
The Cosmopolitan Jesus?

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In recent years, many new archaeology discoveries have been made that directly relate to people and events in the Bible. Many "scholars" have declared that the stories in the Bible are little more than mythology. After all, few of the Kings of Israel or Judah are mentioned any place other than the Bible. Their reasoning is that if the kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon were as great as the Bible says, why are they not mentioned in the writings of other great kings of the day? As Christians, we take the Bible on faith and that is as it should be. However, there have been some significant discoveries in archaeology recently that Bible believers should celebrate.

It is the purpose of this page to present some of those discoveries to church lay persons. Do not become addicted to "proofs" as the basis for your faith, but, take joy in the fact that many people and events in the Bible can be substantiated by scientific study.

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Jesus grew up in Nazareth. When thinking of Nazareth, a pastoral setting comes to mind. It is easy to imagine Jesus walking throughout the countryside performing his ministries. In the May/June 1992 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review* there is an article telling of the discovery of an ancient city called Sepphoris. It has been discovered to have been the ancient capital of Galilee. Moreover, this city was less than 3 miles from Nazareth and could even be seen from a high hill in Nazareth. This discovery sheds new light on traditional beliefs about Jesus' upbringing. Primarily it forces one to consider that perhaps Jesus was much more cosmopolitan than originally believed.

Sepphoris has been found to have had a population of about 30,000. The city was built by Herod Antipas, the son of Herod the Great who beheaded John the Baptist. For thirty years Sepphoris was the capital of Galilee and Perea which comprise a large area east of the Jordan River. The city occupied about 500 acres. Josephus relates that Sepphoris was the largest and most beautiful city in the entire region. The city contained Antipas' royal residence, a 4000 seat theater, bath, archives, and gymnasiums.

Work on the plans to excavate began in 1980. Now with the help of aerial cameras that have ground penetrating radar, it has been found that Sepphoris also had aqueducts, tunnels, grain silos, cisterns, and wine cellars. Most impressive was the intricate water supply system. Knowing all this is very important when trying to reconstruct the life and times of Jesus. The urban influence would be unmistakable. One can't imagine that Jesus lived less than 3 miles away and never visited the city. The city's close proximity also leads one to re-think Jesus' occupation as a carpenter. Herod Antipas actually rebuilt the city after the death of his father Herod. This means there would have been employment for Jesus and Joseph. Incidentally, it is believed that a carpenter in Jesus' time would have been one in the building trade in general.

In the Gospels, there is no account of Jesus visiting Sepphoris. However, after Jesus became an influential religious leader, Antipas wanted him dead. Thus he would not have been safe proclaiming the word of God in Sepphoris. However, this does not mean he never visited the city. This seems highly unlikely.

When studying scriptures, it seems even likely that Jesus had a more metropolitan influence than originally thought. In His parables He mentions kings so often; his understanding of kingship seems influenced by a very real knowledge--- perhaps Antipas' reign over Sepphoris? Jesus mentions "hypocrite" 17 times throughout the Gospel. The word "hypocrite" originally meant stage actor. There was a theater in Sepphoris that seated 4,000? Did Jesus attend the theater? If he did, it seems likely that he wasn't too impressed--this one can surmise from his disdain for hypocrites throughout the Gospel.

Knowing that Jesus had an urban influence enhances our understanding of him. It gives new depth to the Gospel. It brings a sophistication to Jesus that is refreshing and surprisingly modern.