

MORE FASCINATING FINDS RELATING TO THE NEW TESTAMENT

Sergius Paulus

On the apostle Paul's first missionary journey in the first century AD, he came to know the Roman proconsul (under the Emperor Claudius) who lived on Cyprus.* Of their time on Cyprus, Luke writes,

When they had gone through the whole island as far as Paphos, they found a magician, a Jewish false prophet whose name was Bar-Jesus, who was with the proconsul, Sergius Paulus, a man of intelligence. This man summoned Barnabas and Saul and sought to hear the word of God. But Elymas the magician (for so his name is translated) was opposing them, seeking to turn the proconsul away from the faith. But Saul, who was also known as Paul, filled with the Holy Spirit, fixed his gaze on him, and said, "You who are full of all deceit and fraud, you son of the devil, you enemy of all righteousness, will you not cease to make crooked the straight ways of the Lord? Now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon you, and you will be blind and not see the sun for a time." And immediately a mist and a darkness fell upon him, and he went about seeking those who would lead him by the hand. Then the proconsul believed when he saw what had happened, being amazed at the teaching of the Lord (Acts 13:6-12).

In the Roman Empire, provinces were divided under two different categories, those needing Roman troops and those that did not. The former were directly under the emperor, and the latter were governed by the senate and ruled by proconsuls. Cyprus, when Paul visited, was under the administration of a proconsul (ἀνθύπατος in Greek) from 22 BC until the time of the Emperor Hadrian.¹

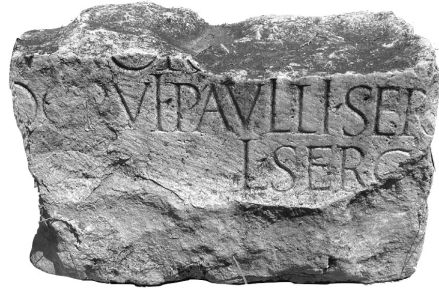
The proconsul is identified by Luke as an intelligent man and also one who was interested in the content of the message that Paul preached. The apostle, the record shows, had a confrontation with a magician by the name of Elymas, and when Paul brought a

* The following discussions of Sergius Paulus; city officials in the Acts of the Apostles; Gallio, proconsul of Achaia; and Erastus, city treasurer of Corinth were adapted from material provided by Dr. H. Wayne House and are used by permission.

judgment on him from God because of his activity, the proconsul embraced the gospel. The text indicates, however, that it was not only the miracle that brought him to Jesus, but also the teaching of the Lord.

Inscriptions Confirming Sergius Paulus

Is there evidence for this proconsul Luke mentions? There appear to be three inscriptions that refer to him, two in Cyprus and one in Rome.* The two in Cyprus are written in Greek and were discovered by General Louis di Cesnola.² One of them was discovered in 1877 on the northern coast of Cyprus, at Soli.³ It mentions Paulus (*nomen*, name of clan) but does not have the *praenomen* (forename, personal name chosen by parents) or cognomen (third name, branch of clan) of the proconsul, so whether it refers to the Sergius Paulus in Acts is uncertain. The inscription reads,



An inscription displayed in the courtyard of the Yalvac Museum in Turkey. Clearly visible is the whole of “Paulli” and portions of “Sergii.” The family of Sergius Paulus had large estates in the vicinity of Pisidian Antioch. The proconsul of Cyprus, Sergius Paulus, was converted to Christianity (Acts 13:7-12). It may have been that at that time Sergius Paulus requested Paul to travel to Pisidian Antioch to speak to other members of his extended family. (Photo used by permission of Carl Rasmussen/www.HolyLandPhotos.org.)

Apollonius to his father...consecrated this enclosure and monument according to his family's wishes...having filled the offices of clerk of the market, prefect, town-clerk, high priest, and having been in charge as manager of the records office. Erected on the 25th of the month Demarcheusius in the thirteenth year [of the reign of Claudius—54 AD]. He also altered the senate by means of assessors during the time of the proconsul Paulus.⁴

The inscription does demonstrate that the family of Pauli was on the island of Cyprus.⁵ The second Greek inscription is one found in Kythraia in northern Cyprus; it references Quintus Sergius Paulus in the time of Claudius,⁶ which is the proper time period for the event given by Luke. Of the three inscriptions, this is probably the best evidence. In the opinion of Joseph Fitzmyer, Sergius Paulus may also be identified from a fragmentary dedicatory Greek inscription from Kythraia in northern Cyprus,⁷ presently housed in the Metropolitan Museum of New York, which on line 10 may preserve part of his name, “Koıntou Serg[iou...],” after mentioning Claudius Caesar Augustus in

* David Williams mentions additional inscriptions that might relate to the family of Sergius Paulus. In addition, William Ramsay and John George Clark Anderson discovered in 1912 an inscription near Pisidian Antioch that mentions a “Lucius Sergius Paullus, the younger son of Lucius.” In 1913 Ramsay discovered the woman's name “Sergia Paulla” on an inscription in the same region. These discoveries played an important part in his theory that the family of Sergius Paulus was Christians (see William Ramsay, *The Bearing of Recent Discovery on the Trustworthiness of the New Testament* [London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1915], pp. 150-72) (David J. Williams, *New International Biblical Commentary: Acts* [Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1990], 227-228).

the preceding line. Unfortunately the restoration is not certain, and the restored name is contested.⁸

The third inscription is written in Latin, reading “Lucius Sergius Paullus” (the Latin spelling of the name, in contrast to *Paulus* in the Greek), was discovered in Rome in 1887.⁹ It was found on a boundary stone erected by Emperor Claudius. Ben Witherington III considers this inscription the most helpful because

we have a clear reference to one Lucius Sergius Paulus, who was one of the curators of the Tiber River under Claudius. There is nothing in this inscription that would rule out the possibility that this Sergius Paulus was either at an earlier or a later date a proconsul on Cyprus, and in fact various classics scholars have been more ready than some New Testament scholars to identify the man mentioned in Acts 13 with the one in the Latin inscription.¹⁰

City Officials in the Acts of the Apostles

At one time, Luke, the companion of the apostle Paul, was viewed as an unreliable guide to the history and geography of the Mediterranean world. The writer of Luke and Acts often was alone in his use of terms, location of places, and mention of persons not known to scholarship. Such is no longer the case. He has been vindicated repeatedly, to the point that Sir William Ramsay, noted classical archaeologist, once a skeptic of the reliability of Luke, called him the greatest of historians, even above the Greek historian Thucydides.¹¹

An example of the accuracy of Luke may be found in his mention of two types of officials in the ancient world, the *asiarch* and the *politarch*. Both of these titles were used by Luke in Acts, and both have been discovered on inscriptions in the Mediterranean world.

Asiarch

The word *asiarch* is a transliteration of the Greek word Ἀσιάρχης and is derived from the word Ἀσία, the province of Asia, and the word ἄρχειν, meaning “to rule.”¹² The Acts of the Apostles records an incident in which Paul the apostle was threatened by certain silversmiths in Ephesus, since his preaching of the gospel was causing them to lose business. Luke mentions that Paul had friends among the “asiarchs.” Scholars formerly viewed Luke’s usage as an anachronism, the only other example of the term being found in classical sources; namely, Strabo’s *Geography*.¹³ However, the word *asiarch* is also mentioned by the early church historian Eusebius in regard to the martyrdom of Polycarp:

26. And when this was proclaimed by the herald, the whole multitude, both of Gentiles and of Jews, who dwelt in Smyrna, cried out with ungovernable wrath and with a great shout, “This is the teacher of Asia, the father of the Christians, the overthrower of our gods, who teaches many not to sacrifice nor to worship.”

27. When they had said this, they cried out and asked the Asiarch Philip to let a lion loose upon Polycarp. But he said that it was not lawful for him, since he had closed the games. Then they thought fit to cry out with one accord that Polycarp should be burned alive.¹⁴

Luke's care about historical accuracy lends credibility to his account in Acts 19:31, where he writes, "And even some of the Asiarchs, who were friends of his, sent to him and were urging him not to venture into the theater" (Acts 19:31 esv). Paul had intended to go into the theater to speak for himself against the charges made by the silversmiths (specifically Demetrius), but certain asiarchs, possibly friends in view of their actions,* encouraged Paul not to do so. Whether they were friends or not is uncertain. Elwell and Beitzel say,

Why there were a number of such officers in Ephesus at the time of the riot, or why the Asiarchs showed such concern for Paul, is not clear. Perhaps they were deputies of the "Commune of Asia," responsible to promote and protect the imperial cult (the worship practices of Rome and the emperor). The Asiarchs mentioned were evidently not adverse to a religious movement like Christianity, which embarrassed the prevailing pagan cult of Artemis. The long account in Acts 19 repeats one of Luke's themes, that Christianity was not subversive nor was Paul a political menace. Otherwise the Asiarchs would not have favored him in such a manner.†

The authenticity of this account in Acts chapter 19 is supported by Luke's firsthand knowledge of things at Ephesus.¹⁵ Koester lists four items that support this thesis:¹⁶ the use of the term "temple keeper" (verse 35) in respect to the cult of Artemis;¹⁷ the



The above inscription containing the word *asiarch* was discovered in Miletus, a short distance from ancient Ephesus (Turkey). (Photo used by permission of Mark Wilson.)

* Paul's friendship with the asiarchs in Ephesians may provide understanding why Philip the Asiarch sought to convince the people in Smyrna against loosing a lion on Polycarp.

† Walter A. Elwell and Barry J. Beitzel, *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 217. Alexander Souter says similarly, "When we come to study the connexion of the Asiarchs with the Acts narrative, we are puzzled. It seems at first sight so strange that men elected to foster the worship of Rome and the Emperor should be found favouring the ambassador of the Messiah, the Emperor's rival for the lordship of the Empire. This is only one, however, of a number of indications that the Empire was at first disposed to look with a kindly eye on the new religion. Christianity, with its outward respect for civil authority, seemed at first the strongest supporter of law and order. Artemis-worship, moreover, hulked so largely in Ephesus as perhaps to dwarf the Imperial worship. Thus St. Paul, whose preaching so threatened the authority of Artemis, may have appeared in a favourable light to the representatives of Caesar-worship, as likely to create more enthusiasm in that direction" (Alexander Souter, "Asiarch," *Dictionary of the Apostolic Church* [2 vols.], ed. James Hastings [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1916-1918]).

fact that small silver shrines of Artemis were sold in Ephesus; the existence of asiarchs as local political persons (verse 31);¹⁸ and the reference to the “scribe of the Demos”¹⁹ as a very powerful Ephesian official (verse 35).

Who exactly were the asiarchs? There is some uncertainty regarding this, with some scholars saying that they were possibly high priests,²⁰ while others view them only as important and wealthy officials.²¹ Strabo’s account recognizes them as officials who were, according to one writer, “chosen from among the wealthiest and most aristocratic in the province. They were expected to finance public games and festivals and usually served one-year terms. Inscriptions attesting *Asiarchs* have been found in over 40 cities in Asia Minor.”²² There is evidence, also, that asiarchs, much like contemporary public officials, may have been retained in their capacities by private persons after they left office.²³

Politarch

Greek city-states had local rulers similar to the archons of Athens who were also responsible to Roman provincial rulers to maintain order and suppress sedition against the empire. One of the officials mentioned by the writer Luke is the *politarch*. In Acts 17:6-8, he reports,

When they did not find them [Paul and Silas], they *began* dragging Jason and some brethren before the city authorities, shouting, “These men who have upset the world have come here also; and Jason has welcomed them, and they all act contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, Jesus.” They stirred up the crowd and the city authorities who heard these things (Acts 17:6-8).




Image not available
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Recently, several politarch inscriptions were found within the ruins of ancient cities. Of the total number discovered, 19 of the 32 “politarch” inscriptions (like the one pictured here) come from the ancient city of Thessalonica, with 3 of these dating to the first century AD.

The charges against Paul and his fellow workers were that they were troublemakers and did things contrary to the decrees of the emperor by proclaiming another king, namely, Jesus—a very serious charge, were it proved.²⁴ This would have caused concern on the part of these city authorities to ensure that these Christians did not have seditious intentions and to calm the crowd.

The words “city authorities,” in the Greek, are the term *politarchs* (Greek, τοὺς πολιτάρχας).^{*} The word never occurs in Greek literature, though πολιτάρχας is used once by Aeneas Tacticus. In 1835 an inscription was discovered on an arch at Thessalonica, dated between AD 69 and 79, which begins πολειταρχούντων Σωσπάρχου (“politarchs Sosipater. . .”) and then continues with the names of seven politarchs. Since that time many such examples in other Macedonian cities have been found.²⁵

Though the historical accuracy of Luke has been questioned since the rise of historical skepticism about the Bible, his close familiarity with the world of his day and careful reporting should cause one to trust him when he speaks of persons, places, events, and other facts. As F.F. Bruce said, “When a writer’s accuracy is established by valid evidence, he gains the right to be treated as a reliable informant on matters coming within his scope which are not corroborated elsewhere (Bruce 1985: 2578).”²⁶

Gallio, Proconsul of Achaia

One of the Roman officials the apostle Paul encountered in his missionary travels was Gallio, whom Paul stood before in judgment at the *bema* in Corinth sometime in the years AD 51 to 53. According to Acts 18:12-13, he was brought before this Roman proconsul of Achaia for breaking the Jewish law. When Gallio heard that the charges regarded the Jewish law rather than actionable Roman law, he immediately dismissed them:

While Gallio was proconsul of Achaia, the Jews with one accord rose up against Paul and brought him before the judgment seat, saying, “This man persuades men to worship God contrary to the law.” But when Paul was about to open his mouth, Gallio said to the Jews, “If it were a matter of wrong or of vicious crime, O Jews, it would be reasonable for me to put up with you; but if there are questions about words and names and your own law, look after it yourselves; I am unwilling to be a judge of these matters.” And he drove them away from the judgment seat. And they all took hold of Sosthenes, the leader of the synagogue, and *began* beating him in front of the judgment seat. But Gallio was not concerned about any of these things (Acts 18:12-17).

Junius Annaeus Gallio was the son of Marcus Annaeus Seneca, the rhetorician and

^{*} Note that translations have tended not to use *politarch* but rather substitute a descriptive phrase, such as “city authorities” (NASB, ESV, NRSV), “rulers of the city” (KJV, ASV, NKJV), “city officials” (HSCB, NIV, NET), “city council” (NJB).

the brother of the famous philosopher, Lucius Annaeus Seneca. The latter spoke of Gallio highly: “No mortal is so pleasant to any one person as Gallio is to everybody.”²⁷

The existence of Gallio and his position is confirmed by an archaeological discovery made at Delphi in 1908, consisting of nine stone fragments. Adolf Deissman says regarding the discoveries that the inscription was a puzzle. Some years previous, four fragments had initially been unearthed, then three additional ones, and finally two more.²⁸ There was disagreement as to whether the pieces were part of different inscriptions, but finally scholars agreed that all nine fragments were from the same inscription.²⁹

The inscription, dated to about AD 52, is a proclamation made by Emperor Claudius (AD 41–54) that mentions Gallio as the proconsul of Achaia (Greece). Gallio’s position at Corinth helps to confirm Paul’s time in that city between AD 51 and 53.³⁰ The pertinent part of the inscription reads (as reconstructed), “Gallio, my fr[iend] an[d] pro[con]sul recently [reported to me]. . . .”:



The Gallio inscription, dating to AD 52, was discovered at the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece, and has become an important artifact in forming a chronology of the life and ministry of Paul. (Photo by Todd Bolen/BiblePlaces.com.)

ΝΙΟΣ ΓΑΛΛΙΩΝ Ο Φ[ΙΛΟΣ] ΜΟΥ ΚΑ[Ι ΑΝΘΥ]ΠΑΤΟΣ
[ΤΗΣ ΑΧΑΙΑΣ ΕΓΡΑΨΕΝ]

The entire inscription is thought to have read thus:

Tiberius Claudius Caesar Augustus Germanicus, 12th year of tribunician power, acclaimed emperor for the 26th time, father of the country, sends greetings to [...]. For long have I been well-disposed to the city of Delphi and solicitous for its prosperity, and I have always observed the cult of the Pythian Apollo. Now since it is said to be destitute of citizens, as my friend and proconsul L. Iunius Gallio recently reported to me, and desiring that Delphi should regain its former splendour, I command you (singular) to invite well-born people also from other cities to come to Delphi as new inhabitants, and to accord them and their children all the privileges of the Delphians as being citizens on like and equal terms. For if some are transferred as colonists to these regions....³¹

Erastus, City Treasurer in Corinth

Three persons named Erastus are mentioned in the New Testament. One is mentioned alongside Timothy as among the helpers of Paul in Ephesus (Acts 19:22); another is said by Paul to have remained at Corinth (2 Timothy 4:20) when Paul continued his trip. Since Paul mentions him in his epistle, it is likely that Timothy knew him. Last of all, Paul sent greetings from a man known as Erastus to the recipients of the apostle's letter to the Romans: "Erastus, the city treasurer, and our brother Quartus, greet you" (Romans 16:23b ESV). Paul identified this person as the ὁ οἰκονομὸς τῆς (*ho oikonomos tes poleos*)—the treasurer, manager, or administrator of the city.³² The first and second Erastus listed above very likely are the same person because of the nexus with Timothy, and persons two and three are likely the same because of the connection to Corinth. Consequently all three are probably the same person.³³



The Erastus inscription is located in Greece within the ancient ruins of Corinth.

It has been argued that the latter Erastus may have been a city slave;³⁴ but the likelihood is that Erastus had an important enough status in Corinth to warrant Paul's mention of him as the οἰκονομὸς (*oikonomos*).³⁵ The Roman colony of Corinth would have had a Roman municipal structure, with the *oikonomos* as the Greek equivalent of the Latin office of *aedilis*.

One finds at Corinth a startling connection with Romans 16:23, in a grassy area not normally visited by tour groups today. At the head of a pavement is a long slab with reference to a person named Erastus. Scholars are in agreement that the inscription dates to the middle of the first century AD. The pavement is located east of the city theater. An *aedilis* was commissioned with the task to manage public markets. If indeed this builder of the pavement is the same person mentioned by Paul, then Erastus and Paul may have become acquainted while the former was about his duties of collecting rent or taxes.³⁶

The inscription regarding Erastus reads, "Erastus laid this pavement at his own expense, in appreciation of his appointment as aedile."³⁷ Only two of the three slabs of the inscription have been found. The central slab was found in situ in April 1929; two portions of the right slab were found in March 1928 and then in August 1947, allowing a more complete reading. The extant text reads in Latin,

ERASTUS PRO AEDILITATE
S.P.* STRAVIT

* S.P. is a standard abbreviation for *sua pecunia*, "with his own money" (see J.H. Kent, *The Inscriptions 1926-1950*, vol.

This may be rendered, together with the likely wording of the missing first slab (“*Praenomen nomen*”), as follows: “Erastus in return for his aedileship laid [the pavement] at his own expense.”³⁸

More Archaeological Discoveries Supporting New Testament Reliability

Find

Description

Tomb of Lazarus



On the east side of the Mount of Olives is the traditionally recognized tomb of Lazarus (John 11:38-44). It appears that by the second century AD the location had been identified with Lazarus. The church historian Eusebius says that the city was renamed the “Place of Lazarus” and that the tomb was being shown in his (Eusebius’s) day. Currently, there is a mosque built over the site preventing access through the traditional entrance, though an alternative entrance was created.

Lithostrotos



Located under the modern streets of Jerusalem near the Temple Mount, the *Gabbatha* (that is, place or seat of judgment) mentioned in John 19:13 and Matthew 27:27 is the location of Christ’s judgment by Pontius Pilate. It was found at the Roman military headquarters known as the Tower of Antonia.

The Galilee Boat



(Photo by Zev Radovan.)

In 1986, a drought season revealed a 2,000-year-old boat (dated between the first century BC and the first century AD) in the sediment of the Sea of Galilee, offering an example of the kind of boats that sailed the sea during Jesus’ time (Mark 4:37-41). It could accommodate over a dozen men, being over 26 feet long and more than 7 feet wide. An assortment of chemicals and foam were used to raise the fragile boat and transport it by sea to the Yigal Allon Museum (in Ginosar) on the shores of the Sea of Galilee.

VIII, “Corinth” [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1966], #231, for a similar inscription celebrating a benefaction given *sua pecunia*).

Find	Description
Tyrannus Inscription	<p>That the name <i>Tyrannus</i> was engraved on a stone pillar in Ephesus shows that the same name mentioned in Acts 19:9 (Tyrannus) was used in Ephesus during the first century AD; this find thus shows consistency with Luke's mentioning of the name when Paul visited Ephesus.</p>
Luke's vocabulary in the Gospel and Acts	<p>Luke, the writer of the Gospel of Luke and Acts, has in the past been faulted by some modern critics for alleged historical errors in his records. However, this view has been replaced by a much more favorable view of his accuracy in light of recent discoveries about the customs and language of Luke's time. In many cases, modern historians have had to revise their former opinions. Following are some of the points on which Luke's history in the book of Acts has been vindicated:*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lycaonian as the correct language spoken at Lystra (14:11) • The proper form of the city name Troas (16:8) • Use of "politarchs" as proper designation of magistrates in Thessalonica (17:6) • Correct Athenian slang word for Paul as <i>spermologos</i> (17:18) • Uses <i>areopagite</i> as the proper title for a member of the Athenian court (17:34) • Proper title of <i>grammateus</i> for the chief executive magistrate ("clerk") in Ephesus (19:35) • Uses correct Roman authorized title of honor, <i>neokoros</i> (19:35) • Uses the plural <i>anthupatoi</i>, which could be referring to two men functioning as proconsuls at this time (19:38) • Uses precise term <i>bolisantes</i> for taking soundings and records the correct depth of the water near Malta (27:28) • Applies correct title "first man of the Island" (<i>protos tes nesou</i>) to Malta's leader (28:7) <p>The precision of these historical details and others has led Roman historian A.N. Sherwin-White to remark, "For Acts the confirmation of historicity is overwhelming. . . . But any attempt to reject its basic historicity even in matters of detail must now appear absurd. Roman historians have long taken it for granted."[†]</p>

* See Colin J. Hemer, *The Book of Acts in the Setting of Hellenistic History* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1990).

† A.N. Sherwin-White, *Roman Society and Roman Law in the New Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), 189.

Find**Description****Mamertine Prison (Rome)**

The Mamertine Prison is traditionally recognized as the place where Peter and Paul were incarcerated before being executed in Rome. Originally part of the ancient Roman Forum, today it is the location of two churches, San Giuseppe dei Falegnami and San Pietro in Carcere.


Bema seat

A foundation platform of a “bema seat” was discovered in the early twentieth century in the ruins of ancient Corinth. It served as the place from which the city officials spoke to the citizens; there the apostle Paul was brought before the proconsul Gallio in Acts 18:12-17. It also may have been used to award competing athletes of the Isthmian games. In addition, Paul uses the Greek term *bema* to describe the “judgment seat” of Christ, where Christians will receive their heavenly rewards (2 Corinthians 5:10).

Jacob's Well

(Photo by Zev Radovan.)

Located in ancient Samaria within an unfinished Greek orthodox church is Jacob's Well (*bir ya'qub*), which is mentioned by Eusebius in the fourth century AD, as well as by John and the unnamed Samaritan woman (John 4:5,6,12; Genesis 33:18-19; 48:22). The well had been dug to over 200 feet deep in the seventh century AD (see John 4:11), and today it still produces fresh, cool water fed from underground. It lies a short distance from Mount Gerizim and the ruins of the Samaritan temple.

Find	Description
Capernaum Synagogue 	<p>Excavations at the ancient city of Capernaum have revealed a fourth- or fifth-century AD synagogue that was most likely built over the black basalt foundation of an earlier first-century synagogue. The discovery of thousands of coins beneath the floors helped to securely date the later synagogue, while pottery remains and coins discovered under the black basalt foundation confirmed the date of the first-century structure. The earlier synagogue is most likely the same structure that John refers to (John 6:59) in which Jesus gave His lengthy sermon and said, “I am the bread of life” (Luke 4:33,38; John 6:35,48,59).</p>
Peter’s House 	<p>From 1968 to 1998 archaeologists excavated an octagonal structure located in the ancient city of Capernaum near the shores of the Sea of Galilee, which they believe to be the house of Peter (Matthew 8:14; Mark 1:29; Luke 4:38). Early inscriptions venerating Christ as Lord, Most High, and God in various languages (Latin, Hebrew, Greek, Aramaic, and Syriac) scratched on the plaster walls of the dwelling may indicate that early Christians believed this was Peter’s house. In the fifth century, Christians built an octagonal church over the first-century house. In 1990 the Roman Catholic Church honored the site by building the hexagonal Franciscan Chapel over the ruins of this same house church.</p>
Zeus and Hermes in the account of Paul and Barnabas	<p>In 1909, archaeologists unearthed several inscriptions and a temple near the ancient city of Lystra that identified Zeus and Hermes as the two most important gods, since they were believed to have visited the earth there. These gods were expected to return in the future, which helps scholars understand the reaction of the people when they acclaimed Barnabas and Paul as Zeus and Hermes (Acts 14:6-13). *</p>

* H. Wayne House and Joseph M. Holden, “New Testament Archaeology,” in *Charts of Apologetics and Christian Evidences* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), chart 44.

Find	Description
Nazareth Inscription	<p>An inscription was discovered in Nazareth in 1878 forbidding the robbing of tombs, originating between the time of Augustus Caesar and Claudius Caesar. * Since Nazareth was such a small village, scholars have conjectured that the edict may have been issued in response to the rumor passed on by authorities in Israel regarding the robbing of the grave of Jesus, but there is no certainty that the inscription is attached to the resurrection of Jesus the Messiah.†</p>
The Pool of Siloam 	<p>In 2005, city workers excavating in the vicinity of the Gihon Spring accidentally unearthed the steps to the Pool of Siloam. Archaeologists have revealed that its shape is a trapezoid pool (corners greater than 90 degrees), surrounded by three descending sets of five stairs each. Ancient coins and masonry found at the site confirm this location as the first-century Pool of Siloam mentioned in John 9:7 as the place where Jesus healed the man born blind.</p>
The Pool of Bethesda 	<p>John 5:2-3 tells of a pool located by the Sheep Gate which had five porches where the sick and lame would wait for the stirring of the waters so they might be healed. The passage tells of Jesus healing a lame man who had been afflicted for 38 years. Excavations in the late 1800s uncovered such a pool, with remains that indicate it had several porches (porticoes), twin pool areas, and was fed by an underground water and lock (gate) system, which would result in the waters being disturbed on occasion. Eusebius mentions the Sheep Pool in the fourth century; this most likely refers to the Pool of Bethesda. Today, the pool may be visited at the site of the Church of Saint Anne, about 300 feet inside the Old City from Stephen's or the Lion's Gate (the ancient "Sheep Gate").</p>

* House and Holden. Arguing for a date under Claudius of c. AD 50, see Jack Finegan, *Light from the Ancient Past: The Archaeological Background of the Hebrew-Christian Religion*, vol. II (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1959), 299, while an early date in the time of Octavius Augustus Caesar is argued by Franz Cumont, "Un Rescrit Imperial sur la Violation de Sepulture," in *Revue Historique* (January-April, 1930): 241-266.

† House and Holden.

Find	Description
Absalom's Tomb Inscription	In 2003, on the east bank of the Kidron Valley, Emile Puech and Joe Zias found the oldest New Testament passage yet discovered, carved in stone on Absalom's Tomb. The passage contains Luke 2:25 and tells of Simeon, who in his old age finally saw the baby Jesus. It reads, "Now there was a man in Jerusalem, whose name was Simeon, and this man was righteous and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel, and the Holy Spirit was upon him" (ESV).
Coins of the Bible	Throughout the New Testament various coins are mentioned in association with basic transactions and teaching illustrations. These include the widow's mite, the Tyre shekel, and the denarius, among others. Some coins contain inscriptions of rulers such as Herod Antipas and Herod Agrippa, King Aretas IV, and Emperor Claudius; the one pictured here is of Caesar Augustus.



Chart © Joseph M. Holden, 2013.

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This fourth- or fifth-century synagogue was built over the black basalt foundation of an earlier first-century synagogue—the place Jesus said, “I am the bread of life” (John 6:35,59). (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

Conclusion

The New Testament and its writers have proven themselves to be historically reliable, as is seen by the numerous extrabiblical sources and artifacts demonstrating as much. It appears that any effort to dismiss the New Testament as wholesale mythology or a compilation of embellishments can be met with an avalanche of evidence to the contrary. In view of the ever-growing body of archaeological data, it may be asserted with confidence that the New Testament is historically reliable.