

Archaeology Discoveries Confirm Biblical History

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MANHATTAN, N.Y.—It's been a great few years for biblical archaeology. Here are three of our favorite examples.

Just before or after New Year's, everyone—or at least so it seems—comes out with a "Best of" list. These best-known lists can contain movies, music, television shows, books, whatever.

But there are other "Best of" lists worth noting, and, in the case of today's BreakPoint, worth mimicking. *Christianity Today* recently ran an article titled "Biblical Archaeology's Top Ten Discoveries of 2016."

Great idea. So we here at BreakPoint wondered, "Why not come up with our own list of recent favorites from biblical archaeology?"

Since time does not permit me to list 10 finds, I will settle for three that we talked about on BreakPoint in 2016. At a minimum, these finds shed new light on the world of the Bible and help us in understanding the words of Scripture.

In other cases, they actually confirm portions of the scriptures whose historicity, until recently, was in doubt. But all are a potent reminder that biblical faith is rooted in actual human history, as befits a people who confess that "the Word became flesh and dwelt among us."

So, with no further ado, drumroll, please.

■ No. 3 in our list is the recent discoveries that shed light on the life and time of what I called "least-understood yet incredibly important person in the Bible," Mary Magdalene.

As I said back in April, "more people [mistakenly] 'know' that she was a prostitute—which is based on a misreading of Luke, chapters 7 and 8—than the fact that she was the first witness to the Lord's resurrection."

An excavation of her home town, Magdala, just five miles from Capernaum, discovered the remains of a synagogue, and, even more exciting, a 1st-century Roman coin bearing the image of Tiberius. As the head of the dig told the *New York Times*, there was "circumstantial evidence" that Jesus had been at the site.

What's more, the evidence shows Magdala to have been a prosperous town, which is in keeping with Luke which tells us that Mary was among the women who "provided for Jesus and His disciples 'out of their resources.'"

■ No. 2 on our list of best biblical-archaeological finds is the excavation of a "monumental pool from the Second Temple period, the period in which Jesus lived." In other words, the Pool of Siloam.

You'll recall from John 9 when Jesus encountered the man born blind, he spat on the ground, made mud, placed it on the man's eyes and told him to go "wash in the pool of Siloam."

The finding is further confirmation that the fourth Gospel "rests on extraordinarily precise knowledge of times and places, and so can only have been produced by someone who had an excellent firsthand knowledge of Palestine at the time of Jesus."

■ But my personal favorite was the discovery of a toilet. Specifically, a toilet discovered at Tel Lachish. It was discovered in a "large room that appears to have been a shrine."

The room contained two four-horned altars whose horns had been intentionally damaged. As John Stonestreet told BreakPoint listeners, the damage was, in likelihood, part of King Hezekiah's reforms.

But what about the toilet? Well, if you're going to desecrate a pagan shrine, nothing does the trick like turning it into an outhouse, which is exactly what another reformer, Jehu, did to a temple of Ba'al in 2 Kings. Apparently, Jehu wasn't unique in this regard.

Findings like these should not surprise us. As John put it, "The Bible is the best-attested book of antiquity. Nothing else is within the same solar system." Our faith is firmly rooted in history, not some "once upon a time."