

Evidence for the Bible

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[0 : 00] All right, but the last person you want to see is me, so that's fine. I do want to say what a joy it is to be with you all here at Whitby again. Rosie's come with me, and it's great to be here.

Before I pitch into this evening, I just want to let you know what we're going to do over the four evenings, because if you've got a programme, you might be a bit confused, because the order I sent through has not quite come out on the order on the programme, and therefore you may like to know where we're going through the week.

And I do hope that you can stay with us throughout the week and hopefully bring folk with you as well. This evening we are going to start with evidence for the Bible, which is, and some of you have seen bits of this when I was last up here, but we're going to be looking at some of the archaeological evidence for the Bible, but more of that in a moment.

Then tomorrow evening we're going to deal with the Bible, an authentic book, which is looking at the Bible, both Old and New Testaments, to show how it speaks clearly as a book of authentic, in many cases, not in all cases, eyewitness accounts.

So we'll be dealing with a number of items there that will help to authenticate the authority of the Scriptures. And then the third evening we're going to be dealing with, you may think it's almost superfluous, we don't need to.

[1 : 17] It's under the title, Did Jesus Really Live? And you'll say, well, of course he did. Well, I want to show you that actually, unfortunately, there are still people around who say he didn't. And we're going to be answering that in some detail.

A little bit of that will come up this evening, and I'm going to flick through when we get there, because we don't need to stop on it this evening. And we'll be looking at the whole question, did he really die on the cross? Because some say he didn't. Did he really rise from the dead?

Some say he didn't. And then finally, on Thursday evening, we're going to be looking at the Christ through the Old Testament, the preparation for the coming of Christ in the whole history of the human race.

All of these will have a PowerPoint presentation, and so I hope, as I say, that you'll be able to stay with us and join us for the whole week. The Bible is a book of history.

It is, of course, a lot more than that. It's not just a history book, but it's full of history, lots of it. It's the history of the Christian race, the human race. It tells us how it all began, how everything was created, what went wrong, and how God is planning to put everything right, and it leads right up to the coming of Christ.

[2 : 24] We'll see that in a later session. But the Bible is... One of the exciting things about the Bible being a book of history is that you can check it out. You see, in many religious books, you can't.

You either believe them or you don't. There's no way you can check them. They're just sayings, wise or otherwise, depending on your point of view. But, as I say, the great thing, and what I think is one of the exciting things about the Bible, is that you can check it out.

It's not difficult to do. And one of the great archaeologists of the Old Testament area... I've got to be very careful not to trip up this wire here or everything goes blank.

If you can't see because one of these posts are in the way, we don't really want to move the posts because that might be difficult. So it's easier if you move and get up and move around, and that's fine.

So do make sure you can see the screen because that'll help you through. And Donald Wiseman, Professor Donald Wiseman, who was a very fine Christian who believed in the authority of the Bible, and a world-renowned Assyriologist, which meant that he could interpret, translate cuneiform

writing in the Assyrian language, which very few people could do.

[3 : 36] And he once said that the Bible archaeology correctly understood always confirms the accuracy of the Bible. So let's go back and start somewhere around the beginning.

Most of you will have heard of the flood, Noah and the ark and all that. And I want to underline the fact that what some of you know is that there are other accounts of the flood.

The Bible does not have a corner on the market of accounts of the flood. In the ancient Near East, the 2000 BC and thereabouts, there are a number of accounts of a universal worldwide flood.

Here's just a couple of them, the Atrahasis epic, the Gilgamesh epic. I'd love to have an opportunity of telling you more about those. Let me go back a bit. Sorry, I've gone on too fast.

The Gilgamesh epic has some very real similarities to the biblical account. Gilgamesh meets up with Utnapishti, who says he gained immortality because the god A.R. told him to build a big boat, bring representatives of all the animals in, his family into it.

[4 : 42] It was a big six-decker. They rode out the flood for a week. He sent out a raven, a dove and a swallow. The raven didn't come back in his case, and he got out of the boat on dry land and worshipped the gods.

Now, if you know the story, you can immediately see some similarities there. Don't be bothered by that. Be encouraged by it, because, in fact, there are records and traditions of nations and continents all over the world.

I've given you some of the lists there. In fact, only in the continent of Antarctica do we not yet have any records of worldwide floods, and you might be able to work that out for yourself. Why not?

But, you see, there clearly was, in the history of the human race, a universal flood that wiped out everything, and everything started again.

We have record after record, tradition after tradition of that. We believe that in the Bible, which, incidentally, with all the ancient Near East legends, it's the most sane of them all, because some of them are a bit wacky.

[5 : 42] But, obviously, they are stories that have been passed down, but the biblical record is the accurate record of the worldwide flood. And do remember that the prophet Isaiah in the Old Testament, and Jesus himself, and the apostle Peter in the New Testament, they all believed that the flood in the time of Noah was a fact of history.

Now, what I want to do now is to look at some people and events who some people thought never existed. And the only reason they thought never existed, because the only knowledge of them was in the Bible, and we had no knowledge of them elsewhere.

Let's start with these people, a people called the Hittites. You may not have heard of them, but they're right there back in the Bible. In fact, the first reference you have of them comes in Genesis 10, and you'll find more references as you go through the Bible.

In fact, one of the commanders, one of the military officers of David, King David, was a Hittite. He was the husband of Bathsheba.

Some of you will recall that story. And, in fact, we know that these were a very fierce people.

They're depicted like that in the biblical record. The problem was, for many, many years, the only reference we had to the Hittites was there in the Bible and nowhere else.

[6 : 58] So some people thought they were a people who were made up, because they didn't accept simply the biblical record. And then in 1906, their capital city was discovered in Turkey.

The capital city was called Hattusius. And we know that the Hittites were a people that came to power around 1700 BC. They were at the zenith of their power, 1400 BC.

And then it gradually tailed off. And what we do know from the Egyptian records is that they fought a very famous battle with Ramesses II. Ramesses II was one of the greatest pharaohs of Egypt.

We know so much about him, but that's not my subject tonight. And in 1274 BC, the Hittites and the Egyptians clashed. It was a terrible fight, and they fought themselves to a standstill.

Nobody won. And it did mean that they had to come to some sort of an agreement. In fact, they came to what is generally recognized to be the world's first known peace treaty.

[8 : 02] But, of course, when Ramesses II went back to Egypt, like all ancient despots, he had to declare it as a great victory. And so he built this wonderful temple to himself.

If I tell you that these, each of these, there are four of them. This is Ramesses, of course. And each of them is 60 feet high. It gives you some idea of how big the temple at Abel Simnel in Egypt is, just by the Aswan High Dam now.

And inside, the walls are covered with pictures of the battle against the Hittites. And the background that you've seen, those men kneeling down with collars around their necks and roped together, they are all Hittite prisoners.

No one today doubts the existence of the Hittites. They are a well-known people. But what about King David? You say, surely nobody doubts the existence of King David.

Well, you'd be surprised. One of the great critical approaches to the Old Testament was to suggest that David, in fact, not only David, but the stories of David and Saul before him and Solomon after him, and in fact, much of the Old Testament before then, the story of the patriarchs, it was all made up.

[9 : 23] They were legends made up by Jewish scribes when the Jews were in Persian exile around 500 BC. And the stories were made up to bolster the morale of the Jews and give them a history.

So they're all legends. And David was a legendary figure. Well, that was until this was discovered. It may look a pretty innocuous lump of stone, and so it is.

But actually, it's an inscription from Tel Dan, that's in northern Israel. And it's King Hazael of Syria who refers to the house or the dynasty of David.

Now, the significance of this is that this is unquestionably dated at 796 BC. No one doubts that. And that's only 175 years after David, but more importantly, 300 years before the so-called legends of David were made up by scribes in the 5th century or the 5th or 6th century in the Persian exile.

Now, almost nobody, I have to say almost because there is one archaeologist who's sticking out and thinking that David is really an alternative name of the Israel's God.

[10 : 35] Almost nobody doubts the existence of David. They don't necessarily believe he was as powerful as the Bible sets him out to be. But they do have to accept that there was a David.

Incidentally, we do have now more evidence of King David outside of the Bible. But that'll do for us this evening. And what about this guy? That's the one on the left there, this one here.

Now, there's a king in the Old Testament who's mentioned in just one verse of the Bible. Isaiah chapter 20 and verse 1 and nowhere else. And it's the king Sargon.

And because it was only in the Bible and we had no other knowledge of him, it was assumed, therefore, that perhaps there was never such a king as Sargon. That, again, was another made up, a bit like the Hittites, a bit like David.

He was just made up, a legendary figure, just a name thrown in. That was until in 1843, Paul-Emile Vorta, a French archaeologist, discovered a Corsaba, what is known as Sargon's Fortress, a huge palace complex with many acres and many rooms and thousands of documents available.

[11 : 42] And now this man, who never existed, is one of the best-known kings of the ancient world. In fact, he guarded his palace by two huge, human-headed, winged bulls, 15 feet high, 10 ton in weight, which I think you'll agree is not bad for a king who never existed.

And incidentally, the guy that he's talking to is almost certainly the crown prince, his son, Sennacherib, and more of him in a moment. But before we leave Sargon, you may recall, those of you who know your Old Testament, that you may not, the Bible doesn't give the date, but in 722 BC, the Assyrians came down and captured the northern part, Israel, based on Samaria.

So Samaria, Samaritans, Israel, they were taken into exile. And what the ancient kings always did is they took the cream of the population out, that's how Daniel and Ezekiel later on under the Babylonians ended up in Babylon.

They took the cream of the population out and they shipped people in from other nations that they had destroyed. The idea was to dilute opposition to their authority by bringing lots of people and putting them together from all different backgrounds.

But of course, the people who came in, and you have a list there of some of the nations that were brought in, they brought their gods with them. And they stirred their worship of their pagan idols into the true worship of Yahweh up there in the north, in Samaria.

[13 : 11] And for that reason, the religion of Israel in the north became a mixed religion of the worship of the gods and the worship of Yahweh.

And whenever you come to that passage in John's Gospel, chapter 4 and verse 9, and you read that the Jews have no dealings with the Samaritans, I want you to think Sargon, Isaiah 20, verse 1. It was all his fault. He started the rot. That's what happened. Sargon. So, just like the Hittites and David, Sargon, who never existed, nobody doubts it.

But what about this guy? This is Rembrandt's picture, or part of it. Belshazzar, the banquet that never happened. Because, you see, Belshazzar is only mentioned in the book of Daniel, and for many years that's all we had.

No other reference to Belshazzar, so you've got it. He didn't exist either. He was made up. And what was even worse, you see, we knew who was the last king of Babylon.

[14:10] It was, in fact, this guy here, Nabonidus. He's worshipping three of his gods. The sun god, the moon god, and Ishtar, the goddess of love and war. And so we knew that Nabonidus was the last king of Babylon.

How could Belshazzar be the last king of Babylon? Because the Bible says he was the king, Belshazzar was the king, in Babylon the night, 539 BC, when the Persians broke in.

So the Bible's got it wrong. Well, until this was discovered by the British consul in 1854, the British consul in Basra. It's just a clay cylinder.

It's not quite as big as that. It's only about six inches long. And there were four of them. And he discovered them at the base of a rebuilt temple that Nabonidus had rebuilt. No question about that, because Nabonidus has put his name on it.

But also, he had a prayer for himself on the time capsule. And it included a prayer for Belshazzar, my firstborn, the offspring of my heart.

[15:10] We now know what was happening and what was going on. Nabonidus had been away fighting battles in Arabia for about ten years.

And he had put his son, Crown Prince Belshazzar, on the throne in Babylon. And Belshazzar was having a whoopee time when one night in 539 BC, the Persians broke in.

And it was a bloodless destruction entry because Nabonidus was hated, his son was hated. And the people in Babylon were actually welcoming the Persians in.

And there's a story as to how they got in, but that's not our business this evening. So, like the Hittites, like David, like Sargon, like Belshazzar, they were people who supposedly never existed, and now nobody doubts them.

I've slipped this one in because it is of interest in this way. 2 Kings chapter 24 and verse 10 tells us that in the time of Jehoiakim, the army of Babylon came and they destroyed the city of Jerusalem.

[16:19] What you're seeing on the screen there is not the biblical text of 2 Kings 24, it is actually the text on the clay tablet that you've just seen, and you'll see it again in a moment. And it's the Babylonian text.

Now, it answers a question that some people ask. They say, how can you date something BC? And you can obviously see the problem there, can't you? Nobody knows what the date is BC when they are BC.

Well, the answer, there are two or three answers to that. I'll just give you one because it's the one that concerns us here. The ancient world put a lot of store by their astrologers, the people who studied the planets and the stars and the interception of them, and they made scrupulous recordings of them.

And modern astronomers are able to find out exactly what was happening in the heavens at that time because they left careful records. We actually have records of Halley's Comet going way back centuries before.

They didn't call it Halley's Comet, of course, but we know it's what we call Halley's Comet. And we know exactly, according to this clay tablet, we know exactly what the date was.

[17:29] Babylon came to Jerusalem three times, actually, and this was in 597, not the last time. And on the little bit we've circled there, they actually give the date as the 16th of March, 597 BC.

That's interpreting their astronomical observations at the time by accuracy. So we can actually date something in the Bible as accurately as that.

That's not the only example. There are others that we could cite as well. So we're looking at people and events who supposedly never existed. Look at a few places that perhaps never existed.

What about Nineveh? Nineveh, a little bit like Babylon. You've all probably heard of the Hanging Gardens of Babylon. Well, Nineveh was a great city, a magnificent city. The only problem is we had no idea what it was like and where it was, but it was a magnificent city.

And it was the capital of the Assyrian Empire. And yet, it disappeared. And in fact, two prophets in the Old Testament, two very small prophets in the Old Testament, Nahum, which is the smallest of all, and then Zephaniah, and I promise you they are there in your Old Testament, you can check it

out.

[18:40] Nahum said at Nineveh, fire will devour you. Zephaniah said, you will be left utterly desert, as dry as a desert. And in fact, that's exactly what happened, because in 632, the Babylonians, it was payback time, they had been destroyed by the Assyrians, and now they came back and they destroyed the whole city of Nineveh.

You can see on these burnt walls the evidence of fire, just where the fire stops here, and you've got the scorching of the fire.

And in 1847, the English-British archaeologist, Austin Henry Laird, discovered the Assyrian capital at Nineveh.

Again, a massive capital, many, many acres, hundreds of rooms in the palace. It was the royal city of Sennacherib, and no one today doubts the presence and the existence of Nineveh.

Fire will devour you. The prophecies came true, the city was destroyed, and it actually disappeared under the desert for many, many centuries until discovered in 1847.

[19:50] And when it was discovered, it made international news, because it was the story of the Bible coming out of the ground. You remember this guy, Sennacherib?

Well, when Sennacherib came to power in 701 BC, the first thing he did was to set out across his kingdom and bring to heel some of the subject nations that weren't paying their rent.

And Hezekiah, king of Judah, a lot about Hezekiah in the Old Testament, in Kings, in Chronicles, in Isaiah. He's a well-recorded king.

And this is what Sennacherib himself said in his own records. He said, And as to Hezekiah the Jew, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts, and to countless small villages in their vicinities.

He took his vast army through the land, plundering, destroying as he went. And in the end, he wound up at the second most important city next to Jerusalem, and it was the city of Lachish.

[20:52] And in the discovery of the palace in Nineveh that Austin Henry Laird discovered, there was a victory room.

The victory room had a, it was the Lachish victory room. It had wall carvings of the entire battle, from the line-up of the Assyrians all the way through to the end of the battle, and the capture of the prisoners, and the flaying alive of the leaders, and so on.

But there's about 60 feet of it. It's massive. It would go all the way down this room here, and it goes further than that, but it could go along the back and come up here again. It's the entire battle.

It was the first time an ancient battle had come out of the ground. And this is how we know what battering rams looked like, because we had no idea what they looked like until this, we had this.

And then down in the bottom right-hand corner there, you have some men being, it's an early form of crucifixion.

The Assyrians would drive a stake through a man's groin or his stomach and leave him to die. The Persians perfected it even more, and the Romans got it down to a fine science of killing a man over the longest possible period of time with the greatest amount of pain.

[22:02] Some men could hang on a cross for three days before they expired. I can, but yeah, I've been told to move near the microphone.

I would be easier if the microphone moved near me, because they don't really want to look at me.

That battery ram is much more attractive. Okay. Let's move on from that.

Meanwhile, in Jerusalem, Hezekiah had about three or four years notice that the Assyrian army was on the move. Remember, it had to go through the land and destroy 46 towns and villages, so that took time.

And he had to deny water to the approaching Assyrian army and make sure the city had plenty of water himself. And what he did was quite amazing.

The Bible tells us very simply that he channeled water down to the west side of the city and brought water into the city. He channeled it by 533 meters, winding under the city, 49 meters down.

[23:06] They started at both ends with a little lamp and a chisel in their hands. They met in the middle, and to this day, no engineer knows how they managed to do it. It was a magnificent feat of engineering.

The only thing is, you can walk through it. This is my colleague ahead of me walking through it. How many of you have walked through Hezekiah's tunnel? Anyone? One. Okay. I don't know how deep the water was when you went through.

It was only just over our ankles, fortunately. An incredible feat of engineering. And it's right there in the Bible. It's what the Bible says. It's another illustration of a biblical story coming absolutely true in the ground.

It went into the Pool of Siloam. The Old Testament doesn't tell us that, but that's where it actually ended, in the Pool of Siloam. And that wasn't discovered until around 2002.

That comes into the New Testament account as well. The prophet Isaiah had promised, this is what the Lord says concerning the king of Israel, king of Assyria.

[24 : 07] He will not enter this city or shoot an arrow there. He will not come before it with shield or build a siege ramp against it. He will not enter the city. And that's exactly what happened. The biblical record tells us that actually his army was destroyed by an unseen hand overnight.

And he had to return with a remnant of his army to Assyria, where two years later he was assassinated by two of his sons. But, like Ramesses of old in 1273, after his battle with the Hittites, when Sennacherib goes back, he has to pretend that it was a victory.

And on the Taylor prism that you see here, he records a number of his battles. One of them is the capture, or is the, is, is, it refers to Jerusalem.

But what he says about Jerusalem is very significant. He says he shut up Hezekiah in the city of Jerusalem, quote, like a bird in a cage. That's all he can say.

The problem was he couldn't get the cage open, get the bird out. And what is significant is that he gives a record of all his battles, his triumphs, and every single nation that he defeated, he captured the king, except one.

[25 : 18] And that was Hezekiah. It fits perfectly what his own records tell us. Really, that was an admission of defeat, because he never even was able to lay siege to the city of Jerusalem.

People confirmed by the spade. Just a few more. These are rather, I think, they're of interest. This is Shalmaneser III. He's a king of Assyria.

He described himself as the strong man, unsparing. He loved to give a description of what he did to cities when he destroyed them, building a great pile of skulls outside the city and making the rivers run with blood, and a lot of other things that I won't bother you with this evening.

But he was a brutal king, as they all were. And incidentally, it was to people like this, because it was around this time, that Jonah was sent to Assyria.

So I know he was disobedient, and I'm not excusing him, but just had a little bit of sympathy for him. And I can put it very brutally, would you like to go and take the gospel into the heart of Islamic State today?

[26 : 21] That's the equivalent. That's the equivalent. Remember that when you're reading about Jonah. Anyway, Shalmaneser, on the other side of this stele, you'll have to go around the back of the screen to read it.

On the other side of this stele, he describes a very big battle that he fought against a consortium of 12 kings. It was a massive battle. There was 61,000 infantry involved on the other side.

There were 4,000 chariots. There were 1,900 cavalry and 1,000 camels. And, of course, he won. But what is significant is that he tells us that Ahab, the king of Israel, put half the chariots in, 2,000 chariots, and 10,000 infantry into the battle.

He's named, and that's one of many occasions when a king of Israel is named by a despot of the surrounding nations. And, similarly, that's the Battle of Karkar that was 853 BC.

And this one, Jehu. Now, you all know about Jehu. He's the guy who introduced Formula One racing to Israel. Right. Now, if you don't know what that means, then ask the person nearest you who smiled and nodded and pretended they knew what it meant, and they'll tell you.

[27 : 34] So, Jehu was a butcher. He butchered his way to power, slaughtered the whole family of Ahab, and killed Jezebel, Ahab's evil wife.

He needed a few friends. Who better to get on side than to toddle along to the big guy we've just been looking at, the strong man unsparing, Shalmaneser III, and take him a few presents. And he did. And on this black obelisk, it's a black limestone obelisk, the second row down tells us that the kneeling figure is Jehu the king of Israel. This is the cuneiform writing along the top there.

And he, as you go round this square, you have a picture of all the things that he brought. So, there's two kings, Ahab and Jehu, mentioned by Shalmaneser.

There are seal impressions of kings as well, believe it or not. Now, the seal impression is called a bulla, or bullae, plural. We don't have many seals themselves, but the impression is in clay or mud,

and it comes out on the other side.

[28 : 38] Now, here's a seal impression. It's your ID card. It's your visa card. A seal impression of Ahaz, king of Judah. And here's one of his son, Hezekiah, whom we've just been talking about.

Son of Ahaz, king of Judah. And I like this one. This belongs to Shebenach Yahu, servant of the king, Isaiah 22. He's the bad boy in the palace. And if you want to know what he did, you go away and you read Isaiah chapter 22 and you'll find out.

There are many more seals that have been found as well. How about a couple of instructions that were never given? Here's one. Supposedly never given. The Bible says that Cyrus, king of Persia, when they captured Babylon, 539 BC, Cyrus had a new idea.

He said that all the kingdoms of the earth could go back to the, the Jews could go back to the city of Jerusalem. They could rebuild their city. They could rebuild their temple.

And they could take their gods with them. The Jews said, we haven't got any gods. But could we take the stuff that Nebuchadnezzar nicked from the temple and take that with us? And he said, yes, you can take that. Oh, and by the way, there's no recession.

[29 : 48] So you can, we'll pay some of the cost as well. And the, and the critics said, that's nonsense. Because remember what I said earlier on? What did the despots do?

They took the cream of the population out and put rubbish back in so that they diluted opposition.

Cyrus had a brand new idea. And his idea was, I'll get them all on side.

They think I'm marvelous and they'll pray to their gods for me. They can all go back home. And the critics said, no way. No ancient king would do that. Well, that was until 1896 when this lump of clay was found.

It's about nine inches long. Now, the Cyrus cylinder is so important that an exact replica of it is displayed in the United Nations headquarters in New York.

It's been translated into all 27 official languages of the UN. And it's still, even to today, it's a national icon of Iran. It's just been on tour to Iran, actually, last year.

[30 : 48] And they gave it back because it actually sits in an ice glass case in the British Museum. Why? Well, simply because it says that Cyrus declares, he doesn't mention the Jews on the Cyrus cylinder.

He declares that all the nations can go back, guess what, take their gods with them, build their temples and rebuild their cities. And the exchequer will pay some of the cost. Isn't that incredible? We have to wait for a lump of clay to confirm whether we're allowed to believe the Bible or not. Now, be on your guard because it's better to start the other way around and say it's nice when the lump of clay supports the biblical description.

And actually, it's exactly as we read three times in 2 Chronicles 36, Ezra 1 and Ezra 6. Now, here's another one. You know who this guy is, don't you? You recognize him? Yes, you're right.

The Emperor Caesar Augustus, well, he gave an instruction that nobody would ever have given. You remember it? Well, you've got a few months to go before you'll be hearing it again.

[31 : 49] Caesar Augustus issued a decree that a census should be taken of the entire Roman world and everyone went to his own town to register. What nonsense is that? Can you imagine the upheaval of everyone having to go back?

I mean, isn't it good when you have to register to vote in your locality? You don't have to go all the way back to where you were born before you could register. Well, actually, that's what you had to do.

Here's a census order from the Roman governor of Egypt in the time of Trajan in AD 104 ordering all men to return to their homes. The word he uses is hearth.

And so it's pretty obvious what he's talking about, to go back to their homes for a census. Nothing exceptional and unusual in that at all. People confirmed by the spec.

Just a couple in the New Testament. When Paul wrote to the church at Rome, he was actually in Corinth. And if you go to Corinth today, you can go to the ruins of the theatre at Corinth, which Paul would have known in its pristine condition.

[32 : 53] When Paul's writing the letter to Rome, some of you will know that in chapter 16 he gives loads of greetings to people in Rome. But he also gives a lot of greetings from people in Corinth.

And one of them he names as Erastus, the director of public works, who actually sends greetings. Well, this, if you go to the theatre, you can find in the pavement outside, a marble pavement, the inscription that tells us that Erastus, the city treasurer, laid the pavement at his own expense.

Almost certainly the same man for two reasons. Number one, Erastus is a very unusual name. According to the Greek lexicon of names, first century names, only one in 1100 men would ever have the name Erastus.

That's not very common, not like Brian. And the other reason is that the two offices, the director of public works and the city treasurer, they're not the same word in Greek, but they're very similar. They're financial jobs. And he could have either held the two together or one after the other. Almost certainly the same man. But unquestionably, this is the right man. When Paul and Barnabas arrived on Cyprus, they came up against Sergius Paulus, who was an intelligent man, according to Luke. [34 : 13] Well, of course he was, because he accepted the gospel, and all intelligent people do. And he was the proconsul at Paphos. And this inscription, discovered in 1877, tells us that Sergius Paulus was proconsul in AD 47, exactly the time when the apostle Paul was there.

Sir William Mitchell Ramsey was one of the most famous archaeologists, and to this day is still, although he died at the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. And he spent his whole life, his academic life, digging up Asia Minor.

That's modern-day Turkey. Not all of it, but bits of it. And he came to this conclusion. He said, you may press the words of Luke. That's the gospel of Luke and the author of Acts as well.

You may press the words of Luke in a degree beyond any other historians, and they stand the keenest scrutiny and the hardest treatment. Christianity did not originate in a lie, and we can and we must demonstrate this.

And what's significant about Ramsey is that when he began his work, he had been trained in Germany to believe he would find the Bible nonsense everywhere. And that was the conclusion he came to. Luke was an accurate historian.

[35 : 26] You go through the gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles and check these figures out. He refers to 117 living people by name, 114 towns, provinces, islands, seas, and other identifiable places, 25 political, military, social, and religious events known to history.

He refers to the famine in Acts 11, the expulsion of the Jews from Rome in the time of Claudius in Acts 18, both of those authenticated by first-century texts. Luke was happy for his readers to check him out.

You don't do that kind of detail if you're not willing to be checked. I believe Luke kept a notebook, and he scribbled lots of stuff down in his notebook. And why shouldn't he?

This is a first-century notebook. Here, here's a good idea. Take a few slithers of wood, very thin slithers of wood, or parchment if you like, and punch a couple of holes in the bottom and put a ring in them.

Do you know what we've made? A filofax. A first-century ring binder. That's exactly what they were using. Did you know Paul was using one?

[36 : 35] Well, we know this, you see, because when Paul wrote to Timothy in 2 Timothy 4, he asked Paul to send, he asked to Timothy to bring to him some items of his, a coat because it was getting winter and it was getting cold.

But then he says, bring with me, with you also, my scrolls and the parchments. Now, the Greeks didn't have a word for this newfangled filofax, so they nicked the Latin word, membrane, from which we get our word membrane.

And that's exactly the word that the Apostle Paul uses in 2 Timothy 4.13. My scrolls and my membrane, my notebooks. Paul was using a notebook.

And it leads me to remind you of this. The old idea that the Gospels were not written down until, you know, a couple of hundred years after the event, after all this oral teaching, everybody passing it on from hand to mouth.

That's nonsense. That's yesterday's ideas. Forget it. We know that students took notes of the rabbis and their philosopher teachers. We know that because we got their notes.

[37 : 35] In the first century, people were reading. They were reading histories. They were reading agricultural manuals. They were reading fiction. They were reading poetry. They were reading drama. People were reading.

Every boy Jew, sorry girls, but every boy Jew had to read and write. And you can imagine that when people were listening to this rabbi out on the hillside, do you think anybody thought of writing anything down?

Of course they would. There were lots of people in the Gospel records who could write. The centurion could write. Matthew could write. He was a tax collector. He was good at fiddling the books. He knew how to write or write.

Yeah, there were plenty of people who could read and write. And people were writing things down. I'm not going to deal with this because we'll come to this in more detail on another evening.

But I'm going to just finish. I want you to just look at the last bit there. This is Lucian, who ridiculed Christians and Christ, but never suggested that he didn't live and accepted his crucifixion as a fact.

[38 : 33] See what he says. I love this testimony to Christians. Second century. The Christians worship a man to this day. The distinguished person, see he doesn't doubt that Jesus lived.

He just mocks it. Who introduced their novel rites was crucified on that account. He doesn't doubt his crucifixion either. From the moment they are converted, listen to this, they deny the gods of Greece, thank God for that, and worship the crucified sage.

You're right. And live after his laws. Good on them. Isn't that a great testimony? But listen. They worship the crucified sage. This is a piece of second century or even third century.

I'm not quite sure which. I've put it down as second century graffiti in Rome. I'll show it to you a little bit clearer in just a moment. It's a picture, a scrawled image of a donkey-headed man spread-eagled on a cross.

You can understand why. These people worship a donkey crucified. And there's a little man with his hands up worshipping. And in misspelt Greek, somebody has written, Alex Zamanos worships his god.

[39 : 42] Ha, ha, ha. Silly fool. But what I like is this, that underneath, in proper Latin, somebody has written, Alex Zamanos is faithful.

I love to believe, and it's only my imagination, that that night, Alex Zamanos crept back and said, you can laugh, but Alex Zamanos is faithful. He's worshipping his god who died for him.

And it brings me to this very moving picture. Leon Jerome's picture of the Christian's last prayer. I hope you can see it. This little ring of people here, an elder standing, praying for them, men, women, and little children here, in the arena, the great thousands roaring for their blood and the wild animals coming to tear them apart.

That happened again and again in the first and second and halfway through the third century, into the fourth century. And it's happening today. These Christians were convinced of the reality of their Saviour.

And all over the world, as you and I sit here in peace and comfort and quietness, our brothers and sisters are suffering the same way, because they love Jesus. And why?

[40 : 57] If you go to the garden tomb in Israel, you'll see a tomb that isn't the tomb Jesus was buried in, but is very like it.

And if you go through the door there and then you turn around and come out, you'll see there's a notice on the inside that says, He is not here, for he is risen. The resurrection of Jesus Christ demonstrates who he is and what he came to do.

And that's why Christians all over the world, through every century, have been prepared to die for their love for him. Or as the Apostle Paul put it, writing to the Corinthians, Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures.

He was buried and he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures. Thank you, you've been very patient. I'm going to hand back to the pastor and he will, Peter, you'll lead us in any questions and answer any questions while I go and get a cup of tea and a flapjack.

Okay.