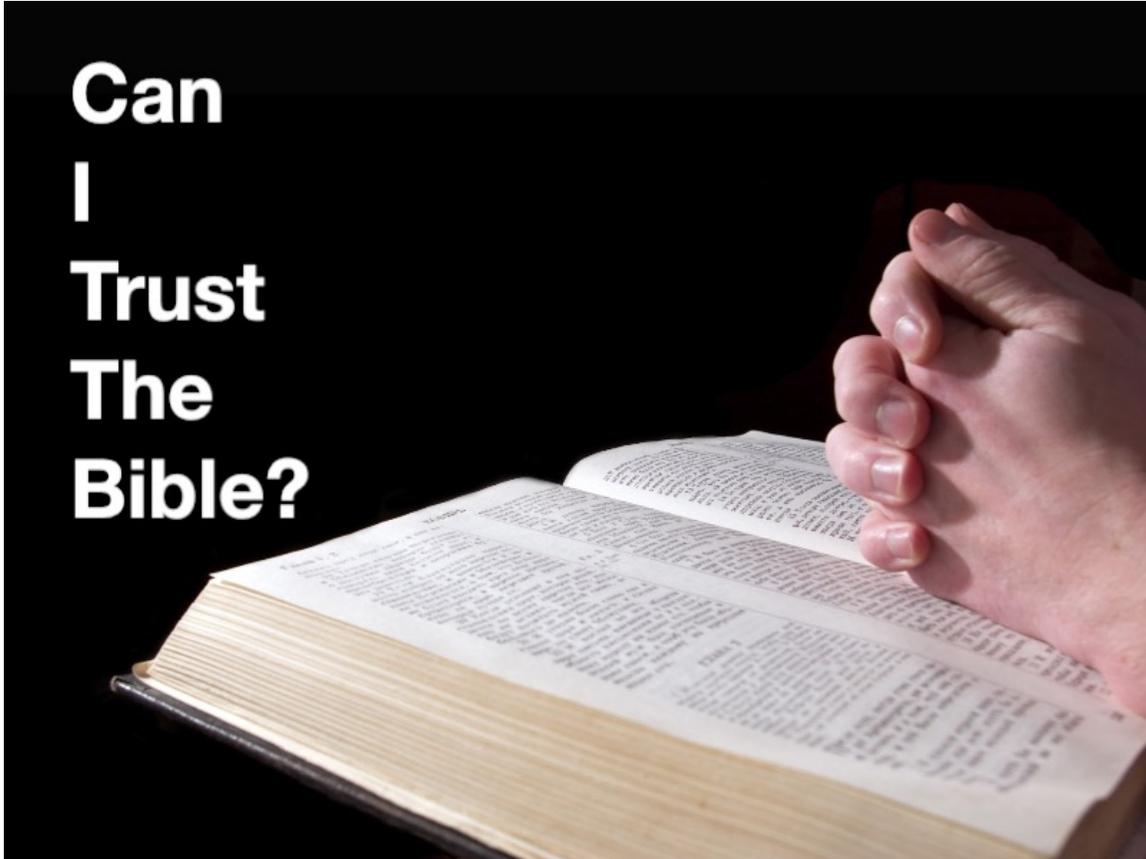


**Can  
I  
Trust  
The  
Bible?**



## Part 3

By

Mark McGee

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# Archaeology and the Bible

**Biblical archaeology** during the past 200 years has done much to bolster the claims of Christians through the centuries – the Bible can be trusted! Biblical archaeology is one of the major weapons God used in my life as an atheist and journalist. It's difficult to do honest research and not come to the conclusion that the Bible is what it claims to be – the Word of God.

Here are some of the archaeological findings that played a part in my believing in God and His Written Word.

## Noah's Ark and the Genesis Flood

Dr. Henry Morris introduced me to archaeological research to find Noah's Ark and prove that the Genesis Flood covered all of the earth thousands of years ago – just as the Bible claimed. We spent only a couple of hours together on my radio program, but Dr. Morris' introduction was profound and God used it to put a crack in my atheistic armor. Dr. Morris was visiting Tampa to share the plans of his new research organization, ICR (Institute for Creation Research), to lead an expedition to Mt. Ararat – located in Eastern Turkey near the borders of Armenia and Iran. Dr. Morris said one of the difficulties with the expedition would be that the Ark is encased in ice and snow ten months of the year – August and September being the only

months for expeditions. He told me about a November 13, 1948 about a Kurdish farmer finding Noah's Ark on top of Mt. Ararat a couple of months earlier. The farmer reportedly told people in nearby villages about finding a large ship in the ice and many of them climbed up to see for themselves.

Dr. John Morris, son of Dr. Henry Morris, has led expeditions in the past and wrote an historical background you may find interesting (<http://www.icr.org/article/noahs-ark-search-goes/>).

Another possible location was discovered in 1960 by a Turkish army captain who saw a boat-shaped form in an aerial photograph that was taken of an area near Mt. Ararat. That find led to many expeditions to determine if the form was Noah's Ark. The Turkish government eventually established "Noah's Ark National Park" near where the boat-shaped form is located. There is some dispute about the find based on the width of the form and other scientific concerns.

During our radio interview early in 1971, Dr. Henry Morris explained the science he used in supporting the Genesis Flood. Dr. Morris had written a book by that title with Dr. John C. Whitcomb just ten years before we met. Dr. Morris was a hydraulic engineer with a PhD from the University of Minnesota. Dr. Whitcomb studied geology and paleontology at Princeton University. Dr. Morris, who was head of the civil engineering program at Virginia Tech, and Dr. Whitcomb, who was a professor at Grace Theological Seminary, collaborated in the late 1950s to write *The Genesis Flood: The Biblical Record and its*

*Scientific Implications.* They wrote the book during a time when many Christian professors and leaders had accepted evolution as the method God had used to “create” the earth. Though I certainly was not convinced during my interview with Dr. Morris, I was impressed with his knowledge and confidence in his beliefs.

## The Dead Sea Scrolls

In 1947, Bedouin shepherds found several scrolls, fragments, broken pottery and jars in a cave overlooking the northwest end of the Dead Sea. Scholars in Jerusalem soon heard about the find, which led to more discoveries in several caves and a ruin in Qumran. Hundreds of documents were found, including those of the Hebrew Bible. What may have been most important about this find is that the Dead Sea Scrolls were at least a thousand years older than what had been the oldest known Hebrew copies of the Old Testament. Studies of the Dead Sea Scrolls have demonstrated how accurate the relatively newer copies are to the older ones – a unique demonstration of how God has protected His Word.

## The Hittites

Scholars ridiculed the Bible for claiming that the Hittite people existed (e.g. Ezra 9:1; Nehemiah 9:8). The laughing stopped in the late 19th century AD when archaeologists unearthed evidence of a once powerful civilization. The capital of the Hittite Empire, Hattusa, was

found in the Black Sea region of Turkey. Some of the earliest people who settled in the area were known as the Hatti people. It's believed that merchants from Assur in Assyria established a trading post in the area. The merchants used cuneiform writing to keep records of their business dealings. The Hittite kingdom grew in strength and influence during the 18th and 17th centuries BC and reached the height of its power in the 14th century BC under the leadership of King Suppiluliuma I. He became well known for his challenge to the Egyptians for controlling land between the Euphrates and the Mediterranean. The Hittite Empire eventually included most of Asia Minor and part of Upper Mesopotamia. Within a few centuries, the empire lost much of its power and became a series of independent city-states. The important point here is that the Hittites were a real people and only the Old Testament told the world of its existence until archaeologists uncovered the lost civilization.

## Walls of Jericho

Excavations of the site of Jericho were started during the 19th century AD, but the great discovery about the Walls of Jericho was made during the early part of the 20th century AD. British professor and archaeologist John Garstang excavated the area between 1930 and 1936 and found that the walls fell "outward" just as the Bible records in Joshua 6. Archaeologists have also discovered that the dating of the event coincides with the time Joshua led Israel across the Jordan River to conquer the kingdoms of Canaan.

## Solomon's Walls and Gates

*“And this is the reason for the labor force which King Solomon raised: to build the house of the LORD, his own house, the Millo, the wall of Jerusalem, Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer.” 1 Kings 9:15*

The walls and gates of Hazor, Megiddo and Gezer were discovered during 20th century AD archaeological digs. Though I learned about the finds at Hazor and Megiddo before becoming a Christian, the discovery in Gezer was made in the summer of 1971, just a couple of months after I was saved.

## Summation

I spent several months after meeting and interviewing Dr. Morris searching, researching and seeking answers to many questions before trusting Christ for my soul salvation. In the 45 years since that time I have not been disappointed by archaeological findings in placing my faith in the Lord for my soul and those of fellow believers. In fact, archaeology continues to add growing support for the ancient claims of the Word of God.

# Powerful Tool for Faith Defense

**Archaeology** has become a powerful tool for defending the New Testament. It was written during the 1st century AD and mentions many people, cities and events by name. Archaeologists have located many ancient findings of those people, cities and events, thus giving historical evidence to the accuracy of the ancient writings of the New Testament.

A major difference between Old Testament archaeology and New Testament archaeology is the time span and coverage area involved. The Old Testament was written over a period of about 1,000 years from most of the Middle East. The New Testament was written over a period of about 50 years from near the Mediterranean area. However, even though the time span and coverage area of the New Testament is relatively small, archaeologists have made many discoveries that support the historical information in those writings.

Before we look at individual archaeologists and their findings, let's look at the development of archaeology to see if it's a science we can trust. Atheists and agnostics sometimes raise the question of accuracy when it comes to archaeological discoveries concerning the Bible.

Archaeological findings prior to the 19th century AD were often treasure hunts. Explorers and amateur archaeologists visited ancient lands looking for spectacular items they could use for personal collections, to sell to wealthy collectors, or display for pay. Little thought was given to developing a systematic method for their searches, so they dug up large portions of ancient cities with no consideration to what they be might be destroying in the process.

**Napoleon Bonaparte** of France is credited with opening the door to modern archaeology in the Middle East. As he was fighting to expand his empire at the end of the 18th century, the young Bonaparte led his army into Egypt. He also brought more than 150 scientists and scholars with him to uncover the mysteries of Egypt. They were able to take some of what they found with them when they left Egypt in 1801. Their discoveries were released in a multi-volume set called *Description de l'Égypte, ou Recueil des observations et des recherches qui ont été faites en Égypte pendant l'expédition de l'armée française* (Description of Egypt, or the collection of observations and research which was made in Egypt during the expedition of the French Army). The work opened the door to future studies of Egypt (Egyptology).

Another important discovery by Napoleon's army was the **Rosetta Stone** in 1799. It was the first ancient bilingual text discovered in modern times. The stone contained writing in Demotic Script, Greek, and Egyptian Hieroglyphs about a priestly decree concerning a young Egyptian pharaoh. The French began the process of deciphering the

Rosetta stone, but the British army was able to get the stone from the French and took it to England where it remains to this day in the British Museum. Knowledge of ancient Greek and the Demotic text opened the way for scholars to study ancient Egyptian Hieroglyphs.

The combination of all those discoveries was the beginning of modern archaeology. More findings in Egypt and other areas of the Middle East opened the door to many ancient civilizations which had a history with Israel – a history detailed in the Bible. Some of the ancient areas studied by 19th century AD archaeologists (in addition to Egypt) included Nineveh, Babylon, Ur, and Jerusalem. Students of the Bible were able to compare historical facts listed in the Old Testament with the archaeological findings.

The science of archaeology developed further with the work of **Sir Flinders Petrie**. Petrie developed many scientific advances in archaeology during his years investigating prehistoric monuments in his homeland to the pyramids of Egypt. He understood the importance of careful surveying and digging and preserving artifacts. One of those artifacts, known as the Merneptah Stele, contains an inscription from Pharaoh Merneptah (reigned during the latter part of the 13th century BC) mentioning the people of Israel. The hieroglyphs about Israel use a sign for foreign people rather than a city-state. That fits with the history of Israel at that time according to the Bible. Israel did not have a king or capital until more than a hundred years after the inscriptions on the Merneptah Stele, so Egyptians would have seen them as nomadic tribes at that time (during the time of the

Judges).

Petrie turned the focus of his work to Palestine in the 1920s and became a permanent resident of Jerusalem after retiring from his professorship. His work inspired a new generation of archaeologists and led to many more innovations in the science of archaeology.

**Sir William Ramsay** was a contemporary of Petrie and became the leading authority on the history of Asia Minor and the New Testament during his lifetime. Ramsay was a professor at Oxford and Aberdeen and highly acclaimed for his contributions to archaeology and historical research. Sir Ramsay did much of his research in Greece and Turkey, which led him to archaeological findings that supported both the Book of Acts and the Pauline Epistles in the New Testament. Little was known about many of the cities mentioned by Luke and Paul, so Sir Ramsay believed his research would prove their writings as being inaccurate since Acts and the Pauline Epistles had been written centuries earlier.

In his book titled *The Bearing of Recent Discovery*, Ramsay wrote this about the Book of Acts – “I set out to look for truth on the borderland where Greece and Asia meet, and found it there. You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historian’s and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment.” Sir Ramsay also gave his support to the truthfulness of facts found in Paul’s Letters and concluding that Paul was the author. He also came

to believe that Luke, Acts and Paul's Letters were written during the 1st century AD instead of the mid-2nd century AD that was the prevalent belief of Ramsay's time.

Some of Ramsay's archaeological findings support the following claims of the New Testament:

- Roman censuses were held every 14 years beginning with Caesar Augustus in either 23-22 BC or 9-6 BC.
- Quirinius was governor of Syria about 7 BC and again in 6 AD.
- Iconium was a city of Phrygia.
- Lysanias was Tetrarch of Abilene between 14 and 29 AD.
- Erastus was the treasurer of Corinth during the 1st century AD.
- Civic assemblies in Ephesus did take place in a theater.
- Gallio was the Proconsul of Achaia.
- Publius was the chief man in Malta.
- Civil authorities were known as politarchs in Thessalonica.

Other archaeologists have also made discoveries that support the New Testament records, including:

- The Pavement (Gabbatha) where Pilate tried Jesus was found buried beneath a part of Jerusalem rebuilt by Emperor Hadrian.
- The Pool of Bethesda was located in the northeast quarter of old Jerusalem.
- Ossuary of Caiaphas
- House of David inscription
- Pontius Pilate inscription
- Ekron inscription and Mt. Ebal altar

## 1995 Internet Article

This is not the first time I've written about archaeology and its firm support of the Bible. I began speaking and writing about it within months of becoming a Christian. The many archaeological discoveries of the 19th and 20th centuries were important evidence that played a role in my faith in God. The Internet has given us an expanded opportunity to share about the trustworthiness of the Scriptures with the world. The first article I wrote on the Internet about archaeology and the Bible was in 1995. It was a compilation of what I had studied about archaeology and the Bible since becoming a Christian. Here's a shortened version.

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### ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE BIBLE

Archaeology is the study of material remains of past human life and activities. An archaeologist is the person who conducts the research of those material remains.

Here's what some of the great archaeologists and students of archaeology had to say about how material remains of past human life and activities affected the Bible.

- Nelson Glueck – “It may be stated categorically that no archaeological discovery has ever controverted a biblical reference.”
- William F. Albright – “There can be no doubt that archaeology has confirmed the substantial historicity of Old Testament traditions.”
- F.F. Bruce – “Where Luke has been suspected of inaccuracy, and accuracy has been vindicated by some inscriptional evidence, it may be legitimate to say archaeology has confirmed the New Testament record.”
- Merrill Unger – “Old Testament archaeology has rediscovered whole nations, resurrected important peoples, and in a most astonishing manner filled in historical gaps, adding immeasurably to the knowledge of biblical backgrounds.”
- Miller Burrows – “Archaeology has in many cases refuted the views of modern critics. It has shown in a number of instances that these views rest on false assumptions and unreal, artificial schemes of historical development ... The excessive skepticism of many liberal theologians stems not from a careful evaluation of the available data, but from an enormous predisposition against the supernatural.”

## Archaeology and the Old Testament

- Genesis derives the ancestry of Israel from Mesopotamia. Archaeology confirms it.
- Genesis 11:1 reads that “The whole earth was of one language and one speech.” God confounded the language in Genesis 11:9. Most philologists attest to the likelihood of such an origin for the world’s languages.
- In the genealogy of Esau, there is mention of the Horites (Gen. 36:20). Archaeology confirms the Horites were a prominent group of warriors living in the near East in Patriarchal times.
- The Bible claims the walls of Jericho fell outwards. Critics scoffed because “walls of cities do not fall outwards, they fall inwards.” Archaeology proved in the early 1930s that the walls of Jericho did fall outward, just as the Bible said.
- One critic said the Biblical record of the laver made of brass mirrors was not an original entry into the Priestly Code. So, he dated the writing of the Law at 500 B.C. However, archaeology has since found evidence of such bronze mirrors in what is known as the Empire Period of Egypt’s history (1500-1200 B.C.). That’s contemporary with Moses.
- A century ago such familiar Biblical cities as Jericho, Samaria, Bethel, Shiloh, Bethshan, Gezer, Nineven, Babylon, Ur and many others were shapeless mounds. Critics scoffed at the Biblical record. Within the last 100 years, all of these cities have been uncovered. The importance of the discoveries is that the

excavation has produced material which confirms the Scriptures point after point.

- Excavations are dated on the basis of levels at which things are found. At Tepe Gawra, a few miles north of Nineveh, a seal was found which depicted a man, a woman and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a serpent. Another seal depicted a man and a woman picking fruit from a tree. Behind the woman was a serpent standing erect. The seals were found in the level antedating 3000 B.C. It suggests that the story of the temptation in the Garden of Eden is very old. It was known about long before Abraham and Moses. It was not some Hebrew fairy tale.

These are but a few of hundreds of confirmations of the Old Testament from archaeology.

## Archaeology and the New Testament

1. Sir William Ramsay is regarded as one of the greatest archaeologists ever to have lived. He believed that the Book of Acts was a product of the mid-second century A.D. (150 A.D.). He set out to prove it. However, after thorough research, he changed his mind. He became a firm defender for the mid-first century authorship of Acts.
2. For many critics the account of the birth of Jesus was held as ridiculous. They argued that there was no census, that Quirinius was not Governor of Syria at that time and that everyone did

- not have to return to his ancestral home for a census. Archaeology has proven the critics wrong (again) —Critics said Acts was unreliable because Luke wrote that Lystra and Derbe were in Lycaonia and Iconium was not (Acts 14:6). However, in 1910, Sir William Ramsay found a monument that showed Iconium was a Phrygian city. Later discoveries confirmed that.
3. The Romans had a regular enrollment of taxpayers and held censuses every 14 years. The procedure was begun under Augustus.
  4. Quirinius was Governor of Syria about 7 B.C.
  5. A papyrus found in Egypt gives directions for the conduct of a census. Families were to return to their own governments to complete family registration of the enrollment and that the tilled lands might retain those belonging to them.
  6. In his letter to the Romans, Paul mentions the city treasurer, Erastus (Romans 16:23). The letter was written in Corinth. Excavations of Corinth in 1929 found this inscription on a pavement: “Erastus, curator of public buildings, laid this pavement at his own expense.” The pavement dates from the 1st century A.D.

Many critics have blasted the usage of certain words by Luke.

- Luke called rulers in Philippi “praetors.” Scholars argued that two “duumvirs” would have ruled the town. However, archaeology shows that the title of “praetor” was employed by the

magistrates of a Roman colony. Luke was right.

- Luke called civil authorities in Thessalonica “politarchs.” Critics said there was no such person. However, 19 inscriptions have been unearthed which use the title. Luke was right.
- Luke called Gallio “proconsul.” The Delphi inscription was unearthed which reads: “As Lucius Junius Gallio, my friend and the proconsul of Achaia.”

Sir William Ramsay wrote of Luke: “Luke is a historian of the first rank ... this author should be placed along with the very greatest of historians.”

The Bible is to be trusted as an authentic Book of antiquity. Archaeology supports and confirms facts as stated in the Bible.

Read “An Introduction to Bible Archaeology” by Howard F. Vos (1956, Moody Press, Chicago, Ill., 125 pages) for some excellent basics to an understanding of how archaeology confirms the claims of Scripture.

You will enjoy reading the following books if you want to go deeper into the study of Biblical Archaeology.

- “The Philistines and the Old Testament,” Edward Hindson, 1971, Baker Books
- “Archaeology and Bible History,” Joseph Free, 1956, Scripture Press
- “Archaeology and the Old Testament,” Merrill Unger, 1954,

### Zondervan Publishing

- “Highlights of Archaeology in Bible Lands,” Fred Wight, 1955, Moody Press
- “Out of the Earth,” E.M. Blaiklock, 1957, Eerdmans
- “Light from the Ancient Past,” J. Finegan, 1959, Princeton University Press
- “Excavations in Palestine,” F. Bliss and R.A.S. Macalister, 1902, Palestine Exploration Fund
- “The Old Testament in Modern Research,” H. Hahn, 1966, Fortress Press
- “Archaeology and the Religion of Israel,” W.F. Albright, 1942, John Hopkins Press
- “Archaeology and the Old Testament,” J. Thompson, 1957, Eerdmans
- “Documents from Old Testament Times,” D.W. Thomas, 1965, Harper & Row
- “Archaeology and the Ancient Testament,” J. Kelson, 1968, Zondervan
- “Biblical Archaeology,” G.E. Wright, 1960, Westminster

Two other excellent resource books for researching archaeological finds that support the Bible are: “Unger’s Bible Handbook” (1967, Moody Press) and “Eerdmans’ Handbook to the Bible” (1973, Eerdmans).

If you are interested in a more in-depth series of articles about archaeology and the Bible, please visit **FaithandSelfDefense.com** and search for *Convince Me There's A God – Archaeology*. The series on Old Testament archaeology includes almost 40 separate studies. The first part of the New Testament archaeology series is scheduled for publication in 2017.

In the next part of our current study we'll look at how our Bible became "our Bible" and why we can trust that what we hold in our hands is the complete Word of God.

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