from the west and the pumping station fell into ruins by the early 1960's.<sup>168</sup> No pump house was constructed in the 1970's.

In addition, the church at Khirbet el-Marjameh was constructed by the well, not up on the tell, where it would have been within the city limits of Ephraim. There was no biblical reason to commemorate the well, only the city, and having the church within the limits of the

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<sup>165</sup> Ibid., 53.

<sup>166</sup> Murphy-O'Connor, "Place-Names in the Fourth Gospel (II): Bethany (JN 1:28; 11:18) and Ephraim (JN 11:54)," 96.

<sup>167</sup> Ibid.

<sup>168</sup> Ibid., 96-97.

city would have made more sense. In addition, neither W. F. Albright in 1922 or Albrecht Alt in 1927 made mention of a Byzantine church at Ain Samieh.

The situation at Taybeh is completely different. Just south-east of Taybeh, at al-Khirdm a Crusader church was found within a much larger Byzantine church. Denys Pringle described the Byzantine church as follows:

The Byzantine church appears to have consisted of a basilica, probably of three aisles, 14.77 m wide and of uncertain length approached from the west up a monumental flight of steps. To north and south this was flanked by apsed subsidiary chapels which appear to have been secondary, and along the west front of the church and chapels there appear to have been a narthex. Overall the complex would have extended 28.6 m north-south by at least 28.5 m east-west.<sup>169</sup>

Having both a Byzantine and Crusader church constructed in the same spot is more in line with a historical Ephraim. While the exact location of Ephraim is currently not known without question, Taybeh fits the criteria better than Khirbet el-Marjameh, according to Murphy-O'Connor. It is only the weight of W. F. Albright that keeps Khirbet el-Marjameh in the conversation. However, Graves points out that the choice of Taybeh is “based entirely on toponymy (the study of place names) and tradition, was echoed by Arabs and Crusaders in later periods and had been uncritically accepted into modern times.”<sup>170</sup> There is a lack of archaeological evidence for Taybeh.

A third site for Ephraim, proposed by Stripling, is Khirbet el-Maqatir.<sup>171</sup> Khirbet el-Maqatir is located nine miles north of Jerusalem and about two miles east of Bethel. Associates for Biblical Research began excavations under the direction of Dr. Bryant Wood in 1995. Dr. Stripling joined the excavation staff in 2010 and in 2014 he became the Director of

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<sup>169</sup> Denys Pringle, *The Churches of the Crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem: A Corpus: Volume 2, L-Z (Excluding Tyre)*, vol. exx \ (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 340.

<sup>170</sup> Graves, *The Cities of the New Testament World: An Illustrated Guide to the Places of the Bible in the Steps of Jesus and the Apostles*, 82.

<sup>171</sup> *Ibid.*, 78.

Excavations. Based on a maximalist interpretation of the Bible, Dr. Wood proposed Khirbet el-Maqtir as biblical Ai, as opposed to et-Tel. However, Stripling has proposed Khirbet el-Maqtir as Ephraim.

Khirbet el-Maqtir was a heavily fortified city that was founded by the Hasmonean Dynasty in the second century B.C. In John 11:54, the Greek word used to identify the city is *πόλις*, which usually refers to a fortified city and not an unfortified village. Therefore, as Graves points out, “not only does a candidate for Ephraim not only need to have Early Roman remains, but also needs a fortification system.”<sup>172</sup> Taybeh is not only lacking in archaeological remains, it is also lacking in any fortification. At Khirbet el-Maqtir there is also evidence using ceramic, numismatic, and C14 dating to show it was destroyed by the Tenth Roman Legion in 69 A.D. Coins found at the site abruptly ended with coins from the Year 3 Revolt. This exactly fits the time frame from Josephus.

Another reason for Khirbet et-Maqtir as Ephraim over Taybeh is the lack of archaeological evidence of stoneware at Taybeh. Stoneware was used for Jewish ritual purification ceremonies and this was very important in first century Israel. To date, eighty-one pieces of stoneware have been uncovered at Khirbet et-Maqtir, while none has been found at Taybeh. For the above reasons based on archaeology, Khirbet et-Maqtir is the stronger candidate for Ephraim of John 11.

#### Garden of Gethsemane (18:1)

The Gospel of John does not specifically mention “Gethsemane.” John writes, “When he had finished praying, Jesus left with his disciples and crossed the Kidron Valley. On the other side there was a garden, and he and his disciples went into it” (John 18:1 NIV.) John does not

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<sup>172</sup> Ibid., 83.

use Gethsemane in his description; only Matthew (26:36) and Mark (14:32) do. Luke simply refers to it as the Mount of Olives. Matthew and Mark call it a χωρίον, which means *place*. Only John uses κήπος, which means *garden*. Therefore, Garden of Gethsemane is a conflation of the Synoptics and John and did not appear until the twelfth century.<sup>173</sup> The Greek word Γεθσημανί (Gethsemane) means *oil-press*. An oil press in the first century would refer to an olive oil press used to extract olive oil. Thus, Matthew and Mark are referring to the *place of the oil-press*. According to John, there would have been a garden, or cultivated area nearby.

Long suggests that there are at least four possible sites for Gethsemane.<sup>174</sup> The most popular location proposed is at the Church of All-Nations. At this location there is a small olive garden. While excavating a tunnel in 2020, archaeologists uncovered a Jewish *mikveh*, which would be used for purification before making oil, at this site. Workers needed to be ritually clean before producing wine or oil, so this discovery would make sense in light of a nearby oil press.

According to Long, the “primary competing traditional location of the betrayal of Jesus is the Grotto of the Agony, near the Tomb of Mary on the Mount of Olives.”<sup>175</sup> The grotto is a cave owned by the Franciscan Custody of the Holy Land. Excavations by the Franciscans in 1956-1957 found that the natural opening of the cave, lying on the north side, was over 16 feet wide.<sup>176</sup> The cave itself is quite large, measuring 33 feet deep and 62 feet wide. Taylor suggests that this is the actual location for Gethsemane for a number of reasons.

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<sup>173</sup> Joan E. Taylor, “The Garden of Gethsemane : Not the Place of Jesus’ Arrest,” *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 21, no. 4 (1995): 31.

<sup>174</sup> Phillip J. Long, “Where Is the Garden of Gethsemane? Matthew 26:36,” *Reading Acts [BLOG]* (blog) (Grand Rapids: Newstex, 2023), <https://readingacts.com/2023/03/13/where-is-the-garden-of-gethsemane-matthew-2636/>.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>176</sup> Taylor, “The Garden of Gethsemane : Not the Place of Jesus’ Arrest,” 26.

First, archaeological evidence suggests that the cave was used for oil production. There is a hole located in the wall that could have been used for the cross bar of the press. Olive oil presses were often in caves because the warmth helped with the extraction process. There is also evidence from pilgrim accounts that this cave held not one, but two presses. This is derived from the pilgrim accounts of four rock ledges in the cave and an oil press requiring two ledges. The four ledges were wide enough for three men, even for sleeping.

Second, a cave or some type of shelter would have made sense to spend the night in. The night in which Jesus was betrayed was cold, as John describes in 18:18. The cave would offer some protection from the cold and heavy dew during the spring time of Passover. When Jesus was arrested, Mark writes, “A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind” (Mark 154:51 NIV.) The cave would have provided warmth and shelter and would account for someone wearing “only” a linen garment.

It would also make sense that after the meal with wine, that they would go to “check into their hotel” for the night. John tells us that they went there often and that Judas knew the place. When Judas shows up, they are carrying torches and lanterns, indicating it is night time and it would be expected everyone would be sleeping. Indeed, the disciples, including Peter, James, and John kept falling asleep. Since an oil press would only be needed in the fall after the olive harvest, it would only be used for storage the rest of the year. At the busy time of Passover in the spring, it would make sense that the owner of the cave would “rent it out” to travelers. The owner may even have been a follower of Jesus, but this cannot be known with any certainty.

Finally, John (18:1) describes them as entering “into” the garden, implying an area with

a definable “interior” and “exterior.” In 18:4, however, John tells us Jesus “went out” to meet Judas and the armed crowd. This would seem to indicate that they had gathered inside of the cave and that Jesus went out of the cave to meet Judas. For these reasons, the cave is the best fit for the location of Gethsemane.

### Palace of Roman Governor / The Praetorium (18:28)

The Praetorium in Jerusalem was the palace of the Roman governor when residing in Jerusalem. While the Roman capital was in Caesarea, the governor would reside in Jerusalem during major Jewish festivals. The traditional site was the Fortress of Antonia, but

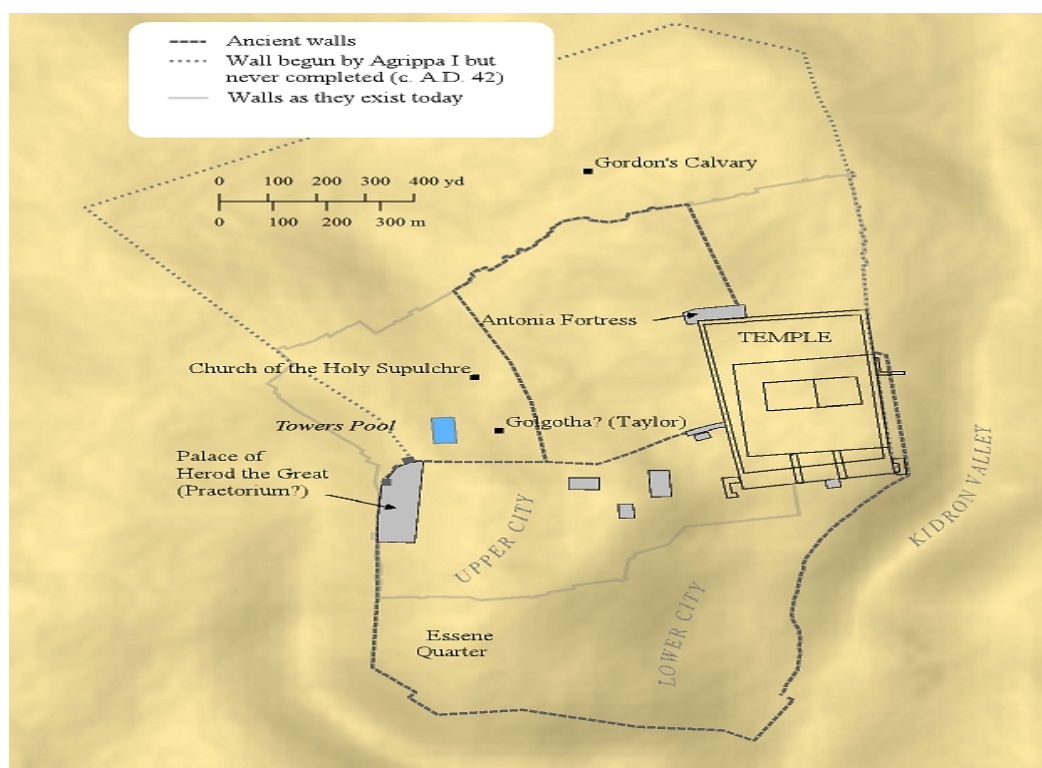


Figure 2: Praetorium, Golgotha, and Tombs

archaeological evidence has demonstrated that this is incorrect.<sup>177</sup> The former palace of Herod

<sup>177</sup>“PRAETORIUM,” in *The IVP Bible Dictionary Series: Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2013), 54.

the Great was used as the palace for Pilate, located along the western wall.<sup>178</sup> Josephus writes that Herod the Great had three major buildings which he used. When Herod was appointed ruler, the Hasmonean palace fell into his hands. After fourteen years he built his own palace on the western hill, known as Herod's Lower Palace. Finegan argues that it was here where the trial and death of his wife took place.<sup>179</sup> Josephus describes the Hasmonean palace as "which house was over the galley, at the passage to the upper city, where the bridge joined the temple to the galley."<sup>180</sup> The bridge Josephus identified is known as Wilson's Arch today. This is the palace Herod Agrippa would use when staying in Jerusalem. Herod the Great had built a chamber here where he could recline while eating and overlook the Temple Court. Therefore, the location of the palace would have to be high on the west bank of the Tyropoeon Valley across from the southwestern corner of the Temple Mount in what is today the Jewish Quarter of the Old City.

Josephus places the palace adjacent to the three towers, Hippicus, Phasael, and Mariamne, which formed the northern wall of the palace.<sup>181</sup> The base of one of the towers can be seen today near the Jaffa Gate.<sup>182</sup> The palace, which consisted of two adjacent wings (Caseareum and Agrippium) was uncovered in the archaeological excavation of the Armenian Garden.<sup>183</sup> The center line between the two wings of the palace is today marked by the principle road running through the Armenian quarter, with the southwest corner of the palace roughly

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<sup>178</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 247.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>180</sup> Josephus, *Complete Works of Josephus*, 620.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 705.

<sup>182</sup> Avi-Yonah et al., "Tiberias," 106.

<sup>183</sup> Shimon Gibson, "The 1961–67 Excavations in the Armenian Garden, Jerusalem," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly* 119, no. 2 (1987): 81–96.

beneath present-day Armenian Church of St. James.<sup>184</sup>

Excavations in the 1970s have confirmed this and the Judgment Seat (John 19:13) next to the praetorium and now can be seen in Jerusalem.<sup>185</sup>

#### Judge's Seat / Gabbatha (19:13)

After Jesus was brought before Pilate for interrogation, Pilate brought Jesus out before the Jewish leaders and said he could find no reason for his accusation (John 19:4,6). When Pilate wanted to release Jesus, the Jewish leaders shouted out, "If you let this man go, you are no friend of Caesar. Anyone who claims to be a king opposes Caesar. When Pilate heard this, he brought Jesus out and sat down on the judge's seat at a place known as the Stone Pavement (which in Aramaic is Gabbatha)" (John 19:12). John calls this the Λιθόστρωτον (Lithostroton), which in Hebrew is Gabbatha, the Greek transliteration of an Aramaic word.<sup>186</sup>

The Judge's Seat is located next to the palace of Herod. Josephus mentions two landmarks in reference to the palace, namely a place called "Bethso" and the gate of the Essenes.<sup>187</sup> While Gibson states that the exact location of these two features has puzzled scholars in the past, he suggests that the gateway complex uncovered by Magen Broshi's excavation in the western Old City wall south of the citadel is the Gate of the Essenes.<sup>188</sup> It is suggested that the primary function of the gate is to provide direct access to the palace and praetorium. Inside the gate complex was a courtyard flanked by two large towers and inner and outer walls,

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<sup>184</sup> Gibson, "The Trial of Jesus at the Jerusalem Praetorium: New Archaeological Evidence," 106.

<sup>185</sup> Titus Kennedy, "The Praetorium of Pilate – Drive Thru History®: 'Bible Unearthed,'" *Drive Thru History®* (blog), July 14, 2020, <https://drivethruhistory.com/the-praetorium-of-pilate/>.

<sup>186</sup> Finegan, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: The Life of Jesus and the Beginning of the Early Church*, 246–47.

<sup>187</sup> Josephus, *Complete Works of Josephus*, 704.

<sup>188</sup> Gibson, "The Trial of Jesus at the Jerusalem Praetorium: New Archaeological Evidence," 109.



measuring 30 x 11 m.<sup>189</sup> Because of the proximity of the barracks in the immediate vicinity and its well defensible position, Gibson suggests this as the location for the Judge's Seat.<sup>190</sup>

#### Golgotha / Garden / Garden Tomb (19:17, 41-42)

The location of the Garden and Garden Tomb are intimately tied to the location of the crucifixion. John writes, "At the place where Jesus was crucified, there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid" (John 19:41 NIV). This place which Jesus was crucified John identifies as, "the place of the Skull (which in Aramaic is called Golgotha). There they crucified him" (John 19:17 NIV). Thus, the tomb and the place of the crucifixion were in close proximity.

There are two locations that have been suggested for the location of the crucifixion of Jesus: Gordon's Calvary and the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

Golgotha translated from Aramaic could either mean "Place of the Skull" as per Matthew, Mark, and John, or simply "Skull" as per Luke.<sup>191</sup> This led Charles Gordon in 1883 to identify a rocky hill outside of the Damascus gate as the place of crucifixion. He verified this with the identification of an ancient tomb nearby.<sup>192</sup> The Garden Tomb was discovered by a peasant in 1867 while trying to cut a cistern to cultivate the land.<sup>193</sup> A Jerusalem correspondent, Conrad Schick, visited the site soon afterwards and published a report about it in 1874. He wrote a second, more detailed, report in 1892 after it was suggested that this tomb might have

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<sup>189</sup> Ibid., 113.

<sup>190</sup> Ibid., 115.

<sup>191</sup> David E Graves, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: 75 Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible* (Moncton, New Brunswick: Electronic Christian Media, 2019), 97.

<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Gabriel Barkay, "The Garden Tomb - Was Jesus Buried Here?," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 2 (1986): 42.

been that of Jesus. In his report he noted a large cistern from the Crusader period, southwest of the tomb but within the perimeter of the garden. Charles Warren and Claude Regnier Conder also mention the Garden Tomb in their *Survey of Western Palestine* in 1884. They mention that excavations in the garden, conducted in 1875, one year after Schick's publication, found mostly Crusader remains.<sup>194</sup> Furthermore, as Kathleen Kenyon pointed out, modern quarrying has caused severe erosion and there is no reason to believe that the hill resembled a "Skull" two thousand years ago.<sup>195</sup>

There is no archaeological evidence to support Gordon's claim.<sup>196</sup> Gabriel Barkay, a well-respected archaeologist in Jerusalem, notes a "long and extremely bitter dispute" over the location of Gordon's Calvary and the Garden Tomb as the authentic site of the crucifixion and burial of Jesus.<sup>197</sup> As he noted, the location of the tomb as the Garden Tomb "reflects the psychology and atmosphere of late 19<sup>th</sup> - century Jerusalem, rather than any new evidence - scientific, textual, or archaeological."<sup>198</sup>

In 1974-1975, Barkay and Amos Kloner, an expert Barkay describes as "second to none on early Roman tombs," undertook an archaeological investigation of the Garden Tomb.<sup>199</sup> From their findings, they determined that the Garden Tomb was part of a northern cemetery north of Jerusalem in the eighth and seventh century B.C. during the First Temple period, and not a new,

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<sup>194</sup> Ibid., 43.

<sup>195</sup> Graves, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: 75 Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible*, 97.

<sup>196</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 311–13; Graves, *The Archaeology of the New Testament: 75 Discoveries That Support the Reliability of the Bible*, 97.

<sup>197</sup> Barkay, "The Garden Tomb - Was Jesus Buried Here?," 46.

<sup>198</sup> Ibid.

<sup>199</sup> Ibid., 47.

unused tomb at the time of Jesus.<sup>200</sup>

The second location, the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, is located in the Old City and is the traditional site of the crucifixion. John 19:20 says that the crucifixion took place “near the city,” in other words outside the city walls. Because this location is within the present walls, this site was disputed in favor of Gordon’s Calvary. However, Kathleen Kenyon found evidence in the late 1960’s that the current wall enclosing the Church of the Holy Sepulchre was a “Third Wall” constructed after the death of Jesus.<sup>201</sup>

All four Gospels use the Greek word Κρανιον (kranion), meaning cranium. Thus, Kennedy proposes this to mean “it was merely a rounded hill and not the face of a skull.”<sup>202</sup> Thus Golgotha can and most likely means a rounded hill. Taylor has proposed that this is in fact not a small hill but an area encompassing the hill and surrounding garden area.<sup>203</sup> With this understanding, she expands on the interpretation of Golgotha to mean more than an isolated hill, but rather an area. This she derives from John’s description of the area. She describes this as a disused quarry west of the first century wall, just outside of the Gennath Gate. Gibson and Taylor identify this quarry area to have covered 200 meters by 150 meters.<sup>204</sup>

The Gennath Gate is mentioned only once in Josephus. Gennath is understood as an Aramaic word meaning “garden” and it is referred to as the “Garden Gate.” This would indicate that there was (were) garden[s] located just outside the gate. Just north of the First Wall and to

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<sup>200</sup> Ibid., 56.

<sup>201</sup> Kathleen M. Kenyon, *Jerusalem, Excavating 3000 Years of History* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1967), 153–54; Bruce E. Schein, “The Second Wall of Jerusalem,” *The Biblical Archaeologist* 44, no. 1 (1981): 21–26.

<sup>202</sup> Titus Kennedy, *Excavating the Evidence for Jesus: The Archaeology and History of Christ and the Gospels* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House Publishers, 2022), 201.

<sup>203</sup> Joan E. Taylor, “Golgotha: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for the Sites of Jesus’ Crucifixion and Burial,” *New Testament Studies* 44, no. 2 (1998): 183–86.

<sup>204</sup> Shimon Gibson and Joan E. Taylor, *Beneath the Church of the Holy Sepulchre: The Archaeology and Early History of Traditional Golgotha* (London: Palestine Exploration Fund, 1994), 59.

the west of the Second Wall, there is an open pool known as the Amygdalan (“Towers”) Pool. Gibson suggests that the pool could have been used for irrigation of terraced gardens in this location.<sup>205</sup> However, as Chandler suggests, there is no archaeological evidence for terraced gardens near this pool.<sup>206</sup> While the exact location of the Gennath Gate is not known, the majority view is the location suggested by Nahman Avigad.<sup>207</sup> This location for the Gennath Gate is located close to the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, lending additional support as the correct location for Golgotha and the tomb.

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was built over the site of the Hadrian Temple of Aphrodite, built around 135 A.D. Excavations in the 1970’s revealed the foundations of the Hadrian Roman Forum at the site of the church.<sup>208</sup> Hadrian built pagan temples and shrines over early venerated Christian sites. Eusebius writes,

It was this very cave of the Saviour that some godless and wicked people had planned to make invisible to mankind, thinking in their stupidity that they could in this way hide the truth. Indeed with a great expenditure of effort they brought earth from somewhere outside and covered up the whole place, then levelled it, paved it, and so hid the divine cave somewhere down beneath a great quantity of soil. Then as though they had everything finished, above the ground they constructed a terrible and truly genuine tomb, one for souls, for dead idols, and built a gloomy sanctuary to the impure demon of Aphrodite.<sup>209</sup>

Constantine had the Temple of Aphrodite torn down and the soil removed. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre was then built over the site and dedicated on September 14, 335 AD. When they removed the soil, the tomb under the temple was revealed. Another fact which

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<sup>205</sup> Shimon Gibson, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Archaeological Evidence* (New York, NY: HarperOne, 2010), 119.

<sup>206</sup> Chandler Collins, “In Search of Josephus’ Gennath Gate,” Substack newsletter, *Approaching Jerusalem* (blog), April 8, 2023, <https://approachingjerusalem.substack.com/p/in-search-of-josephus-gennath-gate>.

<sup>207</sup> Ibid.

<sup>208</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 313.

<sup>209</sup> Eusebius of Caesarea, Averil Cameron, and Stuart George Hall, *Life of Constantine* (New York;Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1999), bk. 3.26.

favors the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is the style of the tomb.<sup>210</sup> Two different types of tombs were in use in the first century. The more common type is known as *kokim* in which the tomb is a long narrow niche cut into the burial chamber walls at right angles to the walls. In this type of tomb, one would see only one end of the body, depending on whether the head or feet went in first. The second, less common, type of tomb is the *acrocolia*. This is a long shallow bench cut into the wall of the burial tomb with an arch above the bench. This is the type of tomb that Jesus would have been laid in. John 20:12 tells us that there were two angels sitting where Jesus had been, one sitting at the head and one sitting at the feet. This would not be possible with a *kokim* tomb, only with a *acrocolia* tomb. Gordon's Calvary is a *kokim* type of tomb, not a *acrocolia* tomb.<sup>211</sup> In fact, no tombs in the vicinity of the Garden Tomb (Gordon's Calvary) are *acrocolia* tombs. The tomb at the Church of the Holy Sepulchre is an *acrocolia* tomb.<sup>212</sup>

More recent archaeological excavations have been undertaken in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. The Church of the Holy Sepulchre is under custodianship of six Christian sects. The three primary religions are the Greek Orthodox, the Franciscan Order, and the Armenian Orthodox Church. Coptic, Ethiopian Orthodox, and Syriac also have a presence at the site.<sup>213</sup> The Edicule structural integrity had been a concern for decades after an earthquake in 1927 caused significant damage, forcing the British mandate to shore up the building in 1947. Finally, in 2015, the Israeli's brief closing of the Edicule because of the unsafe conditions served as the impetus for the three primary custodians to work together. In October 2016, the

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<sup>210</sup> Price, *The Stones Cry Out*, 314.

<sup>211</sup> John McRay, "Tomb Typology and the Tomb of Jesus," vol. ETS-4227. (Evangelical Theological Society, Evangelical Theological Society, 1990).

<sup>212</sup> Dan Bahat, "Does the Holy Sepulchre Church Mark the Burial of Jesus?," *The Biblical Archaeology Review* 12, no. 3 (1986): 31–32.

<sup>213</sup> "Exclusive: Christ's Burial Place Exposed for First Time in Centuries," *Culture*, October 26, 2016, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/jesus-tomb-opened-church-holy-sepulchre>.

first large-scale restoration since the 1808 fire began. The work was completed and the Edicule was reopened to the public a year later. However, during the repairs additional repairs that needed to be completed were discovered. A preliminary study of these additional repairs was conducted between 2020 and 2022 when it was largely empty due to COVID. The work began in earnest in March 2022.

The excavations were carried out by the Department of Antiquities of Sapienza University of Rome under the direction of Francesca Romana Stasolla.<sup>214</sup> The excavations were carried out around the clock over a seven day period. Under one section, a cache of coins dating up until the time of Roman emperor Valens, who ruled from 364 A.D. to 378 A.D., was discovered. Other discoveries include wall cladding covered with graffiti.<sup>215</sup> The excavations removed the top marble slab to reveal loose fill which covered another gray marble slab. This gray slab rested directly on the rock face. Removing the gray slab also revealed part of the original cave wall, including the original limestone burial bed, establishing remnants of the original tomb.<sup>216</sup>

As has been previously noted, archaeology is not a hard science that can be repeated, but is an observational science. Fredrik Heibert, the National Geographic archaeologist-in-residence, has noted regarding the recent excavations of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, “We can’t say 100 percent, but it appears to be visible proof that the location of the tomb has not

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<sup>214</sup> Francesca Romana Stasolla, “Communiqué on Excavation Work in the Area in Front of the Aedicule of the Holy Sepulchre,” *Custodia Terrae Sanctae*, July 7, 2023, <https://www.custodia.org/en/news/communique-excavation-work-area-front-aedicule-holy-sepulchre>.

<sup>215</sup> Melanie Lidman, “Round-the-Clock Excavations at Church of Holy Sepulchre Yield Historical Treasures,” accessed March 12, 2024, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/round-the-clock-excavations-at-church-of-holy-sepulchre-yield-historical-treasures/>.

<sup>216</sup> Ilan Ben Zion, “‘Original Limestone Bed’ on Which Jesus Was Buried Said Uncovered,” accessed March 12, 2024, <http://www.timesofisrael.com/original-limestone-bed-on-which-jesus-was-buried-said-uncovered/>.

shifted through time, something that scientists and historians have wondered for decades.”<sup>217</sup>

#### Sea of Galilee (21:1-7)

After the resurrection, Jesus appeared to his disciples several different times; one of them was on the Sea of Galilee, where several of the disciples had gathered. Here the disciples are once again fishing without success when Jesus tells them to cast their nets to the right side of the boat, which results in a catch that overwhelms the net. The disciples then come ashore and have a meal of bread and fish with Jesus.

Such a site would leave little, if any, archaeological evidence behind; yet Clemens Kopp has identified this with a site just north of Tiberias.<sup>218</sup> A rocky plateau juts out into the Sea of Galilee. In this area, warm water with its plant debris from the Seven Wells flows into a sheltered harbor, attracting fish and fishermen, even today. It is here, based on tradition, that Jesus stood from the shore and addressed the apostles. According to Kopp, this is a sound tradition unbroken through history.<sup>219</sup> Located at this site is the chapel of the “Apparition of the Lord and the Primacy of Peter.” According to Kopp, the church was twice destroyed and rebuilt during the crusades, and then destroyed by the Sultan Bibars in 1263. It was not until 1933 when it was finally rebuilt. Even though there is no archaeological evidence for this location mentioned in the Gospel of John, as Kopp mentions, it is still of some interest “because it throws a side-light on the ecclesiastical past” of John.<sup>220</sup> As de Vaux has stressed, “literary and archaeological material must be evaluated separately and used together to reconstruct

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<sup>217</sup> Ibid.

<sup>218</sup> Kopp, *The Holy Places of the Gospels*, 224.

<sup>219</sup> Ibid., 225.

<sup>220</sup> Ibid., 230.

history.”<sup>221</sup>

### Summary

There are many more examples of archaeology confirming the historicity and reliability of the Gospel of John. Von Wahlde has stated that sixteen of the twenty sites previously listed above have been confirmed thru archaeology.<sup>222</sup> As continual progress is made in the field of archaeology, future discoveries may confirm additional sites recorded in the Gospel of John. What these archaeological discoveries have shown so far, however, is that the Gospel of John is more than just a theological tome. It can also be considered historically accurate.

### Conclusion

The reliability of the Bible has been disputed for centuries. The Gospel of John, in particular, has been accused more than any other Gospel of having no real historical value.<sup>223</sup> However, the archaeological evidence has continued to confirm the historical reliability of the Gospel of John. Köstenberger writes, “there is every reason to believe that John, as a “spiritual gospel” – in the sense of being an interpretive account that brings out more fully the spiritual significance of the events and teachings it features—is grounded firmly in actual historical events, for it is only on such that theological reflections can properly be based.”<sup>224</sup>

Even today, misinterpretations and misunderstandings related to the Gospel of John, such as the location of the Sheep Gate, are still perpetuated. Yet, a careful examination of the evidence will show that the Gospel of John can be considered historically accurate.

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<sup>221</sup> Joan E. Taylor, *Christians and the Holy Places : The Myth of Jewish-Christian Origins* (Oxford (England) : Clarendon Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>222</sup> Paroschi, “Archaeology and the Interpretation,” 76.

<sup>223</sup> *Ibid.*, 67.

<sup>224</sup> Köstenberger, *A Theology of John’s Gospel and Letters*, 39.



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