

Lesson 13: Finding People in the Bible Outside the Bible

The final lesson of the regular segment classes ends with a review by looking at people named in the Bible where archaeology has found some mention of them in discovered artifacts. It is the articles in **Bible Archaeology Review** March/April 2014 Volume 40 Number 2 and **Biblical Archaeology Review** September/October 2017 Volume 43 Number 5 by Lawrence Mykytiuk. He is an Associate Professor of Library Science and the History, American Studies, Classical Studies and Bible librarian at Purdue University.

How many people in the Hebrew Bible have been confirmed archaeologically? The startling answer is at least 50! Let's start with the Hebrew kings. According to the Bible, David ruled in the tenth century B.C.E., using the traditional chronology. Until 1993, however, the personal name David had never appeared in the archaeological record, let alone a reference to King David. That led some scholars to doubt his very existence. According to this speculation David was either a shadowy, perhaps mythical, ancestor or a literary creation of later Biblical authors and editors. In 1993, however, the now-famous Tel Dan inscription was found in an excavation led by Avraham Biran. Actually, it was the team's surveyor, Gila Cook, who noticed the inscription on a basalt stone in secondary use in the lower part of a wall. Written in ninth-century B.C.E. Aramaic, it was part of a victory stele commissioned by a non-Israelite king mentioning his victory over "the king of Israel" and the "House of David."

According to the Bible, this eighth-century B.C.E. king of Judah "did what was right in the sight of the Lord just as his ancestor David had done" (2 Kings 18:3; 2 Chronicles 29:2). Among other things, he is credited today with building the tunnel still called Hezekiah's Tunnel to supply water to Jerusalem, enabling the city to withstand the siege of the Assyrian ruler Sennacherib. Jerusalem did not fall, but Judah thereafter became a vassal of the Assyrian king. Like David, Hezekiah is mentioned not in a royal inscription of his own, but in one written by an enemy. Hezekiah is recorded in a cuneiform inscription known as Sennacherib's prism. Sennacherib there claims to have shut up Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage," but he does not claim to have conquered Jerusalem. In addition to David and Hezekiah, four other kings of Judah (Uzziah, Ahaz, Manasseh and Jehoiachin) have been confirmed archaeologically. This is likewise true of the kings of the northern kingdom of Israel. Eight of them are mentioned in inscriptions. They include Ahab, who angrily called the prophet Elijah "Thou troubler of Israel" (1 Kings 18:17). Other kings of Israel who have been confirmed archaeologically are Omri, Jehu, Joash (short for Jehoash), Jeroboam II, Menahem, Pekah and Hoshea.

The Assyrian monarch Sennacherib is confirmed. Adrammelech, son of Sennacherib, slew his father (2 Kings 19:37; Isaiah 37:38), then fled. His brother Esarhaddon became king. We also know Adrammelech from a cuneiform inscription. We have inscriptions referring to Tiglath-pileser III, Shalmaneser V, Sargon II and Esarhaddon, all of whom are mentioned in the Bible. Best known of the Babylonian kings is Nebuchadnezzar (actually Nebuchadnezzar II). It was he who destroyed Solomon's Temple in 586 B.C.E. and exiled the Jews to Babylonia. Other Babylonian monarchs are Merodach-baladan II, Evil-merodach and Belshazzar featured in the Book of Daniel. The Babylonian empire gave way in the sixth century B.C.E. to that of the Persians. They were not exactly nice guys, but Cyrus II (Cyrus the Great) did issue his famous decree allowing the Jews to return to Jerusalem from their exile. Besides Cyrus the Great, four other well-known Persian monarchs mentioned in the Bible have been confirmed archaeologically: Darius I, Xerxes, Artaxerxes I and Darius II. Xerxes plays an especially prominent role in the Book of Esther where he is called Ahasuerus.

A pharaoh during Solomon's reign is identified, Sheshonq I, called Shishak who cut a swath through Judah, ultimately attacking Jerusalem, according to the Bible. Accounts of his campaign also survive in hieroglyphics. Other pharaohs mentioned in the Bible and in hieroglyphic inscriptions are Osorkon IV, whose name was abbreviated as So, Necho II and Hophra, whose name is also rendered as Apries. One of the Cushite/Nubian rulers of Egypt and Cush was Taharqa, called Tirhakah in the Bible.

A king of Moab has become famous not so much because he is mentioned by name in the Bible (only once), but primarily because the episode recounted from the Israelite point of view in the Bible is recorded as the Moabites saw it in the famous Mesha Stele. The Bible records how Israel's king Omri conquered Moab, while the Mesha Stele, a 3-foot-high black basalt stone that displays about 34 lines of writing, recounts how the Moabite king Mesha liberated Moab from the Israelites.

For Judah two names appear in the bulla of Gemariah, the son of Shaphan. This father and son show up in Jeremiah 36:10, 11, and the father is almost certainly the scribe in 2 Kings 22:3, etc. Other officials (Hilkiah, Azariah, Jehucal and Gedaliah ben Pashur) are also named both in the Bible and in the City of David bullae discovered as recently as 1982, 2005 and 2008.

For a collection of writings usually seen as religious, the New Testament mentions a surprising number of political figures, in connection with court trials, dates of important events and even political murders. In order to understand who the political figures were in the New Testament, we must have a basic grasp of one particular family of rulers—the Herodian family, which was nestled under the wing of the Roman Empire and protected by its military might and served as its regional surrogates. This family consisted of Herod the Great (r. 47–4 B.C.E., initially ruling Galilee only and later all of Roman Palestine) and his descendants (some also had Herod as part of their name). Charts of the family tree of Herod the Great can list up to 80 people.

A number of Roman officials, including the notorious Pontius Pilate, are also confirmed by archaeology.

Quirinius, a Roman legate in Syria-Cilicia (Luke 2:2) who acted as “troubleshooter,” is referred to in the Lapis Venetus, a stone inscription in Latin that describes a census that he ordered in a Syrian city. Apparently he did not have the luxury of issuing any coins. After the disastrous rule of Herod Archelaus inflamed Palestine with anti-Roman sentiment, Quirinius was sent to dispose of Archelaus's property, restore order, assure the populace of better treatment and prepare the way for Roman governors. That succession of Roman governors eventually included Pontius Pilate. Pontius Pilate, the Roman prefect of Judea during the trial and execution of Jesus, is named in a building dedication on the “Pilate Stone” discovered in 1961 in the theater or arena of the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima, on Israel's northern seacoast.

Bible People Confirmed in Authentic Inscriptions

NAME	WHO WAS HE?	WHEN HE REIGNED OR FLOURISHED B.C.E.	WHERE IN THE BIBLE?	
EGYPT				
1	Shishak (= Shoshenq I)	pharaoh	945–924	1 Kings 11:40, etc.
2	So (= Osorkon IV)	pharaoh	730–715	2 Kings 17:4
3	Tirhakah (= Taharqa)	pharaoh	690–664	2 Kings 19:9, etc.
4	Necho II (= Neco II)	pharaoh	610–595	2 Chronicles 35:20, etc.
5	Hophra (= Apries)	pharaoh	589–570	Jeremiah 44:30
MOAB				
6	Mesha	king	early to mid-ninth century	2 Kings 3:4–27
ARAM-DAMASCUS				
7	Hadadezer	king	early ninth century to 844/842	1 Kings 11:23, etc.
8	Ben-hadad, son of Hadadezer	king	844/842	2 Kings 6:24, etc.
9	Hazael	king	844/842–c. 800	1 Kings 19:15, etc.
10	Ben-hadad, son of Hazael	king	early eighth century	2 Kings 13:3, etc.
11	Rezin	king	mid-eighth century to 732	2 Kings 15:37, etc.
NORTHERN KINGDOM OF ISRAEL				
12	Omri	king	884–873	1 Kings 16:16, etc.
13	Ahab	king	873–852	1 Kings 16:28, etc.
14	Jehu	king	842/841–815/814	1 Kings 19:16, etc.
15	Joash (= Jehoash)	king	805–790	2 Kings 13:9, etc.
16	Jeroboam II	king	790–750/749	2 Kings 13:13, etc.
17	Menahem	king	749–738	2 Kings 15:14, etc.
18	Pekah	king	750(?)–732/731	2 Kings 15:25, etc.
19	Hoshea	king	732/731–722	2 Kings 15:30, etc.
20	Sanballat “I”	governor of Samaria under Persian rule	c. mid-fifth century	Nehemiah 2:10, etc.
SOUTHERN KINGDOM OF JUDAH				
21	David	king	c. 1010–970	1 Samuel 16:13, etc.
22	Uzziah (= Azariah)	king	788/787–736/735	2 Kings 14:21, etc.
23	Ahaz (= Jehoahaz)	king	742/741–726	2 Kings 15:38, etc.
24	Hezekiah	king	726–697/696	2 Kings 16:20, etc.
25	Manasseh	king	697/696–642/641	2 Kings 20:21, etc.

When in History?





New Testament Political Figures Confirmed by Historical Texts and Archaeology

NAME	WHO WAS HE OR SHE?	WHEN DID HE RULE?	WHERE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?	SAMPLE OF EVIDENCE IN HISTORICAL WRITINGS	EVIDENCE IN INSCRIPTIONS	
ROMAN EMPERORS						
1	Augustus	Roman Emperor	31 B.C.E.–14 C.E.	Luke 2:1	Numerous	Numerous
2	Tiberius	Roman Emperor	14–37 C.E.	Luke 3:1	Numerous	Numerous
3	Claudius	Roman Emperor	41–54 C.E.	Acts 11:28; 18:2	Numerous	Numerous
4	Nero	Roman Emperor	54–68 C.E.	Acts 25–26; 28:19	Numerous	Numerous
HERODIAN FAMILY						
5	Herod I, the Great	Rome's King of the Jews over all of Palestine.	37–4 B.C.E.	Matthew 2:1; Luke 1:5	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
6	Herod Archelaus	Oldest son of Herod the Great. Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea.	4 B.C.E.–6 C.E.	Matthew 2:22	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
7	Herod Antipas	Son of Herod the Great; second husband of Herodias. Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Transjordan). He ordered the execution of John the Baptist.	4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.	Luke 3:1; 13:31–32; 23:7–12; Mark 6:14; 6:16–28; 8:15	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
8	Herod Philip	Son of Herod the Great but not a ruler; Herodias's uncle and first husband; father of their daughter Salome.		Matthew 14:3–4; Mark 6:17–18; Luke 3:19	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)
9	Herodias	Granddaughter of Herod the Great; niece and wife of Herod Philip, mother of his daughter Salome; then Herod Antipas's wife. She brought about the order to execute John the Baptist.		Matthew 14:2–11; Mark 6:17–28; Luke 3:19–20	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because she was not a ruler)
10	Salome	Herodias's daughter. Her dance led to the execution of John the Baptist. Grandniece and later wife of Philip the Tetrarch.		Matthew 14:3–12; Mark 6:17–29	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins of her second husband, Aristobulus, king of Chalcis
11	Philip the Tetrarch	Son of Herod the Great. Tetrarch of Trachonitis, Iturea and other northern portions of Palestine. Eventually husband of his grandniece Salome.	4 B.C.E.–34 C.E.	Luke 3:1	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
12	Herod Agrippa I	Grandson of Herod the Great; brother of Herodias. King of Trachonitis, Batanea, gradually all of Palestine. Executed James the son of Zebedee and imprisoned Peter.	37–44 C.E.	Acts 12:1–6, 18–23	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins

NAME	WHO WAS HE OR SHE?	WHEN DID HE RULE?	WHERE IN THE NEW TESTAMENT?	SAMPLE OF EVIDENCE IN HISTORICAL WRITINGS	EVIDENCE IN INSCRIPTIONS
13 Herod Agrippa II	Son of Herod Agrippa I. Initially Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, then also over parts of Galilee and Perea, Chalcis and northern territories. Festus appointed him to hear Paul's defense.	50–c. 93 C.E.	Acts 25:13–26:32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
14 Berenice/ Bernice	Sister and companion of Herod Agrippa II, rumored lovers. Attended Paul's trial before Festus.		Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Inscription of King Herod Agrippa II in Beirut
15 Drusilla	Sister of Herodias and Herod Agrippa I; Jewish wife of Roman governor Felix.		Acts 24:24	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	(No coins; not a ruler)
ROMAN LEGATE AND GOVERNORS					
16 Publius Sulpicius Quirinius (= Cyrenius)	Roman imperial legate brought in to govern Syria-Cilicia after Herod Archelaus's rule led to rebellion.	6–9 C.E. and possibly earlier	Luke 2:2	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	The Lapis Venetus inscription discovered in Beirut
17 Pontius Pilate	Roman prefect of Judea who conducted Jesus' trial and ordered his crucifixion.	26–36 C.E.	Matthew 27:11–26; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 3:1; 23:1–24; John 18:28–19:22	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i> ; Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> ; Philo, <i>De Legatione ad Gaium</i>	Pilate Stone discovered at Caesarea Maritima; coins
18 Lucius Junius Gallio	Roman proconsul of Achaia who convened and dismissed the trial of Paul in Corinth.	c. 51–55 C.E.	Acts 18:12–17	Seneca, <i>Letters</i> ; Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	Stone inscription discovered in Delphi, Greece
19 Marcus Antonius Felix	Roman procurator of Judea who held initial hearings in the trial of the apostle Paul.	52–c. 59 C.E.	Acts 23; 24	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
20 Porcius Festus	Roman procurator of Judea who conducted a hearing in the trial of Paul, during which Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome.	59–62 C.E.	Acts 24:27–25:27; 26:24–32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Coins
INDEPENDENT POLITICAL FIGURES					
21 Aretas IV	Arabian king of Nabatea. Father of Herod Antipas's first wife, before Herodias.	9 B.C.E.–40 C.E.	2 Corinthians 11:32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Inscriptions at Petra, etc.; coins
22 The unnamed Egyptian leader	His Jerusalem-area insurrection was suppressed by Roman procurator Felix.		Acts 21:38	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)
23 Judas of Galilee	Led a rebellion against the census of Roman imperial legate Quirinius.		Acts 5:37	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)