

# *Smoky Mountain Bible Institute*

## *Archeology 106 Cities, Churches, & towns*

Welcome to class. Please take out your Bibles and prepare to take copious notes as the information that follows is of great value.... Let's continue our discussion on archeology, but let's shift our attention to some more recent historical events—let's say around 2,010 to 1,985 years ago (as of the year 2010.) In essence, let's look at some of the sites from the life of Christ that reflect great consistency with the biblical narrative contained in the Gospel accounts of His life.

**The Church of the Nativity:** There are ancient records of the cave upon which this church was built, and which was a point of Christian pilgrimage as early as the first century AD. Whether or not it is the exact location upon which this church was built, this almost 1700 year old church is clearly in a place and in the town that fits the biblical narrative. The Holy Land is filled with many churches built on similar locations. The annunciation, the crucifixion, and many other significant events in Christ's life are marked with churches in the locations where those events happened. Some may be yards from the actual location, but few biblical scholars' question whether most of these churches sit in the general location of these biblical events.

**The City of Woe:** Bethsaida has had much archeological work done since its discovery in 1987. Biblical maps made since that date now accurately show this dried up harbor city which is the birth place and home town of Peter, Andrew and Philip. Only Jerusalem and Capernaum are mentioned more in the Gospel accounts than Bethsaida. But Jesus condemned Bethsaida, as recorded in Matthew 11:21 and Luke 10:13. The town was destroyed around 66-68 AD and never rebuilt.

**Capernaum Synagogue:** During His ministry in Galilee, Jesus taught and healed at the synagogue in Capernaum. There is clearly a black basalt foundation from the time of Christ beneath the ruins of a synagogue built some 350 years later. It is easy to tell the difference between the two because the newer stones are white.

**Jericho:** The accent city of Jericho remains uninhabited. However, there is a modern city that bears its name close by, and there was a city close by in Jesus' day as well. That is the location of Herod the Great's winter palace--the same Herod who was King when Jesus was born. It also is the same place that Jesus met Zacchaeus the tax collector. That's right—the same short man in the sycamore tree from the Sunday school song. There was a heavily traveled road between Jerusalem and Jericho, the same one Jesus used in His parable of the Good Samaritan. The historical accuracy of scripture is a real thorn in the side of those who would dismiss it as fable and myth.

**Bethesda:** The pool by the sheep gate with the five covered colonnades where Jesus healed the cripple man as recorded in John 5:2. You can visit the ruins of that pool today. It has been unearthed since 1956, and portions of all five porticos have been reconstructed as well.

**The City of Tiberias:** The home of Herod Antipas still exists today. The main gate from the time of Christ was discovered during a dig from 1973-1974, and there are many other sites in and around the city that bear witness to the city from which Herod Antipas came, and where Jesus did much of His ministry. The Gospel of Luke records that when Jesus was brought before Pontius Pilate for trial, he handed him over to Antipas, in whose territory Jesus had been active. However, Antipas sent him back to Pilate, because Jesus would not entertain him. The legal basis for these events, and the very historicity of Antipas' involvement in the trial, are difficult for the Minimalist to dismiss, but since they cannot dispute the evidence, they attack the messenger by accusing Luke of later inserting the historic facts. It is easier for me to question their motives than those of the great evangelist St. Luke and the Holy Spirit who guided his pen.

**Decapolis:** This is actually the name given to 10 cities (deca = 10 and polis = city). This league of 10 cities, mentioned in Matthew 5:25, Mark 5:20 and 7:31, is where Greek language and culture flourished in the Holy Land, and is for the most part spread to the east of the sea of Galilee and the Jordan River, with the exception of Damascus to the north and Scythopolis on the west bank of the Jordan River. All but one city has been positively identified, and the city of Dion may be associated with Tell el-Ashari among other possibilities. People from those cities were present at the Sermon on the Mount and they also marveled when a man, who had demons cast out of him by Christ, proclaimed what Jesus did had done for him. These are not fictitious accounts or places. Our faith affirms their truth, while the places affirm their historicity.

In Christ,  
Pastor Portier