

## **Foundations 104 – Did It Really Happen? Archaeology and the Bible**

**September 9, 2026**

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We've spent this series looking at the text of Scripture – how it was preserved, how it was recognized, and how old errors keep resurfacing wearing new clothes.

But today we're going to venture into the realm of archeology and address some pretty aggressive claims that have been made over the years.

**Does the physical evidence in the ground actually back up what the Bible claims happened?**

For over a century, critics said no. Confidently. You can see this in the articles that were written.

**Then the ground started crying out.**

### **Case One: The Hittites**

Open your Bible to Genesis, and you'll find the Hittites mentioned by name – dozens of times, all the way from Abraham to David to Solomon.

**For most of the 19th century, skeptics said this was a problem.**

No Hittite records existed anywhere outside the Bible. No Egyptian source mentioned them. No Greek historian mentioned them. One prominent scholar wrote that “the numerous references in the Bible to this mysterious people were unconfirmed by any other historical authorities” – and used that silence as proof the Bible itself couldn't be trusted.

**Then, in 1906, German archaeologist Hugo Winckler began digging at a site called Boğazköy, in modern Turkey.**

What he found was staggering.

**The capital city of an entire empire.**

Massive fortifications. Palaces. Temples.

**And over 10,000 clay tablets** – treaties, laws, royal correspondence – an entire civilization's paper trail, buried and forgotten for three thousand years.

The Hittites weren't a minor tribe the Bible had exaggerated.

**They were a genuine empire, powerful enough to rival Egypt and Assyria, exactly as Scripture had always said.**

The skeptics weren't slightly wrong.

**They were completely wrong, and the evidence that proved it had been sitting in the ground the entire time.**

### **Case Two: Belshazzar**

The book of Daniel names Belshazzar as king of Babylon on the night the city fell to Persia. (Daniel 5)

**For over a century, this was considered one of the clearest historical errors in the entire Bible.**

Every ancient historian available – Herodotus, Josephus, the Babylonian records themselves – agreed that the last king of Babylon was a man named Nabonidus.

### **Not Belshazzar.**

No one had ever heard of a King Belshazzar outside the pages of Daniel.

Critics used this single detail to argue that the entire book was written centuries later by someone who didn't actually understand Babylonian history.

**Then, in 1854, a British archaeologist named J.G. Taylor was excavating ruins near Ur, and uncovered a clay cylinder.**

Inscribed on it was a prayer from King Nabonidus – for his son.

**Guess what his son's name was... Belshazzar.**

Further discoveries filled in the rest of the picture. Nabonidus had spent years away from Babylon, and while he was gone, he left his son Belshazzar ruling in his place as co-regent – the actual, functioning king in the city, even though Nabonidus technically still held the throne.

**That single detail even explains something in Daniel that used to seem like a strange, minor error.**

When Daniel interprets the writing on the wall, Belshazzar offers to make him **“third ruler in the kingdom.”** (Daniel 5: 7)

**Not second. Third.**

Skeptics used to wonder why. Now we know exactly why.

**Nabonidus was first. Belshazzar, his son and co-regent, was second. Third was the highest position Belshazzar actually had the authority to give.**

Daniel didn't get a detail wrong.

**Daniel knew something about the Babylonian court that nobody outside of Babylon would have known – unless he was actually there.**

### **Case Three: Pontius Pilate**

Now we venture from the Old Testament into the New Testament period.

#### **Pilate – the man who sentenced Jesus to death to appease the people.**

For a long time, the only sources for Pontius Pilate's existence were the Gospels themselves, a few passing mentions in Josephus, and a brief, hostile reference from the Roman historian Tacitus.

#### **No direct, physical, contemporary evidence existed.**

Some scholars questioned whether the Gospel writers had gotten his title, or even his historical reality, right.

#### **Then, in June 1961, Italian archaeologists excavating a Roman theater in Caesarea Maritima found a block of limestone repurposed as a stair step.**

Carved into it, in Latin, partially damaged but unmistakably legible:

#### **“Pontius Pilate... Prefect of Judea.”**

This is the only known inscription of Pontius Pilate's name from his own lifetime, carved by people who lived under his own government.

#### **It didn't just confirm he existed.**

It confirmed his exact title – Prefect, precisely matching how the Gospels describe his role.

### **Case Four: The Garden**

This last one is so recent it's still developing as I write this.

The Gospel of John records a small, easy-to-miss detail about the location of Jesus's burial:

#### **“Now in the place where He was crucified there was a garden, and in the garden a new tomb in which no one had yet been laid.” (John 19: 41)**

A garden. Right there, next to the crucifixion site.

Since 2022, archaeologist Francesca Stasolla and a team from Rome's Sapienza University have been excavating beneath the floor of the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem – the site long held by Christian tradition to be the location of both the crucifixion and the tomb.

#### **Their preliminary report, published in 2025, confirmed something remarkable.**

Beneath the church floor, researchers found ancient pollen, seeds, and grapevine wood – physical botanical evidence, dated to the pre-Christian era, of an actual cultivated garden with olive trees and grapevines, sitting directly beneath one of the holiest sites in Christianity.

Stasolla herself connected the discovery directly to the text:

**“The Gospel mentions a green area between Calvary and the tomb, and we identified these cultivated fields.”**

This doesn’t prove the resurrection. No shovel ever could.

**But it means that a small, seemingly unimportant detail – one Gospel writer’s passing mention of a garden – turns out to match what was actually growing in that exact spot two thousand years ago.**

It’s the kind of detail nobody bothers inventing.

**It’s the kind of detail only someone who was actually there would think to include.**

### **A Pattern Worth Noticing**

Look at what these cases have in common.

**In every single case, skeptics didn’t just doubt the Bible.**

They pointed to a specific, confident absence of outside evidence – and used that absence to declare the Bible historically unreliable.

**In every single case, further digging reversed the verdict completely.**

Think about that, because it tells you something about how confident skepticism can sound right up until the moment the evidence catches up.

**“No evidence exists” is not the same thing as “this didn’t happen.”**

It just means the evidence hasn’t been found yet.

The physician and historian Luke opens his Gospel with something that sounds remarkably like a modern historian’s methodology statement:

**“Having investigated everything carefully from the beginning, I too have decided to write it out for you in consecutive order... so that you may know the exact truth about the things you have been taught.”** (Luke 1: 3-4, LSB)

**Investigated. Carefully. From the beginning.**

Luke wasn’t writing devotional poetry.

**He was making a historical claim, and inviting his readers to check it.**

That’s the same spirit this whole Foundations series has been built on.

### **What This Doesn’t Prove – and What It Does**

I want to be honest with you here, the way I’ve tried to be throughout this whole series.

**Archaeology cannot prove the resurrection. It cannot prove Jesus is the Son of God. It cannot prove your sins are forgiven.**

Those are matters of faith, not excavation.

**But archaeology can, and repeatedly does, confirm that the Bible's authors were describing a real world with real people, real politics, and real historical detail – not inventing a myth from nothing, centuries after the fact.**

Every time a skeptic's confident "this never happened" gets overturned by a shovel and a clay tablet, it should make us a little slower to assume the next confident claim is automatically right either.

**The ground has a way of eventually telling the truth.**

### **The Stones Cry Out**

There's a phrase in Luke's Gospel that I've always marveled at.

When Jesus rode into Jerusalem and the crowds erupted in praise, the Pharisees demanded He quiet them down.

**"But Jesus answered, 'I tell you, if these become silent, the stones will cry out!'"** (Luke 19: 40, LSB)

Jesus wasn't talking about archaeology when He said that. He was talking about worship – that praise for the true King was so fitting, creation itself would take up the shout if His people fell silent.

But I can't help noticing the resonance.

**Four times in this article, human skepticism tried to silence what the Bible said actually happened.**

And four times, quite literally, **the stones cried out anyway** – a clay cylinder from Ur, a limestone block from a Roman theater, a buried capital city in Turkey and a garden underneath a holy site, each one speaking up long after the people who lived those events had died.

I'm not claiming Jesus was predicting archaeology. He wasn't.

But I do think it's a fitting picture.

When we try to silence what's true – whether through doubt, dismissal, or simple neglect – the truth has a way of finding another voice to carry it. Sometimes that voice comes from the ground itself.

**Be a Berean. Go look at the tablets, the cylinders, the stone. They're still there.**

## For Further Study

The Associates for Biblical Research ([biblearchaeology.org](http://biblearchaeology.org)) maintains detailed, footnoted articles on all four of these discoveries, along with many others.

The British Museum's own collection pages document both the Nabonidus Cylinder and related Belshazzar artifacts directly, with photographs and translations.

The Israel Museum in Jerusalem holds the original Pilate Stone, and their website includes the full inscription and excavation history.

For the Church of the Holy Sepulchre excavation, the preliminary report was published in *Liber Annuus*, the archaeological journal of Jerusalem's Studium Biblicum Franciscanum; the Times of Israel and Christianity Today both published accessible summaries of the findings in 2025.

**Look at the actual artifacts. Follow the citations. Be a Berean.**

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If you're struggling:

- Christian Faith-Based Resources: <https://mentalhealthhotline.org/christian-faith-resources/> or call 1-866-903-3787 (24/7)
- The Hope Line: <http://thehopeline.com/> Chat with trained professionals for free 24/7.
- Crisis Text Line: Text HOME to 741741
- National Suicide Prevention Lifeline: 988 (call or text)

You matter. Whatever doubts you're wrestling with right now – you don't have to sort them out alone. Please stay.

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