

# BIBLE and SPADE

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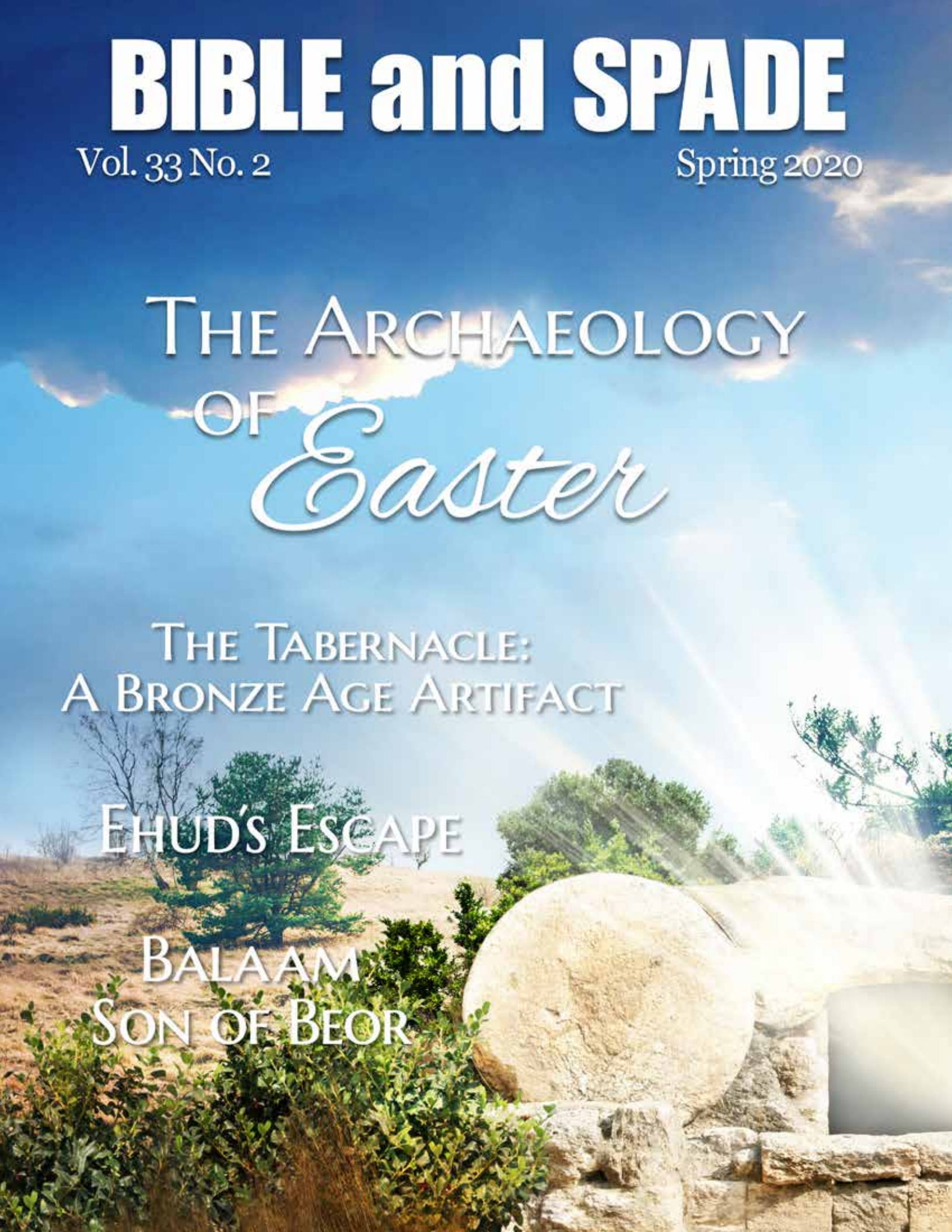
Spring 2020

## THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF *Easter*

THE TABERNACLE:  
A BRONZE AGE ARTIFACT

EHUD'S ESCAPE

BALAM  
SON OF BEOR



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# Beneath<sup>the</sup> Surface

*An Editorial Comment*

*Ascribe to the Lord, O families of the peoples*

*Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength*

*Ascribe to the Lord the glory of His name*

*Bring an offering and come into His courts*

*Worship the Lord in holy attire*

*Tremble before Him, all the earth*

*Say among the nations, "The Lord reigns*

*Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved*

*He will judge the peoples with equity."*

*Psalm 96:7-10*

**By Scott Lanser**

How many of us long for a return to church, to see our friends and loved ones and to share in Christian fellowship together once again? By the time these words reach you that may already be a reality—at least for some! But I was thinking today of the vision that King David sets before us in Psalm 96, as the Ark of the Covenant was brought to Jerusalem, and God's people gathered: a vision of the great I AM, high and lifted up, reigning over all the people, and full of glory. I long for that time when we can come before Him as individuals and as corporate church bodies to offer ourselves in holy worship. David then envisions those in "holy attire" entering the courts of the Temple in fear and trembling, as representatives of all the inhabitants of the Earth before the presence of the Lord, the Almighty One.

Indeed, His people affirm in worship that it is the Lord who reigns over a world "firmly established," a world that "will not be moved". This Holy One who rules the universe is our Judge, who sees into our souls and knows every intention of the heart: "I the Lord search the heart and test the mind, to give every man according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds" (Jer 17:10). His scrutiny causes us to feel "undone" as His holy eyes examine our lives; and yet the earth He has made remains unmoved and firm. From our brokenness we bring ourselves dressed in the

holy attire He clothes us with, the righteousness of Jesus Christ. We bring the fruits of our labor in offering as thanks for abundant blessings from the good earth around us—and even if just the "widow's mite." What a picture of what ought to "shake us" and what ought not! Here, in His holy presence, while trembling, we are reminded that security of soul is far more important than any other security; and yet, as we do not trust in the security of man, we can know that this One who rules our hearts also rules the world. What a picture of true security for the believer in Jesus Christ amidst the turmoil of human experience in a fallen world. Our confidence during our present trials must be in the One who "holds all things together" (Col 1:17). Let us tremble before Him in humility, but boldly stand on the security He provides. Amen, Good and Loving Father.

This word of encouragement came forth from my devotional time just this day as my heart filled with thanks for all of God's blessings and provision, and as I reflected on a world so undone by insecurity and fear. May our Lord bless you in knowing His wonderful grace and peace, and the true security that leads to holy fear and holy joy.



# We Hear You

## Comments concerning the Winter issue of Bible and Spade:

*I recently received the latest Bible and Spade, as well as BAR, both having articles on the debated location of Bethsaida. I found Bryan Windle's article to be more lucid and informative, with more helpful photos and graphics, and better organized than the BAR articles. Kudos to Bryan and ABR!*

– Bill

*Kudos on the new B&S. In my view, it is the best issue I have ever seen. The articles are all strong archaeological articles from a conservative perspective. You captured the best of BAR and the best of Bible and Spade. Please pat yourself and your team on the back.*

– Scott

## A question regarding the plague of the death of the first born

*I'd like to know why pharaoh himself if he was first born, the head of his own household would be subject to being killed by the 10th plague when the plague targeted first born babies/children only.*

– Marvin

## A reply by ABR staff researcher Henry Smith:

Thanks for your question. The text of Exodus 11 indicates the “firstborn” would die. It does not limit the decree to only children.

## NT manuscripts as evidence for the historical Jesus?

*My friend recently challenged me with this question and I was wondering how you would answer it. He is not 100% sure there is a God, but if I could answer this question with reason and evidence it will go a long way to help him come to the Christian faith. He is a very intelligent person and evidence is what works with him.*

*His statement/question is: “There is no evidence of Jesus Christ in any written form until about eighty years after he supposedly walked the earth.” How can I prove to him that Jesus was real?*

– D. Smith

## A Reply from ABR Director Scott Lanser:

Thank you for your question and for your deep concern for your friend. I want to make some general comments and then I will provide a brief rationale for why we are convinced that the New Testament is a faithful historical record of the life of Jesus Christ. Finally, I will attach two popular articles that discuss the early manuscript evidence for the New Testament, and which provide a surface-level review of the key facts. I say “surface-level” because the literature on this subject is vast and can be complex for those new to the subject.

My general comments, which are analytical, are intended to examine the legitimacy of the assertion that the New Testament cannot be trusted to provide accurate historical details based on an 80-year break between the original writing and the first copies. Your friend’s comment was: “There is no evidence of Jesus Christ in any written form until about eighty years after he supposedly walked the earth.” My first question would be: “if we had portions of the gospels from within 70 years would you be convinced? 60 years? 50 years?” The point I would make is that this number is arbitrary and it is not how historians and textual critics normally draw conclusions based on manuscript evidence. There are many factors to consider when seeking to grasp the continuum of the manuscript record and then to draw conclusions from that record. The fact is that leading textual scholars believe that the extant manuscript evidence bears witness to an extraordinary amount of copying activity that dates back to within the lifetime of the writers of the autographs (originals).

Now if he is asking about historical accounts outside the New Testament, I have provided an attachment with a very cursory summary of those documents.<sup>1</sup> My concern with those who reject the extant copies of the NT as legitimate historical sources is that certain agnostic presuppositions are at work. So the issue for your friend is really, do ALL historical persons, places, and events require that there must be extant manuscript evidence within 80 years of the actual event, place, or person? If so, we can wipe clean all historiography of ancient times. We could not be confident in the existence of a vast number of historical persons and we would be beholden to a skepticism that would erase all legitimate historical inquiry. This skepticism reveals the underlying presuppositions and exposes the illegitimate demands he is placing on this matter. If this is indeed the case for your friend then he simply does not want to believe that Jesus is a historical person, and no amount of evidence will suffice.



So the question stands: was Jesus Christ a historical person? The evidence is actually very strong. Remember, we are talking about historical evidence, not proof. Doubting Thomas wanted proof that his slain Rabbi had come back from the dead—“show me the scars”—in spite of all the evidence he had seen with his own eyes of the life and ministry of Jesus; the reality is that often doubting reveals the spiritual condition of the heart, not a paucity of sufficient evidence. No one in all of history has so many streams of evidence pointing to him. But just the manuscripts themselves prove beyond doubt that he was a historical person. One point I would make here is this: some of the oldest discoveries of New Testament manuscripts were made in the desert of Egypt. These papyri are from the late first century to the middle of the second century. But we must keep in mind that for a copy of the gospels to have found its way to Egypt, and to have been so worn out

that it was discarded in the trash, tells us that such manuscript copies were in circulation very early. When such NT manuscripts are discovered they are evidence of decades of copying among the early Christians. Finally, remember that when the claims made in the New Testament were first circulated, there were eye-witnesses to these things that could falsify the claims, including the resurrection. We have no extant sources that provide such a rebuttal. Despite all the power of Rome they were not able to silence the testimony of Christ’s disciples, and in fact were conquered by the message of the King of Love and his followers. This is historical fact.

I will certainly pray for you and your friend and would be more than happy to have a conversation with him in his search for truth on this important subject.

Author	Date Written	Earliest Copy	Approximate Time Span between original & copy	Number of Copies	Accuracy of Copies
Lucretius	died 55 or 53 BC		1100 yrs.	2	----
Pliny	AD 61-113	AD 850	750 yrs.	7	----
Plato	427-347 BC	AD 900	1200 yrs.	7	----
Demosthenes	fourth century BC	AD 1100	800 yrs.	8	----
Herodotus	480-425 BC	AD 900	1300 yrs.	8	----
Suetonius	AD 75-160	AD 950	800 yrs.	8	----
Thucydides	460-400 BC	AD 900	1300 yrs.	8	----
Euripides	480-406 BC	AD 1100	1300 yrs.	9	----
Aristophanes	450-385 BC	AD 900	1200 yrs.	10	----
Caesar	100-44 BC	AD 900	1000 yrs.	10	----
Livy	59 BC-AD 17	----	???	20	----
Tacitus	circa AD 100	AD 1100	1000 yrs.	20	----
Aristotle	384-322 BC	AD 1100	1400 yrs.	49	----
Sophocles	496-406 BC	AD 1000	1400 yrs.	193	----
Homer (Iliad)	900 BC	400 BC	500 yrs.	643	95%
New Testament	first century AD (AD 50-100)	second century AD (c. AD 130 f.)	less than 100 years	5600	99.5%

<sup>1</sup>Source: Matt Slick, Christian Apologetics & Research Ministry, [https://carm.org/can-we-trust-new-testament-historical-document#footnote1\\_j6m2fnc](https://carm.org/can-we-trust-new-testament-historical-document#footnote1_j6m2fnc)  
This chart was adapted from three sources:

- 1) *Christian Apologetics*, by Norman Geisler, 1976, p. 307.
- 2) The article “Archaeology and History attest to the Reliability of the Bible,” by Richard M. Fales, Ph.D., in *The Evidence Bible*, compiled by Ray Comfort, Bridge-Logos Publishers, Gainesville, FL, 2001 p. 163.
- 3) *A Ready Defense*, by Josh McDowell, 1993, p. 45.



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***“So the issue for your friend is really, do ALL historical persons, places, and events require that there must be extant manuscript evidence within 80 years of the actual event, place or person? If so, we can wipe clean all historiography of ancient times.”***

**Left:** The Oxyrhynchus Papyri are a group of manuscripts discovered in Egypt in the early 19th century. Among them were these fragments of the earliest known copy of a work by Sophocles. The papyrus itself was created in the second century, over 600 years after Sophocles died.

# THE TABERNACLE

## A BRONZE AGE ARTIFACT

This insightful article by renowned Egyptologist Kenneth A. Kitchen was first published by ABR in the Spring of 1995 in a smaller, booklet-sized version of *Bible and Spade*. The reprised full-color edition brings to life again Kitchen's important arguments and confronts the erroneous conclusions of 19th and 20th century biblical scholars who dismissed the accounts of Israel's ancient Tabernacle as sheer fiction. The historical and archaeological evidence presented by Kitchen continues to speak in our time, as the faltering and untenable conclusions of the Documentary Hypothesis unravel.

The Documentary Hypothesis began when Jean Astruc (1684–1766) came to believe that he could uncover the sources

of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible traditionally ascribed to Moses, by using the divine names Yahweh and Elohim as a guide. He placed passages that use the name Elohim in one column (A), those that use Yahweh in another (B), and passages with “repetitions” (C) and interpolations (scribal insertions) (D) in a third and a fourth column. From this simplistic beginning, the novel theory of Pentateuchal origins began. In its most basic form, the theory, also known as the Graf-Wellhausen hypothesis, speculates that behind the Pentateuch are four source documents: J (Yahwist), E (Elohist), D (Deuteronomist), and P (Priestly Code). P is theorized to have been written much later than the others, after the Exile.

For more information on why the Documentary Hypothesis falls short as an adequate explanation of the origin of the Pentateuch, see these important articles on the ABR website:

*The Documentary Hypothesis* by Duane Garrett (for those new to the subject)

*The Curious History of the “Editor” in Biblical Criticism* by Dr. Clyde Billington (expert level)

*Digging for Truth* episode #63, *Erasing Moses*, with apologist Kristen Davis

### By Kenneth A. Kitchen

The “Tabernacle” of Exodus 26/36 holds a midway position in biblical tradition between the simple family sacrifices of the Patriarchs in Genesis<sup>1</sup> and the permanent temple built by Solomon at Jerusalem (1 Kgs 6, 7:13–51). However, a century or so ago, in their eagerness to restructure biblical history in accord with the philosophic fads and fashions of their time—and without as much as troubling to check for any factual basis—biblical scholars arbitrarily decided that the Tabernacle was essentially a fiction fabricated by priests in or after the Babylonian Exile; “simple” worship was declared to have been the rule until (at earliest) the shrine at Shiloh or (at latest) David’s tent or Solomon’s temple. Opinion had it that “the tabernacle rests on an historical fiction... At the outset its very possibility is doubtful”<sup>2</sup> or it is “quite unrealistic.”<sup>3</sup> No one can blame 19th-century scholars for not using facts not available to them; but they (and even more, their successors) are academically open to criticism for not even having looked for evidence *pro* or *contra*.

In 1947, Frank Moore Cross suggested that the Tabernacle’s possible reality should be taken more seriously, and wished to refer the Exodus description to David’s tent.<sup>4</sup> [Cross was an esteemed scholar, Harvard professor in Old Testament and Hebrew, and a member of the International team responsible for editing the Dead Sea Scrolls.] In 1960 and since, the present writer was able to point to much fuller extra-biblical evidence that also pointed to epochs long predating the Exile.<sup>5</sup> However, quite typically, much biblical scholarship has failed to pay heed to either Cross’ arguments or to this writer’s fresh facts, and has continued uncritically to repeat the same old 19th-century shibboleths about late priestly fictions.<sup>6</sup> Is this situation tenable? Are there no external facts to guide us in evaluating the data of Exodus 26/36 and associated material? In origin, the biblical books and their contents are ancient West-Semitic texts and come out of the ancient Near East. Therefore it is to that context we must first look, and not remain content with mere *a priori* theory or opinions lacking factual bases.

### The Tabernacle Itself

As viewed in the text, the Tabernacle itself consisted of four sets of coverings over a series of tall, rectangular wooden frames (not solid boards, as once thought), gilded, set in pairs in silver sockets, and secured also by transverse wooden rods. At about 45 ft in length and some 15 ft wide (only two chambers: *adyton* at 15x30 ft; inner sanctuary at 15 ft square), this structure is of basically simple design and of very modest size, as befits a collapsible, portable shrine, which is what the Tabernacle is. To call this structure sophisticated or elaborate is mistaken; is it, nevertheless, fanciful, merely a dream? The following tangible data may suggest otherwise.



Tomb of Hetep-Heres<sup>64</sup>

**Bedroom suite of Queen Hetepheres:** This reproduction of furniture from the tomb shows it all within a rectangular, portable pavilion that was made of gold-covered wood. The pieces of the pavilion fit together with the tenons and sockets in the same fashion as the Tabernacle. Hetepheres was a queen during the Fourth Dynasty of Egypt, ca. 2600 BC.





**Pillar of Cloud by Day.** Artist's conception of the Tabernacle and courtyard.

©AnimMan Studios, artwork by Eric J. Bouchoc

Our review begins in Fourth-Dynasty Egypt, ca. 2600 BC. Mother of Cheops, builder of the Great Pyramid at Giza, queen Hetepheres I had a reburial of her effects nearby in a deep shaft-tomb. Among other treasures was found a splendid bedroom suite (with bed, headrest, chair) with its rectangular pavilion of gold-cased timbers,<sup>7</sup> the upright rods being socketed with tenons into long horizontal beams at top and base; at the rear, it had special corner-pieces for stability (as did the Tabernacle, Ex 26:23, 24). Its crossbraces across the top from one side to the other might even indicate a feature used in the biblical Tabernacle but omitted from the Exodus account. Like the biblical structure, this one also would clearly have supported sets of curtains over it. While in finer details the two structures differ (e.g., rods not frames in Hetepheres, and long base-beams, not pairs of sockets), yet the basic techniques and technology directly recall those of the later Tabernacle—gold overlay on timber structural pieces; tenons into socket-holes, long beams to secure the vertical frame-poles, special corner-constructions, etc. This early example, however, is secular, not religious. But religious use of such prefabricated structures is attested in Egypt long before Hetepheres, even in the First Dynasty (ca. 2900 BC), whence date fragments of poles of such pavilions found in a “royal class” tomb at Saqqara,<sup>8</sup> in funerary use. Long after the queen, four other such pavilions are shown in tomb-scenes of the Fourth to Sixth Dynasties (mid third millennium BC).<sup>9</sup>

Another group of such pavilions of this type, the “Tent of Purification,” was still more explicitly religious in use, being employed for the elaborate rituals performed over the bodies of royalty and notables before and after mummification. These were considerable structures, with hanging of cloth (curtains) over a framework of uprights linked along the top by long transverse rods and beams (cf. the Tabernacle’s rods).<sup>10</sup> Again, actual remains of the Early Bronze “tabernacles” have been found. Before Hetepheres, storerooms of Djoser at the Step Pyramid yielded some wooden fragments, while from the filling of Hetepheres’ own tomb-shaft came parts of gilded wooden poles, limestone sockets for uprights, and copper fittings—same technology once more.<sup>11</sup>

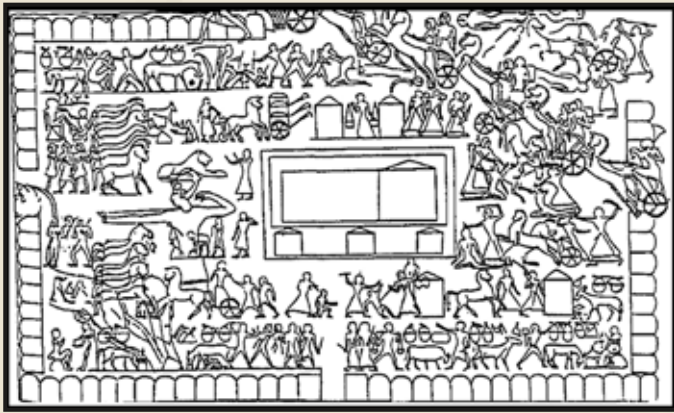
Relevant data next appear during Egypt’s New Kingdom (ca. 1550–1070 BC). Throughout most of this period, in their tombs in the Valley of Kings at Thebes, the pharaohs each had sets of four concentrically-nested gold-plated wooden shrines over their coffined burial. Unlike the Tabernacle, these were solid-walled structures (gold-overlaid throughout), but like the Hebrew structure they were dismountably fixed together by tenon and socket joints, often cleverly concealed. The one set to survive intact in full splendor is that of Tutankhamun (ca. 1330 BC) from his famous tomb; the outermost is some 16.5 ft long, 11 ft wide and 9 ft high.<sup>12</sup> Over the second of these “shrines” had been erected a wooden framework carrying a faded linen pall, like a skeletal version of the Tabernacle, with gilded bronze rosettes (daisy/marguerite) sewn all over the fabric.<sup>13</sup> But such usage also obtained in the religion of this world as well as the next. Behind the oldest part of the great temple of Amun at Karnak in Thebes, Tuthmosis III (ca. 1479–1426 BC) erected a Festival Hall, a huge translation into stone of a pillared tent.<sup>14</sup> Coming down to the 13th century BC, a vivid painting in the Theban tomb-chapel (No. 217) of Ipyu shows workmen busy with the shrine for the deified Amenophis I, with a richly-decorated exterior.<sup>15</sup>



Wikimedia Commons

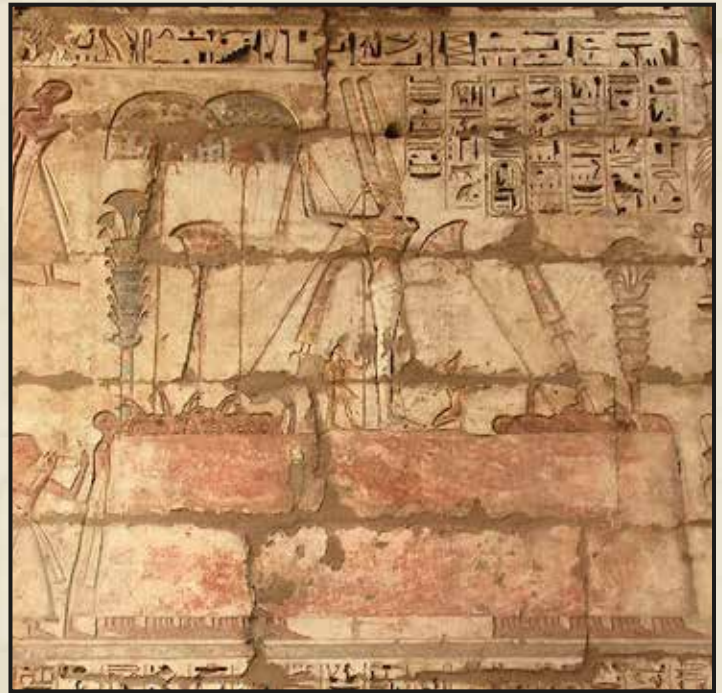
**Festival Hall of Thutmose III:** Karnak Temple Complex, Luxor. The interior is painted to resemble awnings and tent poles such as a tent-shrine that Thutmose would have used on a military campaign.





Yadin, *Art of Warfare*<sup>66</sup>

**The forces of Ramesses II at Qadesh, or Kadesh, Lebanon, 13th century BC.** In this sketch from a war pylon at Luxor, Ramesses' tent is enclosed and situated in the center of a rectangular camp. This is the same way the Tabernacle was enclosed and surrounded by the Israelite tribes when they camped during the Wilderness Wanderings.



Public Domain

**Festival of Min:** This wall painting in the Mortuary Temple of Ramesses III depicts Egyptian servants carrying a statue of the god Min on a tent-like structure (their feet are visible underneath) draped with a great scarlet cloth.



Courtesy Bibleworld Museum & Discovery Centre, Rotura, New Zealand

**Lachish reliefs:** Displayed at the British Museum in London, this detail shows the Assyrian camp at the siege of Lachish (late eighth century BC). In the first millennium BC, military camps were circular. The rectangular encampment of the Israelite tribes matches second millennium usage.



Wikimedia Commons



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**Above Left:** Hatshepsut, the first female ruler of ancient Egypt to reign with the full authority of a male Pharaoh. Trumpets of the same type described in Numbers 10:1–10 were found in Tutankhamen's tomb (ca. 1325 BC), as well as in reliefs featuring festivals and soldiers from the reign of Hatshepsut (ca. 1490 BC) and Ramesses II (ca. 1270 BC). In other words, long, silver trumpets like the Israelites used when they wanted to assemble the community, sound battle blasts, signal camp movement or give warnings were in full and customary use at the time of the Tabernacle.

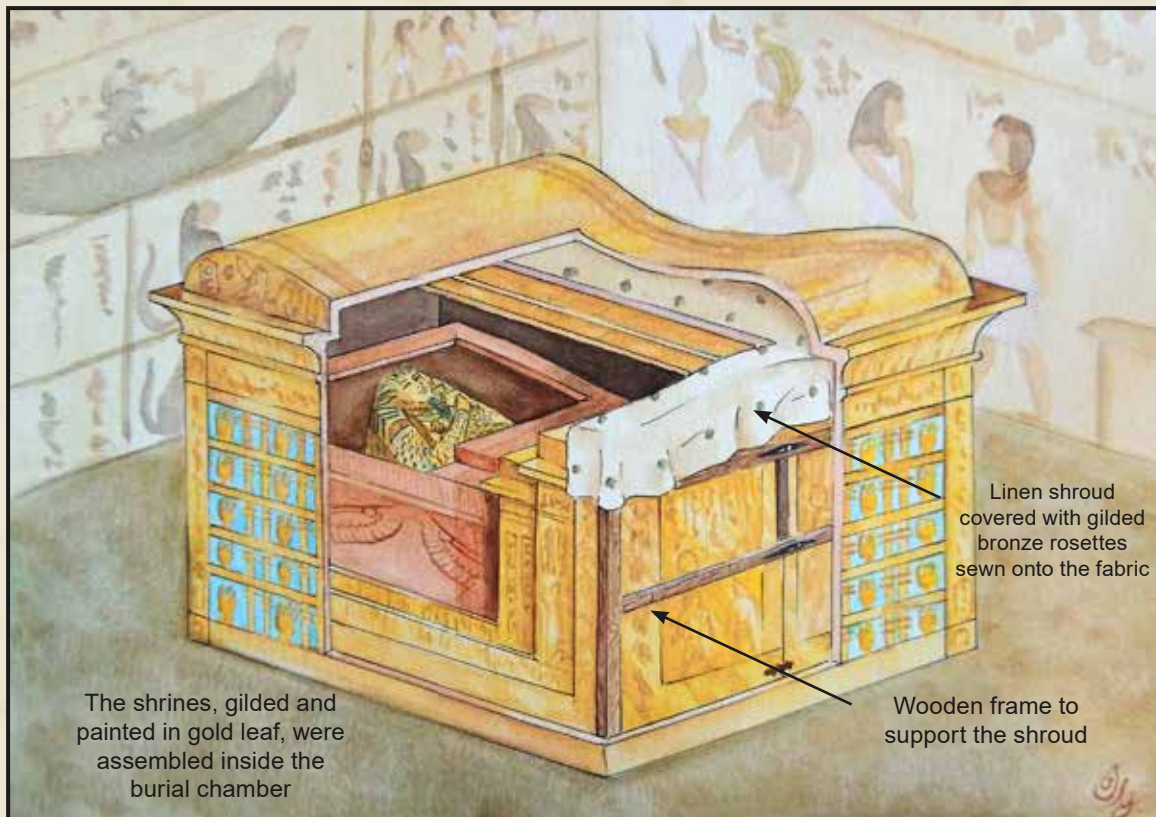
**Above Right:** Funerary mask of Tutankhamun on display at the Cairo Museum. It is made of gold, lapis lazuli, obsidian, turquoise and glass. The mask covered the head of the king's mummy inside three nesting coffins, a quartzite and granite sarcophagus, and four nesting shrines.

*In the 19th century, biblical scholars arbitrarily decided that the Tabernacle was essentially fiction.*

*However, it is a misconception that the miškan was a late priestly term for an imaginary structure.*

*The biblical books and their contents are ancient West-Semitic texts and come out of the ancient Near East. In real history, the Tabernacle tradition belongs to the Late Bronze Egypto-Semitic world.*





Isabella Gliatta

**Cutaway view of Tutankhamun's nesting shrines:** Throughout most of Egypt's New Kingdom period (ca. 1550–1070 BC), the pharaohs each had sets of four gold-plated wooden shrines over their coffined burial. Unlike the Tabernacle, they were solid-walled structures. But, like the Hebrew structure, they were dismantably fixed together by tenon and socket joints, often cleverly concealed. One set to survive completely intact is that of Tutankhamun (ca. 1330 BC). Over the second of these "shrines" had been erected a wooden framework draped with a linen shroud, like a skeletal version of the Tabernacle. The outermost coffin depicted the image of the king and is made of gilded wood, cut stones and silver handles. There were two inner coffins, the inner most made of pure gold, in addition to a funerary mask over the mummy. Although thieves entered the tomb, King Tutankhamun's inner burial chamber remained sealed and undisturbed until its discovery in 1922. The riches and opulence of his burial are quite grand considering he was a minor king who died at a young age. This suggests that the tombs of the greater pharaohs, which have been looted and cleared over time, were filled with even more opulence!

Some of these last items also serve as background to the tricolored linen curtains of the Tabernacle proper, with its embroidered *cherubim* (winged human-headed sphinxes). Overall repetitive use of a single motif on curtains and the like (by various techniques) is well-attested in the Late Bronze Age and well beyond. Compare already Tutankhamun's frame-supported pall, with its gilded rosettes, and the richly-caparisoned shrine for Amenophis I. Richly woven or embroidered linen sheets go back in Egypt over a millennium before the 13th century BC. The state ship of King Sahure (ca. 2500 BC) had a huge, superbly decorated sail with a rich all-over patterning of alternating stars and rosettes in rectangles.<sup>16</sup> This tradition continued right down into the 13th century BC, as tomb-paintings show.<sup>17</sup> Much closer to the Tabernacle for religious usage is the palladium of Min, within which the bearers of his statue walk in procession at his festivals. The great tent-like swathe of scarlet cloth is ornamented with golden stars-in-circles under Ramesses III (ca. 1170 BC),<sup>18</sup> and a century earlier with rows of alternating circled stars and royal cartouches under Ramesses II (ca. 1270 BC).<sup>19</sup>

Thus, the use of richly wrought linen generally and for religious equipment in particular was nothing new by the 13th century BC. In the Near East the use of the hides of aquatic mammals was extremely ancient—already in the fifth/fourth millennia BC, and also ca. 2000 BC, the sea-cow or dugong (possible translation of the *tahash* of Ex 26:14) was hunted for its products along the Arabian Gulf.<sup>20</sup>

The proportions of the Tabernacle structure and its two-roomed arrangement also find analogy from Egyptian sources of that period. The war-tent of the divine king—as with Ramesses II at the Battle of Qadesh (ca. 1275 BC)—was likewise divided into two rooms, the outer being twice the length of the inner sanctum like the Tabernacle; and the Egyptian twofold royal tent stood within the camp, just as did the Tabernacle (Ex 5:9–18).<sup>21</sup> After Ramesses II and III, our Egyptian data fade out.

Going into the Levant and beyond (by contrast with 1,300 years of Egyptian background), the evidence is more limited but significant. The Ugaritic literary tablets of the 14th/13th centuries BC (whose stories originate much earlier<sup>22</sup>) provide additional data for the term



©AnimMan Studios, artwork by Eric J. Bouchoc

**Pillar of Fire by Night.** Artist’s conception of the Israelite camp surrounding the Tabernacle. When set in the context of the Egyptian memorial temples at Western Thebes, Karnak, Memphis and Heliopolis, the Tabernacle is a very modest tent of meeting. Additionally, the daily sacrificial rituals and inductions of priestly staff are simple and more primitive in comparison to the Egyptian or Hittite rituals.

*qerashim*, “frames,” “pavilion,” occurring in such phrases as *qrš mlk ‘ab šnm*, several times, for the abode of El: “the tabernacle of the King, the Father of Years (?).”<sup>23</sup> So usage here extends through the Middle and Late Bronze Ages. King Keret of the legends performs ritual sacrifices in a tent, as a natural religious act.<sup>24</sup> By contrast with the 19th-century misconception that Hebrew *miškan* was simply a late priestly term for an imaginary structure, the term appears (paired with *‘ohel* as in Hebrew) in Ugaritic, again in the old literary texts.<sup>25</sup> On the archaeological plane, at Timna near Elath, we have the Midianite tent-sanctuary of the 12th century BC, a pole-supported tent (shreds of fabric still preserved) within a low stone enclosure, the whole some 30 ft square.<sup>26</sup>

*To an orientalist, what is so striking is the primitive simplicity, even stark “sparseness,” of the Tabernacle rites.*

By contrast with Egypt and the Levant, almost no evidence of the kind so far reviewed is forthcoming from the rich resources for Mesopotamian civilization. Least of all for Exilic (Neo-Babylonian) times. Symptomatically, the only remotely similar structure is a four-pillared canopy over a religious symbol in a sanctuary of the goddess Assuritu in the Temple of Ishtar built by Tukulti-Ninurta I at Assur—again, the 13th century BC.<sup>27</sup> With

this, one may contrast the sanctuary of the Nabu of the seventh century BC, half a millennium later, showing no such feature.<sup>28</sup> In late pre-Exilic and in Exilic times, the tabernacle concept has no place in “Exilic” Neo-Assyria or Neo-Babylon. It is altogether older, on the full comparative data currently available.

Regarding the actual size of the Tabernacle and its precinct, it should be emphasized how very small and simple the whole affair actually was. At 45 ft by 15 ft, the Tabernacle is tiny compared (e.g.) with the 200 ft by 600 ft plan of the personal memorial temples of Ramesses II (the Ramesseum) or Ramesses III (at Medinet Habu) in Western Thebes, while its precinct at 75 ft by 150 ft (23 by 46 m) would be lost in the huge precincts of either temple, that were about twice as long (1,200 ft) and thrice as wide (some 600 ft) as the temple themselves. Of course, the main state temples at Karnak (up to a quarter-mile long) in Thebes, and at Memphis and Heliopolis were much larger again. In short, the Tabernacle of the so-called “priestly” account is a very modest tent of meeting indeed, when set in a wider factual context.

### Setting and Some Furnishings of the Tabernacle

The Tabernacle and its enclosure lay within an essentially rectangular camp, with three tribes encamped outside and at a suitable (if unspecified) distance from each of the four sides of the Tabernacle’s own rectangular precinct (Nm 2). As noticed by others long since,<sup>29</sup> this basically rectangular layout of the Hebrew



camp directly resembles Egyptian usage of the 13th century BC, as illustrated by the Battle of Qadesh reliefs of Ramesses II, whose tabernacular, fenced-off tent was in the middle of a rectangular camp, in its case edged with a palisade of shields.<sup>30</sup> But, in later times, such encampments (more “economically”) are usually round, as with the Assyrians in the first millennium BC.<sup>31</sup> So, typically, the biblical arrangement goes back to its Bronze Age context (13th century BC at the latest), once again.

The transport of the Tabernacle structures through the wilderness was to be confined to six carts, each drawn by a pair of oxen (Nm 7:3 ff). The term used is *‘agala(t)*. Its use in this kind of context is not restricted to Numbers 7. In the early 12th century BC, in his third year (ca. 1151 BC), Ramesses IV sent an expedition of 8,368 men out into Egypt’s Eastern Desert (in Wadi Hammamat) to quarry special stone. The supply-train consisted (besides human porters) of “ten wagons, with six spans of oxen per wagon pulling them,”<sup>32</sup> the word for wagon being the selfsame *‘agalat* (in Egyptian transcript *‘grt*, in group-writing denoting a loan word, here a West-Semitic one).<sup>33</sup> Thus, the term, the use for desert-conditions and mode of propulsion is identical in both cases, barely a century apart; no Exilic fiction here.

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***“The LORD said to Moses, ‘Make two trumpets of hammered silver, and use them for calling the community together and for having the camps set out. When both are sounded, the whole community is to assemble before you at the entrance to the Tent of Meeting.’ ”***

***Numbers 10:1–3***

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The care and custody of the Tabernacle and its sacred contents is clearly divided between the Aaronic priestly family and the other Levites (clans of Gershon, Kohath, and Merari): priests within, and the other Levites on the outside (Nm 18:3 ff: cf. 3:ff); priests guarded the entry to the Tabernacle, however, even outside (Nm 3:38); the Levitical clans came under the control of priests, as of Eleazar (Nm 4:15, 16), and Ithamar (Nm 4:28, 33), etc. This duality of duties is not an isolated freak; it is also found in the Hittite instructions to temple staff, showing the closest analogies in usage with the biblical practices; suffice it here to refer to the exemplary study by Milgrom.<sup>34</sup> In punishments for offenses against the sacred, Milgrom notes (p. 209) the distinction in both traditions between human punishment of the erring individual and corporate punishment of man and family by deity directly. Here, Egyptian usage largely corroborates this position. In the great “secular” Decree of Haremhab (ca. 1320 BC), the punishments meted out are upon the guilty individuals; family is not involved.<sup>35</sup> The same is true almost throughout in the Nauri Decree of Sethos I (ca. 1290 BC), where the individual bears his punishment; only in the case of misappropriation of cattle (which had special status) was a man to be either executed or mutilated and enslaved and his family also enslaved (§§22–23). Otherwise, in one case of offense against others by temple personnel, it was left to deity (in this case, Osiris) to inflict eternal damnation on a man and his family (§§36), as in Hittite and biblical usage.<sup>36</sup> So, the concepts are old and in some cases reach further back.

On furnishings, much could be said, but nothing more than symptomatic examples can be quickly given here. The two silver trumpets of Numbers 10:1–10 were not the familiar curling *shofar*; these *hasoseroth* are generally recognized as having been straight tubular instruments, perhaps with flared end. Their use was fourfold: to gather the assembly; to set the tribes off on their marches; to signal attack on an enemy in the land; to celebrate major festivals and the new moon. Two such trumpets were found in the tomb of Tutankhamun (ca. 1330 BC), one of silver, one of copper or bronze, overlaid with gold.<sup>37</sup> Trumpets of this type occur also in various relief-scenes in Egyptian temples, etc., and in much the same uses as their biblical counterparts. So, they are blown to rally groups of soldiers,<sup>38</sup> to begin or accompany the march to war,<sup>39</sup> actually in war-scenes,<sup>40</sup> and to celebrate great religious festivals—so, under Queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1490 BC), with files of rejoicing soldiers joining in, with foliage, in Amun’s festivals,<sup>41</sup> and under Ramesses II (ca. 1270 BC) at Abydos for Osiris to accompany offerings for the festival.<sup>42</sup> As Hickmann notes, the use of such trumpets in pairs was a widespread phenomenon, including in Egypt (15th–12th centuries BC).<sup>43</sup> Naturally, such instruments long continue in use beyond the Bronze Age; the point here is they were in full and customary use in that period; anyone using them then was neither precocious nor an innovator.

We turn now to actual cultic furnishing. The Ark of the Covenant has had close consideration of late.<sup>44</sup> Its basic form and nature are clear (Ex 25:10–22), if certain details are not. It was a wooden box 1.5 cubits high and wide and 2.5 cubits long (about 0.75 m (2 ft 3 in) and 1.25 m (39 in) on four feet, gilded within and without, with a ledge around the top. Four gold rings at the four feet secured two long, gilded acacia poles on which to carry the Ark. Less clear is the adornment (two *cherubim*, facing each other with extended wings) upon the gold cover of the box, and fuller study of which must be left to another occasion. Such boxes, borne on carrying-poles passing through rings attached to the box, were commonplace in Egypt. This type of box is attested from the Sixth Dynasty at least, a millennium before Tutankhamun or the Late Bronze Age, while from the latter king’s tomb comes a superb example of just such a wooden box borne upon poles set through rings, of dimensions (0.635/0.605 m; 0.83 m) quite close to the Ark’s, if slightly less. It too served religious use, having originally contained a set of teapot-like *namsitu* ritual libation-vessels.<sup>45</sup> The function of the Ark in relation to the deity has been much discussed—throne, footstool, or base-box for an (invisible) throne for an unseen deity?<sup>46</sup> If the biblical references be treated seriously, and not simply “wished away” as later insertions, then the concept

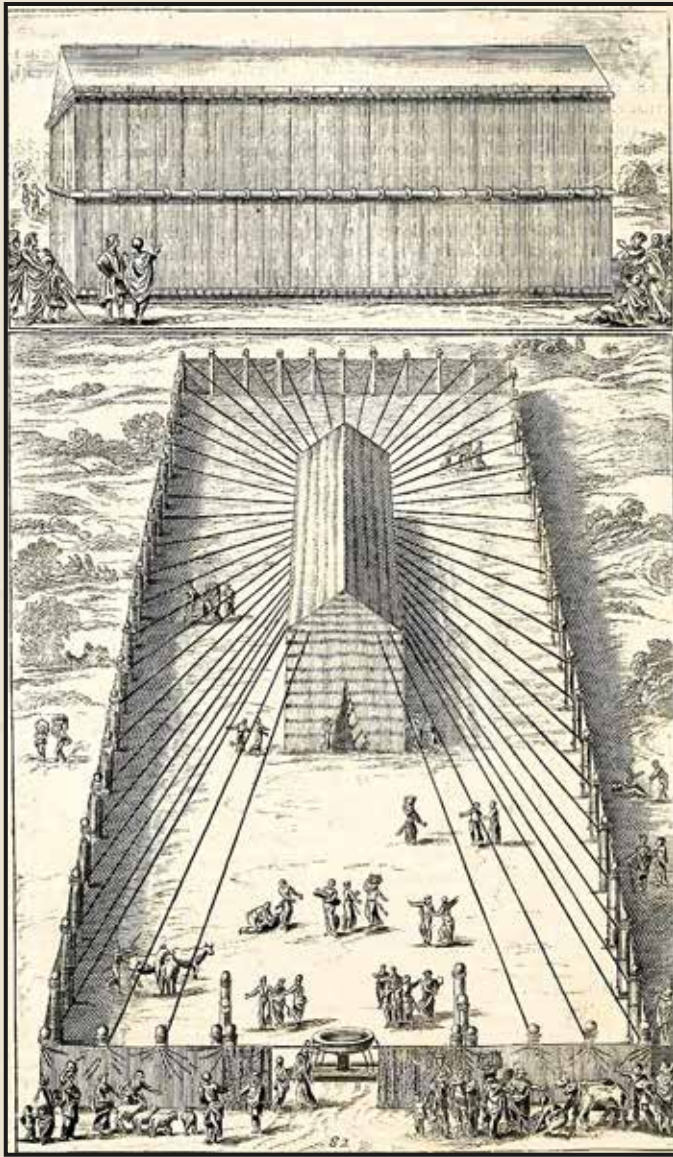
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***“Bezalel made the ark of acacia wood—two and a half cubits long, a cubit and a half wide, and a cubit and a half high. He overlaid it with pure gold, both inside and out, and made a gold molding around it. He cast four gold rings for it and fastened them to its four feet, with two rings on one side and two rings on the other. Then he made poles of acacia wood and overlaid them with gold. And he inserted the poles into the rings on the sides of the ark to carry it.”***

***Exodus 37:1–5***

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Wikimedia Commons

**The Tabernacle** engraving from Robert Arnauld d'Andilly's 1683 translation of Josephus.



Public Domain

**Moses and Joshua bowing before the Ark** by James Tissot, ca. 1900.

is one of YHWH enthroning on the cherubim, in particular upon their inner wings curved over to meet in the middle.<sup>47</sup> In such a case, then the Ark was both the base-box and footstool, and the wings of the cherubim made a throne of its golden upper element. The concept of a throne or the like for an invisible deity has long been canvassed;<sup>48</sup> such a concept is also ancient: suffice it to refer here to a series of scenes at the Deir el-Bahri memorial temple of Queen Hatshepsut (ca. 1470 BC), where an empty “lion throne” repeatedly occurs in festival processions, its absent or invisible occupant symbolized only by a feather-fan.<sup>49</sup>

## The Rituals of the Tabernacle

Here also, a variety of background data furnish us with an external, relatively objective set of standards against which we may better appreciate the biblical data.

The week-long induction of priestly staff for a new shrine (as in Lv 8–9; cf. Ex 29:35–37) is not exclusive to early Israel. One should compare the six/seven days’ ritual of Ulippi,<sup>50</sup> so with its far greater elaboration of ritual than is found in Exodus and Leviticus. At the same general date (14th/13th century BC), we now have from Emar in Syria the two allied rituals for the induction of two priestesses at a temple (M.1 of the archaeologists), of 100 and 115 lines in length. These also lasted seven days (cf. Leviticus and Ulippi), with a bull and seven sheep sacrificed daily in one case, and a bull, ram and goat daily in the other case, with other offerings and elaborate rites ending in a banquet in the second case.<sup>51</sup> Compared with Ulippi and Emar, the Tabernacle rituals of Exodus/Leviticus are altogether simpler, more “primitive.”

In recent decades, actually-known ancient rituals have attracted more sensitive and careful study, notably the West-Semitic and Semito-Hurrian rituals from Ugarit.<sup>52</sup> Besides the Hittites (cf. Ulippi, above), Egypt too has many points of comparison. The rituals of the Tabernacle come under three heads: 1, basic types of sacrifice (Lv 1–7); 2, regular daily cult (Ex 29:38–41, Nm 28:1–10); 3, monthly offerings and annual festivals (Nm 28:11–29:40, cf. Lv 23). These distinctions are universal in the Bronze Age Near East. To an orientalist, what is so striking is the primitive simplicity, even stark “sparseness” of the Tabernacle rites—in evolutionary terms, far closer to the fourth millennium BC than the fourth century. The daily ritual of the Tabernacle is but the twice-daily presentation of a lamb, some flour and oil, and a libation of wine,<sup>53</sup> in not more than three “acts,” while the basic sacrifices consist of only six to ten “acts.” Contrast the *standard* daily ritual for *all* temples (large or small) in New Kingdom Egypt (ca. 1550–1070 BC), of between 48 and 62 “acts” or episodes in the basic rites celebrated thrice a day.<sup>54</sup> The Hebrew calendar of annual feasts reaches barely a dozen celebrations; contrast the 60 or more annual festivals (some, like Opet, vast in length and elaboration) in Egypt, as at Thebes.<sup>55</sup> Again, “primitive” simplicity.

Terminology and usage in ritual, biblical and beyond, has also been more carefully considered of late, notably by Milgrom.<sup>56</sup> In recent years, evidence has accumulated for the antiquity (including a pre-monarchic antiquity) of an increasing number of terms.<sup>57</sup> Comparative evidence enables us to correct the interpretation of familiar terms—*tenupa* is an “elevation-offering,” not a “wave-offering,” thanks to clear indications from New Kingdom Egypt.<sup>58</sup> The concept of transferring evil symbolically to an animal and/or human, to be driven-off out of one’s land is held in common by



both Hebrew usage (scapegoat rite, Lv 16) and in 14th/13th-century Hittite rituals, with (naturally) differences in detail and emphasis.<sup>59</sup> Attitudes to economic status and to integrity of offerings are also shared to biblical and non-biblical writers. Allowance for poverty in Leviticus (5:7, 11; 12:8) provides that the poor may offer (e.g.) a pair of pigeons instead of a lamb; likewise in Late Bronze Age Hittite rites, the poor person may offer one sheep rather than nine.<sup>60</sup> Blemished offerings are acceptable neither to the Levitical cult (Lv 22:17–25) nor to its Hittite opposite numbers.<sup>61</sup> The wealth of background is very extensive, and reaches very far back in time.

## Conclusion

We have not proved that the Tabernacle of Exodus 26/36 actually existed in (say) the 13th century BC, nor have we sought to. But the overall evidence to hand does—in *its own right*—point clearly to an origin long before the supposed “pipe dreams” of the Neo-Babylonian Exile. Much of its technology is Egyptian, the arrangement of a two-room sanctum in a rectangular precinct in a rectangular camp is Late Bronze Age and Egyptian (first millennium and Assyrian camps were rounded, with different structures within), the only Mesopotamian parallel is 13th-century, where later sanctuaries have no such provision; the *qerashim/mishkan* technology is not only Late Bronze West-Semitic but originated earlier; the silver trumpets and their uses directly correspond to Egyptian type and uses. To attribute all, or any, of this to Hebrew “priestly” circles living humbled in exile in Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylon, six or seven centuries after such usages in our data, involves belief in some kind of magical “telepathy” across nearly 1000 miles and several centuries late! This may all be very well in “science-fiction”—but not in serious academic study of the biblical world. “P,” it should be remembered, is strictly pure fiction—there is no such document extant, other than in the scholarly imagination: no papyrus, parchment, codex or ostrakon of it exists in any collection anywhere in the world. Hence, scholars need to revise drastically the rag bag of inherited 19th-century conceptions that “P” contains and symbolizes. Specific entities within “it” need to be taken out, each examined on their merits in their proper ancient context, and re-evaluated as necessary.

In terms of “macro-history”—the span of entire ancient communities and civilizations—drastic and ruthless changes of attitude are now an urgent desideratum. What is needed is more attention to the *actual profile* of ancient Near Eastern history as we actually have it, during the literate era ca. 3000–300 BC. As has been pointed out in provisional form elsewhere,<sup>62</sup> the real profiles of the specific histories in the area show a Formative epoch, a point or time of Crystallization of norms and forms, and then an ongoing Stream of cultural tradition. This is seen at its clearest in Egypt, but is equally discernible in both Mesopotamia (with duality of phenomena due to Sumerian/Akkadian concurrence) and ancient Anatolia (also, multiple groups), and is visible in the archaeological “history” of Syria-Palestine. To this fundamental “profile,” based exclusively on the known facts of history as universally accepted, we must compare biblical history. That displayed in our extant biblical tradition (and so often decried—without evidence—as schematic) fits perfectly. The patriarchs/Egyptian Sojourn are the formative epoch, or “proto-history” (to echo a term used by Professor Malamat<sup>63</sup>) with clear links to the Middle and Late Bronze ages; the Exodus from Egypt to Sinai with

the institution of the Covenant and the simple Tabernacular worship is the crystallization; and the rest of Israelite/Judean history is the ongoing stream of tradition, its history—like all ancient history—marked by *undulation* (ups and downs, in plain language). The old 19th-century concept of a few primitive tribes folk (of “Stone Age” mentality) evolving smoothly upward via a rather rural monarchy to the “moral heights” of later “prophecy” (covenant coming only with the seventh century BC), and followed by fossilization into rigid priestly structures from the Exile onward into a cultural decline (barely a “silver age”)—this is the stuff of fiction, and bears no relation whatsoever to how ancient history really unfolded, inside or outside of biblical tradition. In real history, the Tabernacle tradition belongs to the Late Bronze Egypto-Semitic world, not to Middle-Iron Mesopotamia. Furthermore, this result does *not* flow from dogmatic considerations but from the exclusive attention to tangible evidence, open to all to verify at leisure; it neither needs nor presupposes any particular system of belief or philosophy. Over the years, the contributions by Professor Malamat have been an unflinching stimulus in studying the interrelations of biblical and Near-Eastern data; those presented here seek to tread a parallel path.

*Endnotes for this article can be found at [www.BibleArchaeology.org](http://www.BibleArchaeology.org). Type “Endnotes” in the search box; next, click the “Bible and Spade Bibliographies and Endnotes” link; then page down to the article.*



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An evangelical Christian, Kitchen is an outspoken opponent of the Documentary Hypothesis of mainstream academic biblical scholarship, and has written extensively to defend the historicity of the Old Testament. Nevertheless, his historical dating is not in line with the views of the ABR staff and with conservative evangelical interpreters of the Bible; for example, he places the Exodus from Egypt some two centuries later than those who rely more directly upon scriptural references. See the ABR website for many important articles on this subject.



# EHUD'S ESCAPE

By Brian Janeway

## Ehud the Left-handed Judge

*“For sheer melodrama—gruesome murders, sexual exploits, superhuman feats of strength, a bizarre mutilation—no tabloid can offer you more.” So reads the introduction to the book of Judges in the Quest Study Bible. Such a juicy enticement to begin the study of Scripture! Hopefully, this study will be motivated by more noble incentives!*

### The Book of Judges

In the book of Judges, we encounter the stories of Israel’s “judges,” from the root *spt*, meaning “to deliver” or “to save” in this particular context. But the general meaning of the word is multifaceted and encompasses many functions obscured by the simple rendering. They include the actions of “govern,” “decide,” “rule,” “vindicate,” and “deliver.” With cognates in both Akkadian and the Mari archives, it is often used in the Old Testament in parallel with *dyn*, implying a predominately legal function of the word “judgment.” Whereas the root *dyn* is used only 25 times, the use of *spt* is attested in 180 references.<sup>1</sup>

The book of Judges contains a series of “cycles” wherein Israel experiences God’s blessing, falls into spiritual complacency and idolatry, suffers at the hand of enemies, repents of its evil ways, and is delivered by one of the judges. Rabbinical tradition holds that the prophet Samuel authored Judges. The book itself, however, makes no claims of authorship. It seems likely a prophetic associate of Samuel’s was the actual author, based upon certain chronological indicators in the text (“in those days there was no king in Israel,” 17:6, 18:1, 21:25) and its place in the prophetic division of the Hebrew Bible.<sup>2</sup>

### The Time of the Judges

The period of Judges is entangled in the discussion over the date of the Exodus and Conquest. Many modern scholars want to compress the events of Judges into an intolerably short period of about 200 years. But a straightforward reading of the text (like 11:26, where Jephthah claims the Israelites had been in the land for 300 years) along with 1 Kings 6:1 (480 years from the time of Solomon) dates Judges to ca. 1400–ca. 1050 BC (the appointment of Saul), a span of approximately 350 years.

Taken at face value, the Ehud story probably dates to about 1300 BC. A left-handed man of the tribe of Benjamin whom “the Lord raised up as a deliverer” (v 15), Ehud is only mentioned two other times (1 Chr 7:10, 8:6), both in genealogies. Thus we have a left-handed, or more precisely right hand-bound (*itter*), hero from the tribe whose name means “son of the right hand!”<sup>3</sup> Yet, Benjamin is noted for such warriors. Judges 20:16 speaks of “700 picked troops” who, with their right hands *itter*, could sling a stone at a hair and not miss (see also 1 Chr 2:12).

The Israelites had been oppressed by Moabite king Eglon for 18 years when Ehud arrived on the scene, empowered by God. After delivering tribute to Eglon, probably grain or produce in baskets, he returned to give the king a “message from God” (v 20). Cundall<sup>4</sup> makes the interesting observation that Ehud used the general word for God, Elohim rather than Yahweh, the name of Israel’s deity. Perhaps the generic term was something to which even a Moabite king could relate! In private company with Eglon, he revealed his hidden weapon and coolly dispatched the corpulent king. Ehud’s escape was made good by the ignorance of the king’s attendants who sat idly as he blithely exited past them. By the time they realized what had transpired, the Israelites rallied behind their “deliverer” and routed the Moabites—“about 10,000 men... all robust and valiant” (v. 29, NASB). After Ehud’s deliverance, the land enjoyed 80 years of peace.<sup>5</sup>

### Eglon’s Palace at Jericho

Verse 3:23 would seem to be a rather straightforward sentence, with *misdaron* usually rendered “vestibule.” The LXX renders it that way as do most commentators. Gray<sup>6</sup> states that the locative ending indicates a feature outside the “cool upper chamber” as the place from which Ehud went out. The “cool upper chamber” is the feminine noun *aliyya*. Gray suggests this is a portico, or more likely “an outside stairway.”

Boling<sup>7</sup> translates it “by the way of the porch” (lit. “in the direction of the porch”). In this reading, Ehud would not have exited the same way he came in but somehow went over the side.

Burney<sup>8</sup> notes the preformative (m) commonly used to denote the place of the action described by the verb. In modern Hebrew, Assyrian and Aramaic, the root means “to arrange in order or in a rank.”



The conventional understanding of the “cool roof chamber” or *aliyya* is echoed by Martin<sup>9</sup>. Eglon was understood to be within a simple construction on the building’s flat roof that served as a “summer” palace allowing circulation of air in the hot Jordan Valley. Yet, it is highly doubtful he went to the roof to escape the withering heat of the Jordan Valley. Respite was much more likely in the lower levels of the building.

## Ehud’s Escape

The means of Ehud’s escape has long befuddled scholars. How could he walk right in on an unguarded Eglon and terminate “His Royal Corpulence”? Why wasn’t Eglon’s Moabite retinue able to foil the devious plot of this “Benjaminite Bond” (“that’s Bond... James Bond”)? Archaeology can help illuminate these strange events in the king’s palace.

Halpern<sup>10</sup> offered a plausible reconstruction to this passage. In the ancient Near East, left-handed soldiers had an advantage. Just as with modern left-handed boxers, ancient southpaw warriors presented a problem to conventional battle tactics, mismatching “blade against shield, shield against blade.” By this subterfuge, Ehud passed the guards with his cubit-length sword strapped undetected to his right side.

However, this does not explain the ease of his escape. The *aliyya* where Eglon was seated has been variously translated “cool upper chamber,” “portico,” “outside stairway” and “platform with pillars.” Yet, the term is best understood as an architectural one: “the room over.” According to Halpern,<sup>11</sup> it is always used in this sense. Most often an enclosed, upper story space (1 Kgs 17:19, 23; 2 Kgs 4:10; Jer 22:13) it never indicates more than a single room. The attendants call it a *heder*, or “chamber” in 3:24. Following

Stager, he argues this architectural phrase *aliyya hammqera* (3:20) actually means “the room over the beams.” A similar idea is expressed in Psalm 104:3, where Yahweh “lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters” (NASB)<sup>12</sup>

In 3:20, Ehud gained an audience with the king and “entered unto him,” apparently crossing a threshold into the proposed *aliyya*, where the king was already seated.

As Halpern<sup>13</sup> noted, the *bit hilani* plan is well attested in both Assyrian and contemporary Iron Age (ca. 1200–500 BC) structures from Syria.<sup>14</sup> While only the first floors of these structures survive, wall thickness and remnants of staircases suggest a second story.

The floor plan of these buildings had several common features, focusing on two main rooms—a long, pillared portico and an inner throne room parallel to it, with the entrance through the broad side.

It was common for *bit hilani* palaces to contain a throne room with the core elevated, as was Solomon’s (1 Kgs 10:18–20; 2 Chr 9:17–19). The same was said of Solomon’s Temple, where the Holy of Holies stood ten cubits above the floor (1 Kgs 6:2, 20). Inside this throne room Halpern<sup>15</sup> suggested the king’s *aliyya* was situated. He speculated that the platform was partitioned from the audience hall by a wood screen and not, in essence, a separate room.

Halpern<sup>16</sup> reconstructed the events of Judges 3 as follows: Ehud gained an audience with Eglon (3:19), crossed to where the rotund ruler was seated atop his *aliyya*. The same crossing over is reversed (3:23) when Ehud escapes the locked *aliyya*. In 3:24, he exited past the unsuspecting guards. They sat two doors removed from the king in the *aliyya*. Without this spatial separation, the guards would have suspected foul play upon seeing the closed door of the *aliyya*, locked by Ehud as he departed.

## Covering His Feet

Instead, they thought their monarch was “performing the offices of nature”.<sup>17</sup> This phrase is the well-known euphemism for defecation also attested in 1 Samuel 24:3. In the Saul story, the infinite construct is used (*hasekh*) yielding “to relieve.” For the corpulent king Eglon the Hiphil participle is used, meaning “relieving himself” to indicate an ongoing action, or so they thought! The word comes from the root (*s-kh-kh*) meaning “to overshadow or screen.” The phrase means literally “to cover one’s feet,” with “feet” functioning as the direct object of the reflexive verb.

## Down and Out

So how did the stealthy Ehud escape unnoticed? Did he lock himself inside the *aliyya* or outside it? Halpern<sup>18</sup> believes on lexical grounds that Ehud locked himself **inside**. His argument is strengthened by the fact that in verse 23 the verb “to close” from the root (*s-gh-r*) is used in association with the preposition *b`dw*. In every case of the verb “to close” being used with “upon” or “behind,” the object of the preposition is shut inside the structure in question.



A.D. Riddle, BiblePlaces.com

**Excavations at Tel 'Eton** (or Khirbet Aitun in Arabic) in Israel’s lowlands has been identified as the ancient Canaanite, then Israelite, town of Eglon. It was eventually destroyed by the Assyrians under Sennacherib in the 8th century BC. The 15 acre site is located at an important ancient crossroads just below the Hebron hills. Above is pictured a possible location for Eglon’s palace in addition to the Jericho discoveries (see page 24).

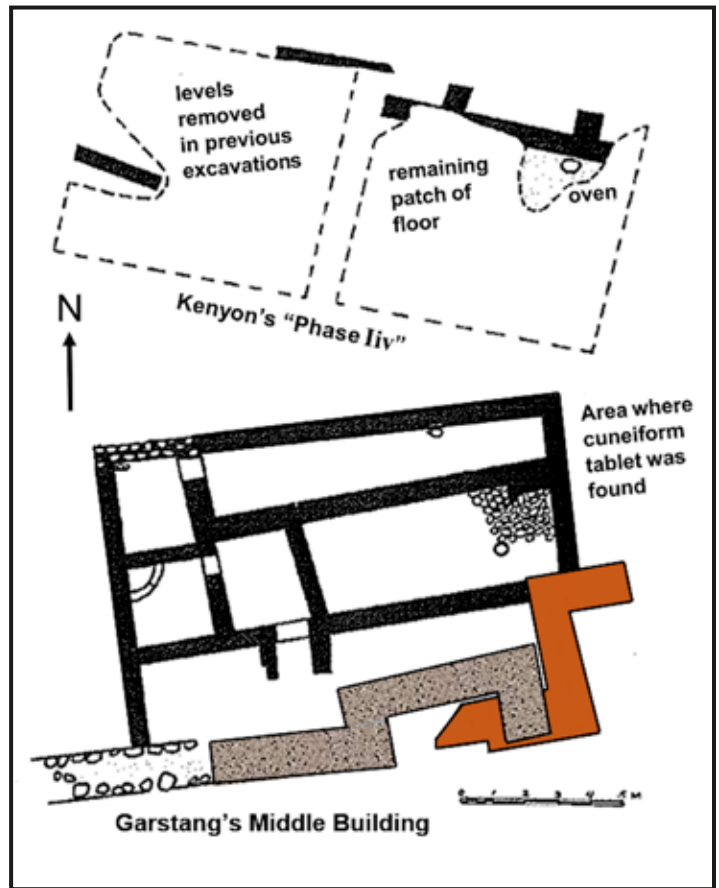
Commentators have long taken the object of the preposition to be Eglon, but Ehud is the last subject mentioned. He closed the doors of the *'aliyya* from the inside.<sup>18</sup>

So what of the *misdaron*? A clue to this feature is given in 3:25. After Ehud's departure, the courtiers checked on Eglon only to find the doors of the *'aliyya* locked. Assuring themselves the king was only "covering his feet," after an unknown period of time, they felt compelled to do something. Burney's<sup>19</sup> rendering of *bosh* is best, indicating that the attendants waited not "until they were utterly at a loss" (RSV), but rather "as long as shame demanded" ("to the point of embarrassment," NIV).

The argument is made that *misdaron* should not be linked to the root (*sdr*) to mean "portico, row of pillars" but rather *sadira*. The root means "to be blinded, puzzled" in Hebrew, Targumic, and Arabic. The usage reminds one of the phrase "to cover one's feet." The term aptly applied to the area "under the beams" and means something on the order of "the hidden place." The word is *mistarim*, meaning "the hidden space" beneath the temple floor. It appears that the *'aliyya* contained a toilet, as inferred from the courtiers' reaction to the locked doors. "What the king deposited from above can only have fallen through the floor." The king's "throne" was in fact a commode!

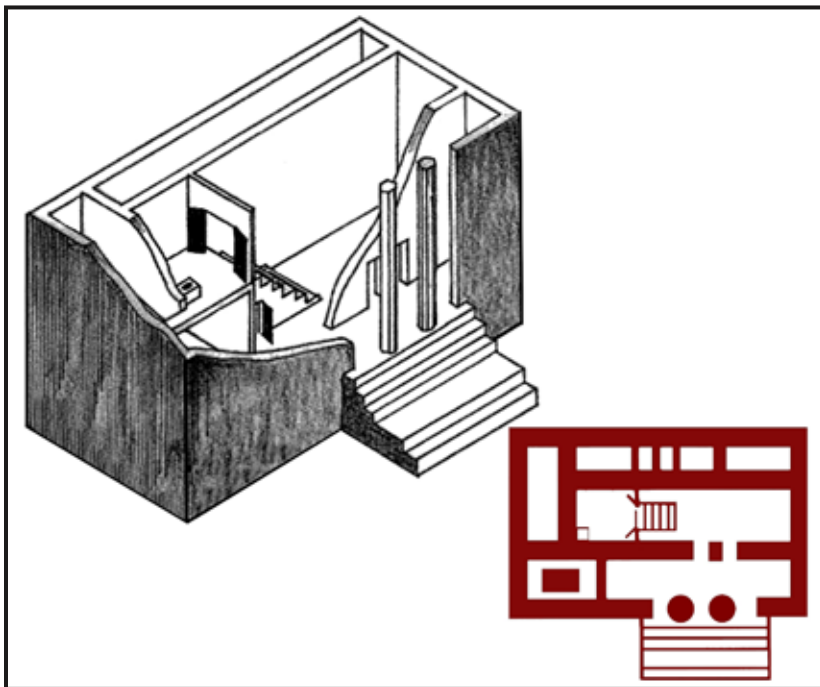
Indoor toilets are well attested in *bit hilani* palaces. The "hidden space" underneath would have been accessed by orderlies through the audience hall. In the absence of any other means of egress from that room, the *misdaron* is the most probable avenue of Ehud's escape.<sup>20</sup> Halpern<sup>21</sup> muses,

The terms having to do with excrement have caused difficulties; crowded into the space of a few verses is the highest concentration of rare and unique vocabulary in the literature of ancient Israel.



Bryant G. Wood

Plan of late 14th century BC (Late Bronze IIA) structures on the southeast slope of the tell at Jericho.



Gene Fackler



Palestine Exploration Fund, London

**Garstang's Middle Building** was excavated in 1933 on Jericho's southeastern slope. Its date corresponds well with the date of the palace of Eglon, the Moabite king in Judges 3:12–25: an isolated structure with evidence of wealth (expensive imported pottery), administrative activity (an inscribed clay tablet) and constructed toward the end of the 14th century. It was also occupied for only a short period of time and then abandoned, paralleling the Bible's description of an eighteen year oppression by Eglon and the subsequent rout of the Moabites by Ehud and the Israelites.

A typical architectural design of an Iron Age palace in Syro-Palestine and throughout the ancient Near East was called a *Bit-hilani*, likely first appearing in north Syria. The main feature was a portico or colonnaded porch. Based on archaeological evidence at Jericho (Garstang's Middle Building), Eglon's palace was likely a *Bit-hilani* in construction and plan.





**Aerial view of Jericho, looking south.** The trenches and squares visible today are from Kathleen Kenyon's excavations in the 1950s and the more recent Italian-Palestinian excavation which began in 1997. The area under consideration in this article is just right of the road running along the tell's left (east) side where excavations by John Garstang found evidence for the destruction of Jericho by the Israelites. The "Middle Building" may be Eglon's palace. Two 8x8 m squares excavated by Kathleen Kenyon was where she found similar evidence for Israel's destruction (ca. 1400 BC), but misdated it to 1550 BC and attributed it to the Egyptians.



Toilets were very uncommon in the ancient Near East during the Old Testament period but are well attested in *bit hilani* palaces. The “hidden space” underneath would have been accessed by orderlies through the audience hall. In the absence of any other means of egress from that room, the *misdaron* is the most probable avenue of Ehud’s escape.

**Right:** Two stone toilet seats have been found in excavation at the City of David. This one was found in Area G and sat in a small room above a cesspit. The house in which it was found was destroyed in 587 BC. The toilet seat over the cesspit appears to be similar to the *misdaron* in Eglon’s palace.



Todd Bolen, BiblePlaces.com

The continuing theme of scatology is prominent in Jull’s<sup>22</sup> treatment of the term *mkerah*, translated as “the cool roof chamber” (v 24). It was the doors to this room that the courtiers found locked after Ehud’s departure. Traditionally derived from the root (*krr*), “to cool,” the upper story was not a logical place to escape the blistering heat of Jericho, as noted previously.

Following Stager and Halpern’s derivation from the root (*krh*), Jull concurs with the translation implying wooden beams. But he takes issue with the rendering “room over beams.” He thinks it more likely that rooms were named after their function rather than their mode of construction. The same tendency applies in English (bedroom, bathroom, dining room, etc.). He contends that the term *mkerah* actually means “toilet chamber” and its equivalent in verse 19 is “royal toilet”<sup>22</sup>.

Jull<sup>23</sup> cites Deuteronomy 23:10–13, where *k rehlay lah* has been translated too narrowly. Rather than merely “nocturnal emission,” it should encompass other “nocturnal accidents” of bodily fluids. The Mishnah offers a more precise term for “nocturnal emission”—*keri*. He relates the root (*krh*), with at least one derivative referring to toilet activity and another meaning “to meet, happen, or befall.” This is done euphemistically. Just as “covering one’s feet” masked the private nature of the activity in the Israelite mind, so did the term *mkerah*.

Additional examples exist in the Old Testament. *Siah*, “to dig a hole,” has also been understood euphemistically for defecating. Hence, Elijah’s taunts of the prophets of Baal has God’s prophet indicating that Baal is perhaps too busy relieving himself to hear the cries of his priests (1 Kgs 18:27).<sup>23</sup>

Returning to Judges 3:12–30, the *mkerah* is now to be seen as “the place of happening,” euphemistic for a place of defecation and urination—a toilet. Contra Halpern, Jull considers *’aliyya ham kerah* not to include the entire throne room but merely the private “royal toilet.” This better explains the sense of privacy implied by Ehud’s “secret word” to be given to “His Corpulency.” Two Iron II “toilets” have been excavated in the City of David.<sup>10</sup> Both were situated within closed chambers, fitting the proposed understanding of our text and reflecting the biblical attitude of privacy toward toilet activity.<sup>24</sup>

What can we now say regarding Ehud’s escape in light of this scatological exegesis? Ehud interrupted Eglon busy on his “throne.” Aghast at this shocking lack of decorum on the part of the upstart Benjaminite, King Eglon arose from his “performance of the offices of nature” only to be met with a two-edged sword. This stealthy Semite then escaped the *hadar ham kerah* the only way he knew, through the *misdaron*, that is, down the cesspit.

*Endnotes for this article can be found at [www.BibleArchaeology.org](http://www.BibleArchaeology.org). Type “Endnotes” in the search box; next, click the “Bible and Spade Bibliographies and Endnotes” link; then page down to the article.*



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# BALAAAM

## SON OF BEOR

By Bryant G. Wood

In an unprecedented discovery, an ancient text found at Deir ‘Alla, Jordan, in 1967 tells about the activities of a prophet named Balaam. Could this be the Balaam of the Old Testament? The text makes it clear that it is. Three times in the first four lines he is referred to as “Balaam son of Beor,” exactly as in the Bible. This represents the first Old Testament prophet to be dug up in Bible lands—not his tomb or his skeleton, but a text about him. The text also represents the first prophecy of any scope from the ancient West Semitic world to be found outside the Old Testament, and the first extra-biblical example of a prophet proclaiming doom to his own people.

Balaam was not an Israelite. He was hired by Balak, king of Moab, to curse the Israelites. They were camped on the east side of the Jordan River, about to make their historic entry into the Promised Land. Through God’s intervention Balaam was obliged to bless the Israelites rather than curse them (Nm 22–24). Afterwards, Balaam seems to have been the cause of the Israelites’ sin in Numbers 25 when they took Moabite and Midianite women and worshiped the Moabite god Baal-Peor (Nm 31:16). Balaam was eventually killed when Moses sent the Israelites against the Midianites (Nm 31). He is further condemned in Scripture in 2 Peter 2:15 (he loved the wages of unrighteousness), Jude 11 (ungodly men ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward) and Revelation 2:14 (he taught Balak to cast a stumbling block before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed to idols, and to commit fornication).

The remarkable text found at Deir ‘Alla consists of 119 fragments of plaster inscribed with black and red ink. It was among the rubble of a building destroyed in an earthquake. It seems to have been one long column with at least 50 lines, displayed on a plastered wall. According to the excavators’ dating, the disaster was most likely the severe earthquake which occurred in the time of King Uzziah (Azariah) and the prophet Amos in about 760 BC (Am 1:1; Zec 14:5). The lower part of the text shows signs of wear, indicating that it had been on the wall for some time prior to the earthquake.





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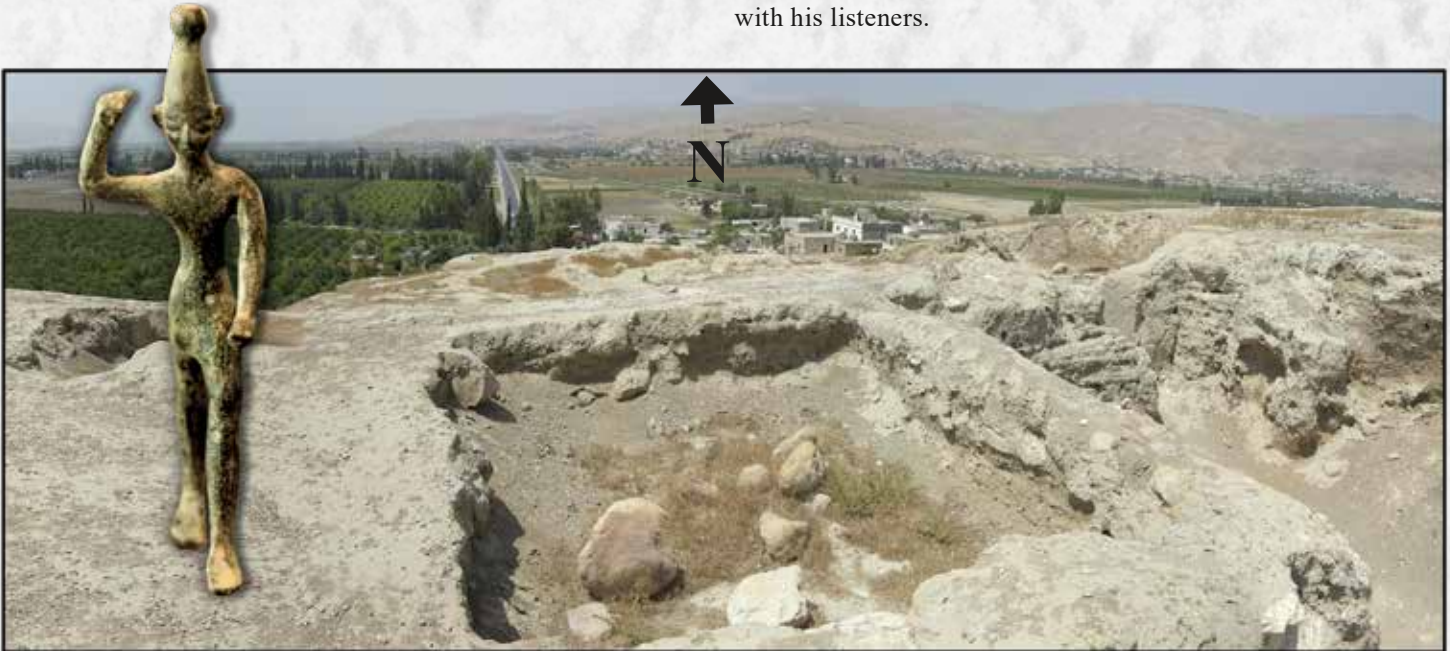
**Balaam and the Ass** by Rembrandt van Rijn, 1626.



Wikimedia Commons

**Balak the king of Moab (wearing a crown) looking over the Israelite camp with Balaam.** From the Phillip Medhurst Collection of Bible illustrations and engravings at St. George's Court, Kidderminster, England.

Written in Aramaic, the text begins with the title “Warnings from the Book of Balaam the son of Beor. He was a seer of the gods.” It is in red ink, as are other portions of the text where emphasis is desired. The reference to the “Book of Balaam” indicates that the text was part of a pre-existing document and therefore the original date of the material is much earlier than the plaster text itself. Balaam goes on to relate a vision concerning impending judgment from the gods, and enters into a dispute with his listeners.



Steve Rudd www.bible.ca

**Tell Deir 'Alla in Jordan**, thought to be biblical Pethor, was once a large city with smelting furnaces and cultic worship. Although the city was leveled by a violent earthquake in the eighth century BC, urbanization continued. This earthquake was likely the one mentioned by Zechariah (14:15) and Amos (1:1). The inset image shows a statue of Ba'al circa 14th–12th century BC found in what was once the ancient port city of Ugarit, now Syria. The word baal meant lord or owner. There were many baals associated with different things and worshipers succumbed to the so-called freedom of behavior that held no shame or consequences, including child sacrifice. The Moabites worshiped Ba'al Peor. Peor translates as opening or to open wide. The worship of Ba'al Peor involved lascivious indulgences and Mount Peor may have been so named because of the rituals that took place there. Falling under the influence of the local customs and the hedonistic behavior of baal worship was a perpetual problem for the Israelites.



There are a number of similarities between the text and the account of Balaam in the book of Numbers. To begin with, the events described in Numbers 22–24 took place in the same general area where the text was found. At the time of the Numbers 22–24 incident, the Israelites were camped on the Plains of Moab, across the Jordan River from Jericho. Deir ‘Alla is located about 25 mi north of this area, where the Jabbok River flows into the Jordan Valley. Balaam was from Pethor, near “the river” (Nm 22:5), in “Aram” (Nm 23:7; Dt 23:4). The reference to Aram has led most scholars to conclude that Balaam was from northern Syria, in the vicinity of the Euphrates. That does not fit well with the biblical account, however, since Balaam’s home seems to have been close to where the Israelites were camped (Nm 22:1–22; 31:7–8).

In view of Balaam being revered at Deir ‘Alla, one would expect that Deir ‘Alla was his home. This is exactly what William Shea was proposed, based on his reading of the name Pethor in an inscribed clay tablet found at Deir ‘Alla (1989: 108–11). In this case, the river of Numbers 22:5 would be the Jabbok River and the *naharaim* (two rivers) of Deuteronomy 23:4 would be the Jabbok and Jordan rivers. With regard to the references to Aram, Shea suggests that the original place name was Adam, with the “d” being miscopied as “r,” since the two letters are nearly identical in ancient Hebrew. Adam was a town about 8 mi southwest of Deir ‘Alla, on the east bank of the Jordan River, where the Jabbok meets the Jordan.

Balaam evidently was well known as a “cursing prophet,” for Balak specifically summoned Balaam for the purpose of cursing Israel (Nm 22:6). Much of the Deir ‘Alla text was given to curses uttered by the prophet. The term “*shadday-gods*” is used on two occasions in the text. *Shadday* is one of the names of the God in the Old Testament, used mainly in the book of Job. Since the account of Job is set in Transjordan (Jb 1:1–3), it seems that *shadday* was a name used for deity in this region. Balaam used the name twice in his blessing speeches where it is translated “Almighty” (Nm 24:4, 16).

The Deir ‘Alla text presents a problem to those who dismiss the biblical account of the Exodus, Wilderness Wanderings and Conquest as legendary, as in the trend in scholarship today. It is clear that Balaam was a real person who operated on the east side of the Jordan river. He was known as a cursing prophet and continued to be revered hundreds of years after his death. His persona as revealed in the Deir ‘Alla text precisely matches that of the Balaam of Numbers 22–24. If Balaam was a real person, what about Balak, Moses, Joshua and all of the other persons named in the biblical narrative? They must have been real as well, and the events described authentic.

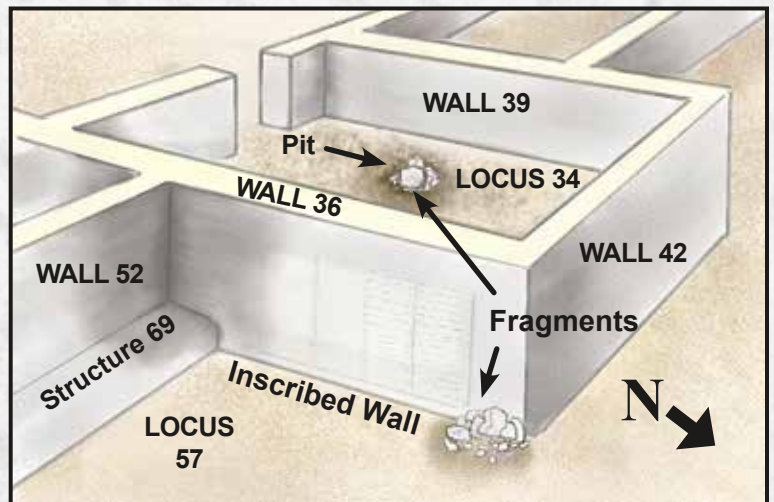
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A portion of the Deir ‘Alla text concerning Balaam son of Beor.



At Deir ‘Alla, Jordan, near the river Zerqa (biblical Jabbok) the inscription fragments were found in 1967 among the ruins of a building that may have been a sanctuary. The sketch shows the possible location of where the inscription was written in red and black ink directly on the wall plaster.



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# THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF EASTER

By Bryan Windle

For Christians, Easter represents the most climactic event in all of human history—the death and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ. Critics contend that it is a mythical story, based more on fiction than fact. Some even go so far as to accuse Christianity of stealing the “death-and-resurrection-of-a-god” motif from other religions. However, scholars have rightly pointed out that stories of the death and resurrection of other gods, such as Dionysus and Adonis, post-date Christianity, so if anyone did the stealing, it was the pagan religions who “borrowed” the motif from Christianity.<sup>1</sup> Historic Christianity has always maintained that what transpired that first Easter were actual historical events: a literal crucifixion during a specific period in time and a physical resurrection leaving a real empty tomb, which forever altered the course of human history. Is there evidence for this claim?

Archaeology is one field of study that must be considered in determining whether the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, as recorded in the gospel accounts in the Bible, are actual historical events. Over the past 150 years, archaeological excavations in Israel have yielded much evidence for the historicity of Jesus of Nazareth. Excavations have confirmed many elements of the Christmas story, his ministry in Galilee and Judea, particularly in the Jewish synagogues, and the fact that the world in which Jesus lived has been so accurately described in the gospels.<sup>2</sup> However, nowhere is the evidence so overwhelming as it is when one studies the details of the historical accounts of the death and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth.

Many Christians travel to Israel during the Easter season to seek out the actual places where Jesus walked. Unfortunately, some of the sites shown to the faithful masses by well-meaning tour guides are of dubious authenticity. The Garden Tomb is a serene place to contemplate the resurrection of Jesus, but most archaeologists agree that it is an Iron Age tomb which was already 500 years old by the first century AD, and not the “new tomb” (Mt 27:60) in which “no one had yet been laid” (Lk 23:53) described in the Bible. Given the doubt surrounding some Easter-related sites, it would be easy to jump to the conclusion that archaeology simply doesn’t support the biblical accounts. This would be a mistake, as archaeological findings have confirmed many details of the Easter story.

## Gethsemane

It may be surprising to learn that the Bible never refers to the “Garden of Gethsemane” by that name; it simply says Jesus and his disciples went to “a place called Gethsemane” (Mt 26:36; Mk 14:32) on the Mount of Olives (Lk 22:39) where there was an “olive grove” (Jn 18:1). Gethsemane itself means “olive press” or “press of oils.” Today tourists enjoy the serenity of the Garden of Gethsemane, and some of the olive trees there are indeed ancient. Likely none of the trees in the garden were alive when Jesus prayed there, as Josephus records that the Romans cut down all of the olive trees around Jerusalem to use in their siege of the city in 70 AD. Some of the trees standing in the garden today may be the descendants of trees that Jesus walked among.



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**The Garden Tomb (or Gordon’s Tomb)** as it appeared in the 1920s. It was only identified as a possible site for the tomb of Jesus in the 19th century. The main advocate for this was Major-General Charles Gordon, a British officer who visited Jerusalem in 1883 and became convinced of its authenticity. The tomb itself dates to the Iron Age. It was hundreds of years old by the time of Christ. While it is a popular place for Christians to reflect on the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, it is not the actual tomb of Jesus.





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**Left: Ancient olive trees in the Garden of Gethsemane** as photographed by British photographer James Robinson (1813–1888). The traditional site located on the Mount of Olives across from the Kidron Valley was identified as the Garden of Gethsemane by Helena, mother of Emperor Constantine who was the first Roman ruler to convert to Christianity. The fourth century AD theologian and historian Eusebius compiled a geographical directory of biblical place names called the *Onomasticon* (*On the Place-Names in Holy Scripture*) in which he wrote, “Gethsimane (Gethsimani). Place where the Christ prayed before the passion. It is located at the Mt. of Olives where even now the faithful fervently utter prayers.”

Nearby is an ancient site called the Cave of Gethsemane (or the Grotto of Betrayal), which may in fact be the actual site of the betrayal of Jesus, or at least the spot where the disciples slumbered. Given that it was a cold night (Jn 18:18), it makes sense that they would have sought shelter in one of the nearby caves. Archaeological excavations have revealed that the cave was used for pressing olives in ancient times.<sup>3</sup> The Garden of Gethsemane and, more specifically, the Cave of Gethsemane, fits the biblical descriptions as the site of one of the most famous betrayals of all time.

## House of Annas

After he was arrested in the garden, Jesus was brought “first to Annas, who was the father-in-law of Caiaphas, the high priest that year” (Jn 18:13). It was here that Jesus was questioned about his teaching and Peter denied his Master three times.

The exact location of the house of Annas is not positively known. The site traditionally identified as the High Priest’s house

is located on the eastern slope of Mount Zion, where a modern church is built over the remains of a sixth-century AD church. The remains of several mansions belonging to wealthy priests and dating to the first century have been unearthed in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem. For example, the “Burnt House” of Katros, the high priest, which was destroyed during the First Jewish Revolt, was discovered in this area.

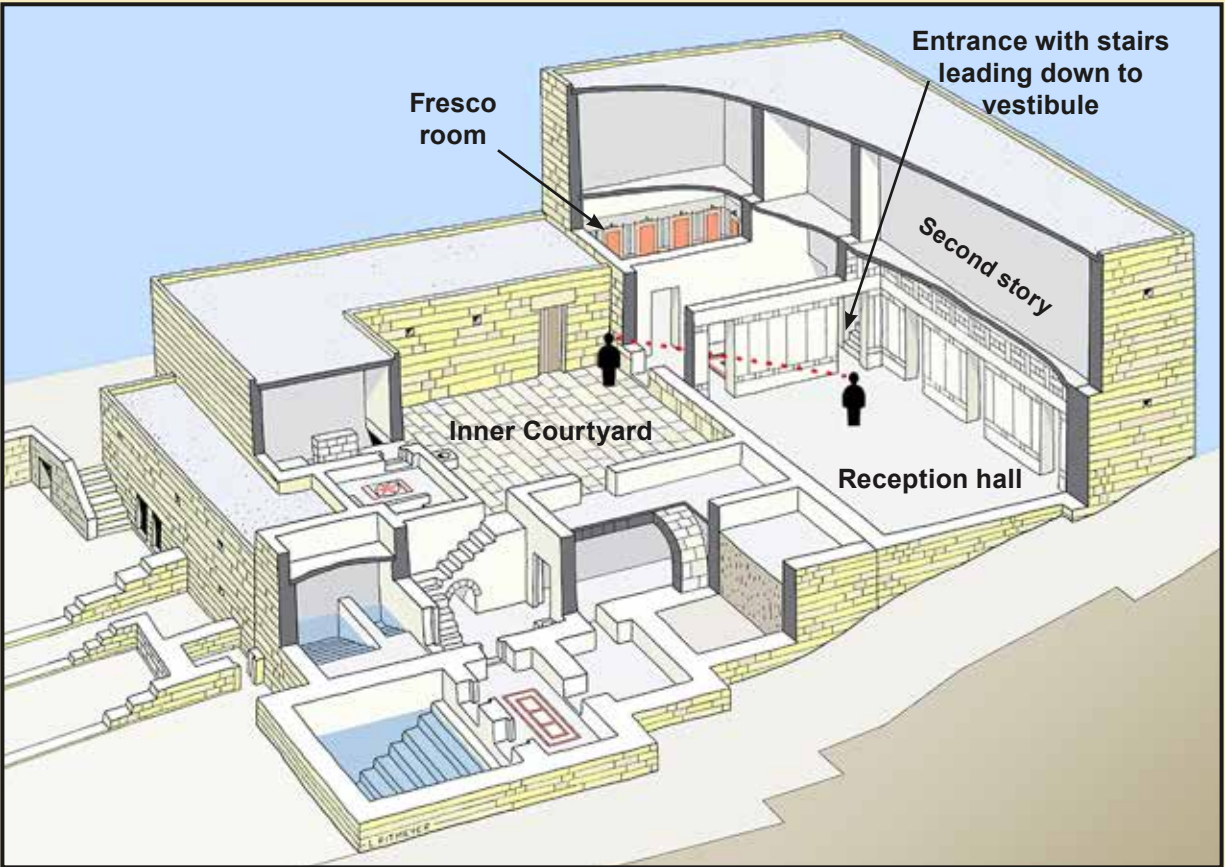
In the 1970s, renowned archaeological architect Leen Ritmeyer was part of a team that excavated a large palace near the Temple Mount in Jerusalem, known as the “Palatial Mansion.” He has identified it as the palace of Annas, who ruled as high priest from 6–15 AD.<sup>4</sup> After he was deposed, Annas continued to wield incredible power in Jerusalem behind the scenes while his sons and son-in-law, Caiaphas, served as High Priests, so it is not surprising that Jesus was taken first to him (Annas is even named a co-high priest in Luke 3:2). Ritmeyer has pointed out that the remains of the Palatial Mansion clearly housed priests, having four *mikva’ot* (ritual baths), the most found in any ancient dwelling in Israel. It is also near the Burnt House, which has been shown to belong to the priestly family of Katros, and is in the area where Josephus records that the palace of Annas was located. The remains of this palace display the wealth that Annas was known to have had, with mosaic floors and fresco-adorned walls. The mansion itself was arranged around a large, paved courtyard, with a reception hall just to the west of the courtyard. It is possible that Jesus was interrogated by Annas in the reception hall while

Peter warmed himself by the fire in the courtyard. Josephus records that the palace of Annas was burned in 70 AD (*War* 2.426). When the Palatial Mansion was excavated, there was evidence that the building had indeed been destroyed by fire.<sup>5</sup> Ritmeyer believes the evidence suggests this may be the place where Jesus was first interrogated before his sham trial with the Jewish leaders.



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**The entrance to the Grotto of Gethsemane**, an ancient cave near the foot of the Mount of Olives. It was excavated in 1955 following some flooding. This investigation revealed the original cave had several cisterns that collected water via a channel system, as well as an olive press on the east side of the cave. Sometime in the fourth century AD, the cave was transformed into a church and used for funerary purposes. The remains of 42 tombs from the Byzantine and Crusader periods were also found.



Leen Ritmeyer

**The Palatial Mansion, Jerusalem:** Tentatively identified as the House of Annas the High Priest, it is a 6500 sq ft dwelling dating to the Second Temple period, between the mid-sixth century BC and the destruction of the Temple by the Romans in 70 AD. The mansion is located in the Jewish Quarter of the Old City of Jerusalem and is now part of the Wohl Archaeological Museum. Excavated in the early 1970s under the late Prof. Nahman Avigad, it was later restored and is the largest of six residences that likely belonged to wealthy priestly families. Inside the dwelling was a large reception hall, as well as a courtyard. Interestingly, at the southwest corner of the courtyard near the exit, there is a direct line of vision to the center of the reception hall. In the below photo, Ritmeyer's daughter-in-law, Claire, stands where Peter may have stood in the corner of the courtyard, as viewed from the center of the Reception Room.



Leen Ritmeyer

*“Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The LORD turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the LORD had spoken to him: ‘Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times.’ And he went outside and wept bitterly.”*  
**Luke 22:60–62**

In a 2012 interview with The Gospel Coalition (TGC), renowned archaeological architect Leen Ritmeyer discussed his work reconstructing the large palace not far from the Temple Mount in Jerusalem. He noted that no other private residence of this size has been excavated anywhere in Israel. “There is no doubt that this Mansion was occupied by priests that served in the Temple, especially as it was located on the eastern slope of the Upper City just opposite the southwest corner of the Temple Mount.” It was only a short walk to the Royal Bridge whereby the priests crossed directly to the Temple platform. Ritmeyer points out, “These dwellings are the finest examples of Herodian architecture, with mosaic floors and walls decorated either with fresco or stucco. Its overall plan is centered round a paved courtyard.” The entrance was from the west, with steps down into a vestibule. The mosaic

floor, with a central rosette pattern, was found almost completely intact with the charred beams of the ceiling lying on top of it. From the vestibule a fresco room is on one side, with panels painted in red and yellow in the style of Pompeian frescoes. On the other side was the magnificent Reception Room. Proceeding straight, the visitor entered the courtyard, from where the rooms of the eastern wing could be reached. There were two mikvehs (ritual baths) that lay beneath the courtyard and a basement level which had two additional mikvehs (pictured above). Ritmeyer notes, “The second mikveh was much larger and had a vaulted ceiling. This mikveh is exceptional in that it had a double doorway and an entrance porch paved with mosaic. The mansion stands out in that it had four mikva’ which is quite unusual and has no parallel in any building in Jerusalem or in all of the Land of Israel.”





The Tower of David Museum

**Near the Tower of David Museum in Jerusalem** one can see the remains of Herod's palace, underneath an Ottoman-era prison called the "Kishle." Excavations have revealed massive walls from the Herodian period (the lowest part of the left wall in the photo), as well as an ancient drainage system that transported sewage from King Herod's palace outside the city walls. Scholars believe that the Roman governor, Pontius Pilate, used King Herod's former palace as the Praetorium and that it is where Jesus of Nazareth was interrogated. Praetorium is derived from the Latin word *praetor* (leader) and originally signified the general's tent within a Roman military encampment but also came to refer to the official residence of the Roman governor.



Ferrell Jenkins

**Remains of the Hidden Gate in Jerusalem National Park:** Excavations revealed that it was a monumental gateway with a paved courtyard and a raised platform. This gateway matches the description as the place in John 19:13 where Pontius Pilate likely presented Jesus to the crowd.

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*“From then on, Pilate tried to set Jesus free, but the Jews kept shouting, ‘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). It was the day of Preparation of Passover Week, about the sixth hour.”*

*John 19:12–16*

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## The Praetorium

After his trial before the Sanhedrin, Jesus was taken before Pontius Pilate at the “palace of the Roman governor” (Jn 18:28), which was one and the same as the Praetorium (Mk 15:16). A tradition stretching back to the medieval era has the Praetorium in the Antonia Fortress. Archaeologist Shimon Gibson has measured the base of the Antonia Fortress and argues that it is too small to have functioned as anything more than a Roman outpost and observation tower. It certainly wasn’t big enough to house the palace and administrative center of the Roman governor.<sup>6</sup> Today many scholars believe that Pontius Pilate resided in Herod’s old palace complex when he was in Jerusalem. Gibson states: “Today, a consensus of opinion exists among scholars that Herod’s palace on the west side of the city was the same as the Praetorium and that in its immediate vicinity Jesus was tried and condemned to death.”<sup>7</sup>

In 6 AD, King Herod’s son Archelaus was deposed by the Romans, who confiscated his possessions. Herod the Great’s palace then became the residence for the Roman governor whenever he visited Jerusalem. Evidence for this is found in the writings of Philo of Alexandria, who describes Herod’s palace as “the house of the governor,” and Josephus, who identifies the residence of Roman governors Cumanus (48–52 AD) and Florus (64–66 AD) with Herod’s palace.<sup>8</sup> John 18:33 tells us that Pilate’s private interrogation of Jesus occurred inside the palace: “Pilate then went back inside the palace, summoned Jesus and asked him, ‘Are you the king of the Jews?’”

Pontius Pilate also conducted a public hearing for Jesus’ case nearby. John 19:5, 9 describes Pilate going in and out of the Praetorium. John 19:13 further describes the place of this public hearing as an elevated platform (*gabbatha*) also called the stone pavement (*lithostrotos*) in which there was a judgment seat (*bema*) on which Pilate sat. In his book, *The Final Days of Jesus: The Archaeological Evidence*, Shimon Gibson describes the discovery of a monumental gateway with a large courtyard between the two fortification walls located along the western Old City wall which led directly into Herod’s palace. Known today as the “Hidden Gate,” at one time it likely functioned as Herod’s private



Carl Rasmussen, HolyLandPhotos.org



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**Top Right: Tomb of Annas.** Located south of Jerusalem is a place called Akeldama, where numerous first-century tombs have been carved from the rocks. The most magnificent one is the purported tomb of Annas the High Priest. It displays a large, ornate rosette pattern on the ceiling, one of the biggest ever discovered in Israel.

**Middle: A replica of the Pilate Stone,** on display at Caesarea Maritima (the original is in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem). It is inscribed with the phrase, “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.” While simply given the general term “governor” in the New Testament, scholars used to debate Pilate’s exact title, whether he was a prefect or a procurator. The Pilate Stone confirmed that he held the Roman title of prefect. This important archaeological artifact dates to the time Pilate lived, and confirms both his historicity and the fact that Caesarea Maritima was the administrative capital of the province at that time.

**Bottom Right: The ossuary of “Joseph, son of Caiaphas”** likely the Joseph Caiaphas who was the High Priest when Jesus was crucified. It was one of twelve ossuaries discovered in a first-century tomb in 1990, and is currently housed in the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.



Wikimedia Commons



entrance into the city and his residence. On the northern end of the courtyard there was a rocky outcrop, on top of which were the remains of a platform with stairs leading up to it.<sup>9</sup> The southern end of the courtyard had been paved at one time, with most of the paving stones robbed in the Byzantine period. The archaeological findings match the biblical description, and it is not difficult to imagine Pilate sitting on the judgment seat presenting Jesus to the crowd saying, “Behold, the man,” and hearing them cry in response, “Crucify him.”

## The Prosecutors

Further archaeological evidence has confirmed the historicity of key people who interrogated and prosecuted Jesus in the Passion Week narrative of the gospels. Leaving aside the plentiful historical evidence for Jesus of Nazareth outside of the Bible,<sup>10</sup> not only are Annas, Caiaphas, and Pilate known from other ancient writings, there is actual archaeological evidence for each as well.

**Annas** – Annas served as High Priest from 6–15 AD, and was later succeeded by his sons and son-in-law Caiaphas. As the patriarch of the family he continued to wield considerable power in the background, so it is not surprising that after his arrest, Jesus was led first to Annas to be interrogated (Jn 18:13). He is mentioned in the New Testament in other places as well (Lk 3:2; Jn 18:24; Acts 4:6). In addition to the Palatial Mansion that has been identified as the residence of Annas, the tomb of Annas the High Priest has been discovered and is further testimony to his wealth, as it is one of the most richly decorated tombs of the Second Temple period.<sup>11</sup>

**Caiaphas** – In 1990, a construction team that was building a water park in the Peace Forest near Jerusalem stumbled upon a first-century cave when their bulldozer plowed through the tomb’s roof. Archaeologists discovered a variety of ossuaries (bone boxes used in the first century), including an ornate one that was inscribed with the name “Joseph son of Caiaphas.” The ancient historian, Josephus, records that Caiaphas’ full name was Joseph Caiaphas. Inside were the bones of a 60-year-old man. Scholars are convinced that this is the ossuary of the high priest who played a prominent role in the trial of Jesus.<sup>12</sup>

**Pontius Pilate** – Pontius Pilate was the Roman governor of Judea and the man who eventually condemned Jesus to death by crucifixion (Jn 19:16). In 1961, Italian archaeologists discovered a stone inscription while excavating an amphitheater near Caesarea Maritima. The limestone block was part of a dedication to Tiberius Caesar from “Pontius Pilate, Prefect of Judea.” Though Pilate is named in numerous literary sources outside of the Bible (i.e. Josephus, Philo, and Tacitus) the “Pilate Stone” is the only known ancient archaeological evidence of Pontius Pilate.<sup>13</sup>

## Crucifixion

Crucifixion as a method of execution is well attested in the ancient world. It likely originated with the Assyrian practice of impaling, but was used systematically by the Persians in the sixth century BC, before being perfected by the Romans and used for 500 years.<sup>14</sup> Ancient historians such as Herodotus and Josephus both testify to the practice. Archaeologically, the most important



Carl Rasmussen, HolyLandPhotos.org

**A replica of the heel bone of Jehohanan, the crucified man,** on display in the Israel Museum. The heel bone dates to the first century AD. A 4.3 in nail can still be seen where it pierced the right heel bone of the victim. No nail marks were found on Jehohanan’s wrists or hands, indicating his arms were likely tied to the cross, as Romans sometimes did. This is in contrast to the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth, whose hands/wrists were nailed to the cross (Jn 20:25, 27), another method that Romans used.

piece of evidence for Roman crucifixion is the heel bone of a crucified man. In 1968, a construction crew with the Israel Ministry of Housing was working at an area in northeast Jerusalem when they accidentally dug up several tombs. Archaeologists who were called discovered numerous ossuaries, including one that contained the bones of an adult male who had been crucified. His name, Jehohanan (Yehohanan), was inscribed on the outside of the bone box, and his right heel bone still contained the rusted spike from his crucifixion. It seems the nail must have hit a knot in the wood of the cross and bent. It probably couldn’t be removed from the victim by his family without doing considerable damage to his foot, and so it was left in place. An analysis of the heel bone and nail reveal that Jehohanan had been crucified with a leg on either side of the cross and the nail driven in sideways through his heel.<sup>15</sup>

Another important piece of evidence for Roman crucifixion may be the famous and controversial Shroud of Turin. The Shroud is a linen burial cloth that bears the negative image of a crucified man. Some have suggested it is merely a medieval forgery; however, the Shroud continues to defy all explanations for how the image was made. For example, the body image is only located on a few of the top surface fibers, not on the whole threads, as would be expected if it had been painted.<sup>16</sup> Moreover, the infamous 1988 radiocarbon dating of a sample of the Shroud, which dated it to the Middle Ages, has been shown to have been taken from an area of the cloth that was repaired in the Middle Ages and contained cotton fibers found nowhere else on the Shroud, invalidating the results.<sup>17</sup> Other scientific studies on the Shroud of Turin suggest that it is an authentic burial cloth of a crucified victim. The absence of lignin, a chemical substance that disappears over time from linen, suggests the cloth is of ancient origin.<sup>18</sup> Residue from a rare type of limestone called aragonite, which is common around Jerusalem,

was discovered near the foot area of the image.<sup>19</sup> A recent study published in the scientific journal *PLOS One* analyzed the Shroud of Turin and discovered nanoparticles of blood, which are found in the blood of torture victims but are not typically found in a normal person.<sup>20</sup> The blood stains on the cloth match what we know about Roman crucifixion from the account of Jesus in the Bible: evidence of torture, nail holes in the hands and feet, and blood from a significant wound in the side. When all of the evidence is taken into consideration, it appears that the Shroud of Turin is an authentic burial shroud from a man who was crucified sometime in the Roman era.

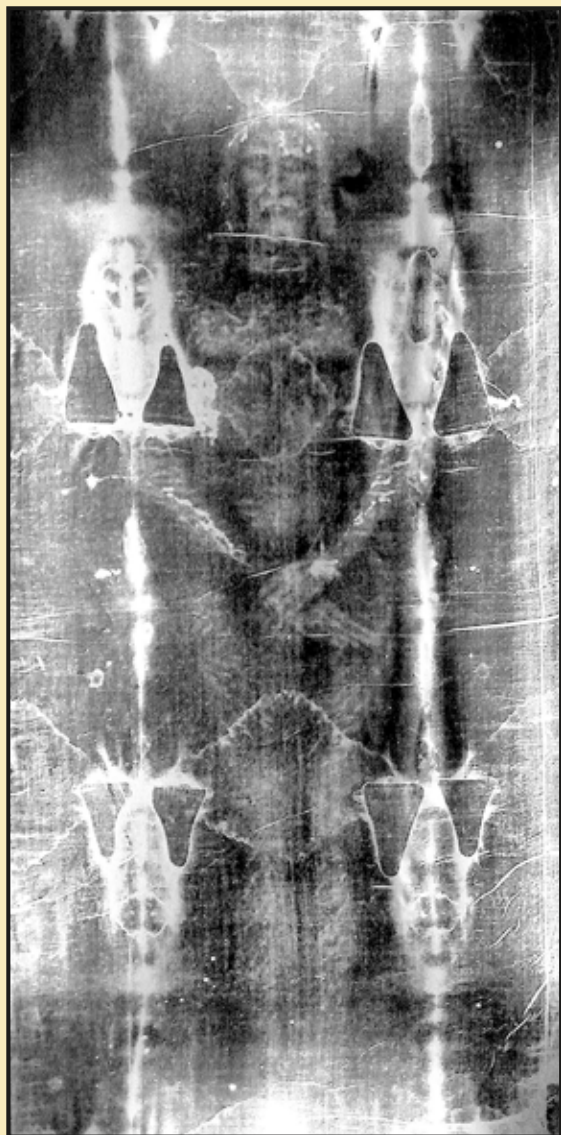
The gospel writers are unanimous that Jesus of Nazareth was executed by crucifixion (Mt 27:35; Mk 15:25; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:18). This fact is attested to by numerous ancient authors outside of the Bible, most notably by the Roman historian Tacitus (55–120 AD), who wrote: “Christus, from whom the name [Christians] had its

origin, suffered the extreme penalty during the reign of Tiberius at the hands of one of our procurators, Pontius Pilate.”<sup>21</sup> The Alexamenos graffito is further archaeological evidence for the early belief in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. In 1857, a structure called the *domus Gelotiana* was uncovered near the Palatine Hill in Rome, which had a piece of graffiti inscribed in the plaster on the wall in one of the rooms. It has been dated to 200 AD, and includes an image of a man with a donkey’s head on a cross and a person in front raising a hand. The inscription that accompanies it reads, “Alexamenos worships [his] god”<sup>22</sup> It appears to be a piece of graffiti intended to mock a Christian named Alexamenos. It may be the earliest depiction of Jesus on the cross, albeit a blasphemous one. It should be noted that both the Tacitus inscription and the Alexamenos graffito provide evidence from “hostile witnesses” for the crucifixion of Jesus of Nazareth.

## Golgotha

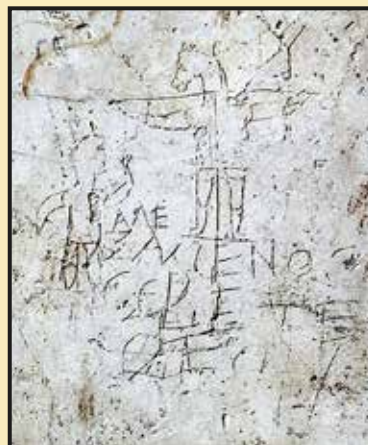
All four biographies of Jesus in the Bible record that Jesus was crucified at a place called Golgotha, which means “the place of the skull” (Mk 15:22; 27:33; Lk 23:33; Jn 19:17–18). John’s Gospel records that “At the place where Jesus was crucified (ie. Golgotha), there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb, in which no one had ever been laid” (19:41). This means that Golgotha was a large area that contained the execution site, the tomb, and a garden. Scripture describes the place of crucifixion as being near the city, where many read the charge that he was “Jesus of Nazareth King of the Jews” (Jn 19:19–20), and that it was “outside the city gate” (Heb 13:12). This makes sense historically, as Roman executions were intended to be a public exhibition to deter others. Thus, the place of execution was near a road, outside the city wall, near a gate, and in an area that included tombs and a garden.

Archaeologists generally agree that the real site of Golgotha is in the vicinity of the “Rock of Calvary” in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre (though probably not right on that spot, it being too small). Excavations in the area surrounding the Church of the Holy Sepulchre have revealed that it was an Iron Age quarry that had been carved out of the sloping hill (its jagged rock formations possibly resembling the shape of a skull to those in the first century). Furthermore, the area was outside of the ancient (first) city wall of Jerusalem nearby a road that led westward towards Emmaus. Remains of a city gate, likely the “Gennath” (Gardens) Gate referred to by Josephus, were also discovered nearby.<sup>23</sup>



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**The Shroud of Turin’s** provenance is unknown, although it is first mentioned in 1390 AD. Aside from a flawed C14 test on the cloth which has since been discredited, studies have shown that it is an ancient burial cloth from a tortured/crucified man which was exposed to elements (limestone residue and pollen) from the Jerusalem area.



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**The Alexmenos Graffito,** discovered carved in the wall plaster of one of the houses of Emperor Caligula’s palace. The date and location have led scholars to conclude it is likely a blasphemous caricature intended to mock a Christian Roman soldier whose name was Alexamenos. Tertullian (ca. 155–240 AD) records that Christians in his day were accused of worshipping an ass’s head.

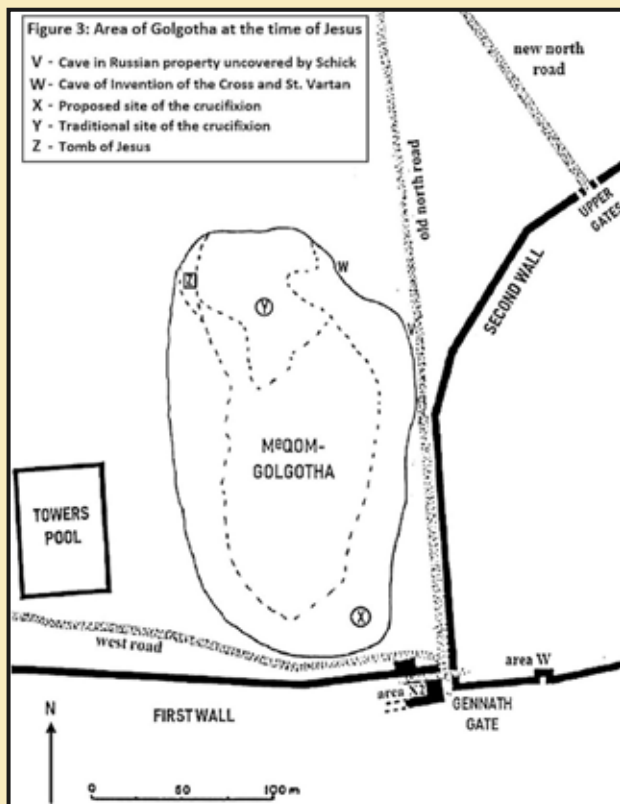


## The Tomb of Jesus

Unlike the Garden Tomb, which has no ancient testimony to its authenticity and was only proposed in the 19th century, the tomb of Jesus in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre has an abundance of evidence that leads many to believe that it is the actual location of the empty tomb. Both Jerome (395 AD)<sup>24</sup> and Eusebius (337–340 AD)<sup>25</sup> record that the Roman emperor Hadrian built a large platform over the tomb of Jesus and then placed a statue of Jupiter over the spot. When Constantine and his mother, Helena, dismantled the pagan shrine, a tomb was indeed found beneath it. They then built the original church on the site in 330 AD. Other first-century tombs are found within the church, confirming that the area was an ancient cemetery.<sup>26</sup> The tomb of Jesus and the burial bed are surrounded by a shrine, known as the Edicule. It was recently uncovered for the first time in almost 500 years for restoration and cleaning. The renovations to the Edicule included

*“People walking past would have almost unavoidably looked down into the area of Golgotha at the execution of the three men. It would have been a gruesome sight and a miserable shock to thousands of Passover pilgrims, who were streaming into the city.”*

Excerpt from Joan Taylor’s article, *“Golgotha: A Reconsideration of the Evidence for the Sites of Jesus’ Crucifixion and Burial”*. Available at [www.biblearchaeology.com](http://www.biblearchaeology.com)



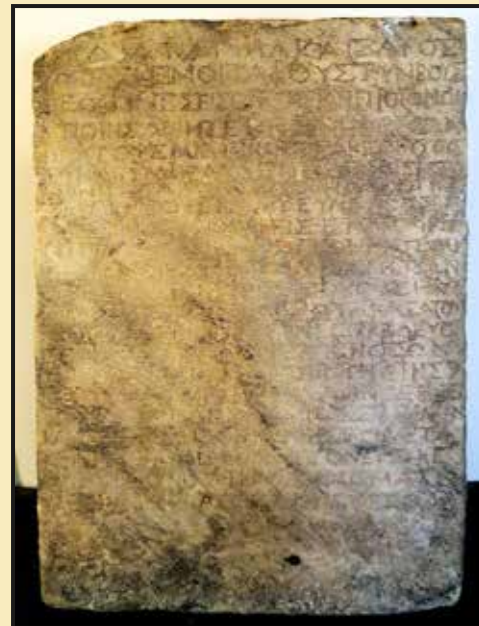
Joan Taylor, ABR

**An illustration of the area of Golgotha, or Calvary, at the time of Jesus.** Note that the location marked X satisfies all of the biblical criteria; being near a road, outside the city wall, near a gate, and in an area that included tombs and a garden. It is currently covered by the Church of the Holy Sepulchre.

the installation of a window that allows visitors to see the original stone walls of the tomb. In December 2017, results from tests done on mortar samples taken during the renovations were announced. They confirm the history of the site, with the mortar taken from between the limestone burial bed and the marble slab dating to the time of Constantine’s construction of the original shrine at the tomb.<sup>27</sup> The evidence clearly points to this being the likely location of the empty tomb of Jesus.

## The Nazareth Inscription

The Nazareth Inscription is a Greek inscription on a marble tablet measuring 24 in (61 cm) by 15 in (38 cm), which was first published in 1930. It is a decree of Caesar (known as an imperial rescript) dating to the reign of Claudius (41–54 AD), shortly after the death and resurrection of Jesus. In it a death penalty is imposed in Israel for anyone caught robbing bodies from tombs, and specifically “sepulcher sealing tombs,” such as the one Jesus was buried in. It is interesting that Caesar would feel the need to make such a pronouncement, since it was normal practice in antiquity for grave robbers to plunder tombs to steal the valuables, but rarely, if ever, the bodies. However, the Bible records that the Jewish leaders concocted and then deliberately spread the lie that Jesus’ disciples stole the body (Mt 28:13–15). This report no doubt reached the ears of the Roman emperor, who likely would have seen the new Christian sect as a dangerous, anti-Roman movement. Dr. Clyde Billington, associate professor of ancient history at Northwestern College, has studied the inscription and concludes: “The context of the Nazareth Inscription clearly proves that it was written for Jews and not Gentiles, and that it was almost certainly issued by Claudius in response to the story of the resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews.”<sup>28</sup>



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**The Nazareth Inscription** is a marble slab engraved with an edict outlawing the stealing of bodies from Jewish tombs. It dates from the reign of Claudius (42–54 AD). Many scholars believe its contents are best explained by the historical setting described in the Bible in response to the Jewish leaders who concocted a story that Jesus’ disciples had stolen his body. (Mt 28:13–15).



Carl Rasmussen, HolyLandPhotos.org

**The Edicule or Aedicula** (a small shrine usually in the shape of an architectural monument) surrounds the limestone remains of the purported tomb of Jesus. Ancient testimonies of this being the actual empty tomb stretch back almost two millennia. Recent tests have confirmed the written history of the location and the different periods of building on the site. Built in 1810, the Edicule has undergone recent restoration to prevent it from collapsing. In 2017 the steel girders which had surrounded it since 1947 were finally removed. The delicate renovation used the modern technology of laser scanners, drones and radar, and included cutting a small window for people to glimpse the ancient stone of the burial cave. While it does not look much like a tomb today, it is the best candidate as the actual tomb of Jesus.



**The cupola of the rotunda** was covered in scaffolding for decades as church custodians were at an impasse of how to restore it. The newly designed and restored dome was unveiled in 1997.



Public Domain

**The Rock of Cavalry**, Latin for “calva,” bald head or skull, is encased in glass inside the Church of the Holy Sepulchre. Archaeologists generally agree that Golgotha, the site of Jesus’ crucifixion, is in this vicinity but probably not this exact spot.

## Conclusion

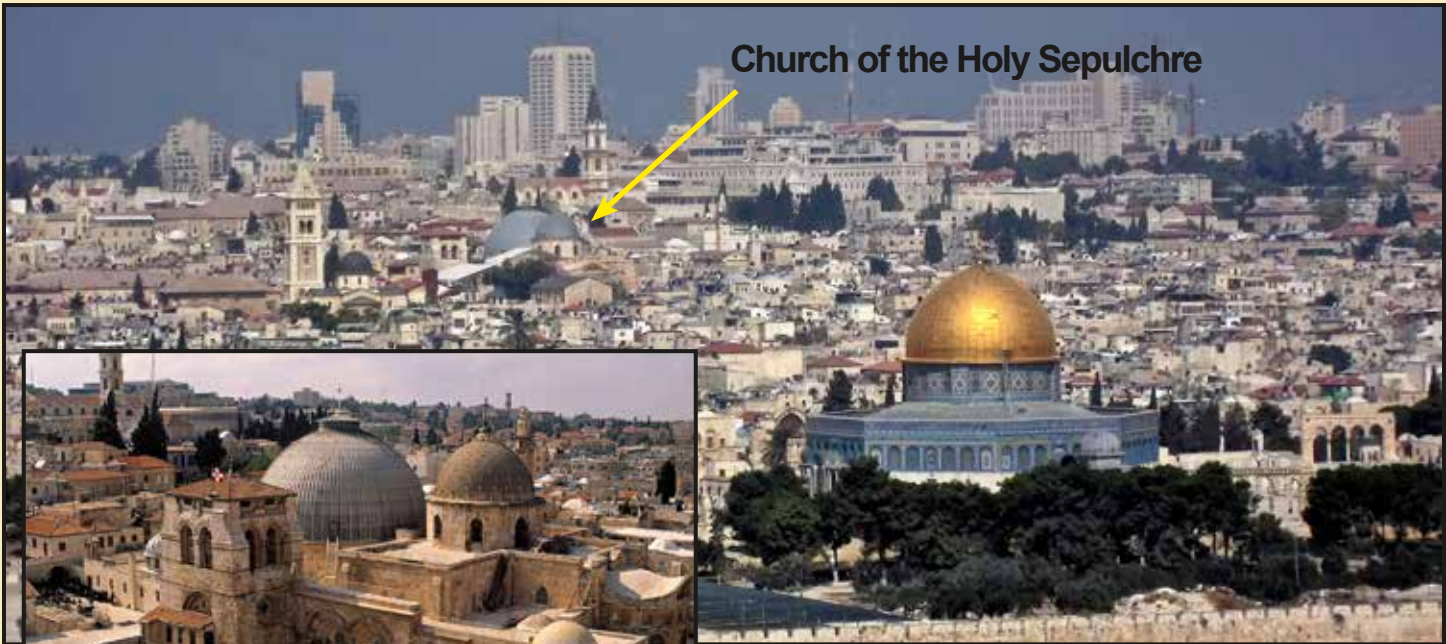
Of course, none of this *proves* that the tomb was empty (though I believe it was), or that Jesus of Nazareth actually rose from the dead (though I believe He did), or that the Bible is true (though I believe it is). Ultimately, those are matters of faith. My purpose has been to demonstrate that many details of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ described in Scripture have been confirmed by archaeology. This leads me to conclude that the Bible is historically accurate when it describes the events of what Christians call Passion Week. The early disciples, many of whom witnessed the death of Jesus of Nazareth firsthand, claimed to have seen him alive after his burial, and then, in many cases, paid for this belief with their lives. Yet they could not be swayed from their belief that Jesus had risen from the dead. They went throughout the world preaching the good news that forgiveness of sins was available in Jesus’ name (Acts 13:38), and that anyone who confessed Jesus as Lord and believed in his heart that God had raised Jesus from the dead would be saved (Rom 10:9). I believe the tomb is empty and that Jesus is alive...that is good news indeed!

*Endnotes for this article can be found at [www.BibleArchaeology.org](http://www.BibleArchaeology.org). Type “Endnotes” in the search box; next, click the “Bible and Spade Bibliographies and Endnotes” link; then page down to the article.*



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**Church of the Holy Sepulchre**



Gary Bembridge/Wikimedia Commons

**The Church of the Holy Sepulchre.** The background image shows the church in relation to the gold plated Dome of the Rock on the Temple Mount, a distance of less than 600 meters as the crow flies. In the first century AD the area of the church was a rocky rise just outside the city walls with a nearby stone quarry where tombs had been cut. The Romans destroyed Jerusalem in 70 AD and church historians record that Emperor Hadrian built a pagan temple over Jesus' tomb around 135 AD. When Emperor Constantine converted to Christianity he and his mother, Helena, pursued projects to venerate important sites. The pagan temple was dug out and an empty tomb was, indeed, found beneath it. Constantine erected church structures over the tomb and crucifixion site in 336 AD. The church was burned in 614 AD when Persians invaded Jerusalem, repaired again but then destroyed

by the Fatimid Caliphate in 1009. Forty years later, under an agreement with the caliph, Byzantine Emperor Monomachos funded a restoration. During the First Crusade (1095–1099), a siege recaptured Jerusalem and Crusaders built up the church with the lavish architectural elements of the Western cathedrals. In 1187 Sultan Saladin defeated the Crusaders and turned it into a mosque. It was returned to Christians and renovated by 1390. Throughout all of this, much of the Constantine era external masonry survived. In 1555, with Jerusalem under Ottoman rule, renovations were allowed and included a more substantial enshrinement of the tomb itself. The church has undergone a variety of expansions in different styles reflecting the communities which sponsored them. It is a fascinating complex of structures, including 30 chapels, mosaics, caves, a 13th-century bell tower, and underground tombs. Many features continue to change over time including damage and repair after a major fire in 1808, the 1927 earthquake and recent renovations to save the Edicule from collapsing. Throughout the centuries, no matter the condition or politics, Christians have continued their pilgrimage to this site in great numbers.

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