

# PARACLETE

ADVOCATING FOR THE TRUTH OF THE CHRISTIAN FAITH



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## Are the People Real?

By Dr. Don Bierle, *FaithSearch* President

When I'm doing my presentations on evidence for the Bible and the Christian faith, there is a question I frequently get. The question says a lot about the Church's lack of effectiveness in communicating truth to our current society, both Christians and non-Christians: **"Are the people real or are they just Bible people?"**

Implied in the question is that the Bible "stories" are only "make-believe" and have no connection to the "real world." This point of view expects that they should all begin with "once upon a time!" Because *FaithSearch* International has excelled in demonstrating the Bible is "real history" and identifying the evidence of archaeological discoveries to support its reality, we have maintained our ministry relevance for evangelism and discipleship for nearly forty-two years.



Caravaggio: *The Incredulity of Saint Thomas*. Public domain.

We may not know whether the people in the Bible are real—including Jesus—if we don't ask questions (as did "doubting" Thomas) and look carefully at the available evidence.

the Holy Spirit draws them to follow the "real Jesus." No "fairy-tale" can transform a life and place it on the certain path to eternity!

### How do we know that Bible people are real?

I have articulated the evidence for God, for the Bible, for Jesus, and for faith in my book, *Surprised by Faith*. It is available at our office, at our online store ([www.faithsearch.org](http://www.faithsearch.org)), and at our live presentations. For this article, I will address the question above.

First, a caveat.

There is convincing evidence for the inspiration of Scripture by the Holy Spirit. **The Bible does not need my answer to be legitimate.** Christians around the world "know" that it is true by the testimony of the Spirit within them and by His transforming power in their life. My answer, therefore, is to **help those who have not yet become Christians and those who want additional objective assurance.**

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Dr. Don Bierle has been extending the Gospel with evidence to all peoples everywhere since 1979.

At least one million people have either read or heard the "real story" of Jesus, the Bible, and Christian faith through *FaithSearch* publications and recordings. More than seventy-two thousand have experienced an "Ah-Ha!" moment at one of our apologetic presentations as

## FOR REFLECTION

### "...who will go for Us?" Isaiah 6:8

In a vision, Isaiah responded to God's call to deliver His message to Israel. Likewise, the church has been commissioned to take the Good News of redemption in Jesus Christ to the world (Matthew 28:19-20).

The twenty-first century has taken a toll on the Church's ability to do that.

The Gallup polling organization reported in March this year that **American church membership fell to 47% in 2020**, the lowest since Gallup began tracking the statistic in 1937. Church membership was 70% at the turn of the century.

Source: *Answers Magazine* Vol. 15, No. 4 (Oct-Dec, 2020), p. 27.



### "...come away... rest a while." Mark 6:31

Jesus gave us an example. **This summer** might be a great time to practice it. When Jesus faced the crucial task of choosing His twelve apostles, Luke records that He retreated alone to a mountain to pray (6:12). When the ministry later attracted such a crowd that "they could not even eat a meal," Jesus said to His disciples, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest" (6:31). When the 5,000 whom He had just fed pressed in on Him, He dismissed them and "went up on a mountainside by Himself to pray" (Matthew 14:23). Finally, when He faced imminent arrest, suffering, and death, He went to the Garden of Gethsemane — "withdrew from them...knelt down and began to pray" (Luke 22:39-41).

**Take time this summer to rest and refresh your spirit in His presence** (Psalm 16:11).



## Are the People Real?

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A biblical scholar, **Lawrence Mykytiuk**, has given everyone asking this question an incredible gift. He has exhaustively researched ancient literature outside of the Bible (the “real world”) and archaeology discoveries to see if there are any authentic references therein to Old Testament and New Testament persons, and to Jesus. The references must conform to the following three rules:

- Sources are genuine, not forged or unreliable.
- The time-and-place setting of the person in the ancient writing matches the setting of the person in the Bible.
- Marks of an individual, such as name, father’s name, title, or work location, distinguish two different people from each other.



Photo credit: HolyLandPhotos.org

The so-called “Pilate stone” was discovered in 1961 at Caesarea Maritima. It provides extra-biblical confirmation of the existence of Pontius Pilate, who was previously only known through the New Testament.

Dr. Mykytiuk has published his findings over the years in four *Biblical Archaeology Review* articles. In summary, the number of confirmed “real” Bible people mentioned in sources outside of the Bible are astounding:

- **Fifty-three Old Testament figures** from about 1000-400 B.C. have been confirmed by science.
- **Thirty New Testament figures** from the first century A.D. (including Jesus) have been confirmed outside the text of the Bible.

**The popular notion that persons mentioned in the Bible are fictitious is itself the fiction!** Author Mykytiuk ful-



Public domain

Pharaoh Shishak had this list of his conquests in Israel (ca. 926 B.C.) inscribed on a temple wall in Kanak, near modern-day Luxor, in Egypt.

ly expects many more confirmations in the future.

The sources may be an ancient writing, like the several books by the Jewish historian **Josephus** or the **Jewish Mishnah** (the Mishnah and Gemara make up the Talmud); **inscriptions** on stone monuments and stele; and **minted coins** – to name a few.

### Who Are They?

Confirmed **New Testament religious figures** include Pharisee **Gamaliel the Elder** (Acts 5:34-39); **John the Baptist** (Matthew 3:1-15); **James**, brother of Jesus (Mark 6:3); and the high priest **Caiaphas** (Luke 3:2). **New Testament political figures** include emperor **Tiberius** (Luke 3:1); **Herod the Great** (Matthew 2:1); prefect **Pontius Pilate** (Luke 23:1-24); and **Aretas IV** (2 Corinthians 11:32).

Confirmed **Old Testament figures** include **Shishak** (Egyptian pharaoh 945–924 B.C.; 1 Kings 11:40); **Jeroboam II** (king of the Northern Kingdom of Israel from 790–750 B.C.; 2 Kings 13:13); **Belshazzar** (king of Babylonia 543–540 B.C.; Daniel 5:1); and **Artaxerxes I** (king of the Achaemenid Empire, also known as the first Persian Empire, from 465–425 B.C.; Ezra 4:7).

Sources for the external confirmation of Jesus’ life include works by **Tacitus**, **Josephus**, **Lucian of Samosata**, **Pliny the Younger**, **Suetonius**, **Mara bar Serapion**, and **Celsus** (himself a second-century opponent of Christianity).

Historical research scholar, **Dr. Edwin Yamauchi**, responding to the claim that Jesus never existed, famously said:

*From time to time some people have tried to deny the existence of Jesus, but this is really a lost cause...*

*There is overwhelming evidence that Jesus did exist...*” (Quoted in Lee Strobel, *The Case for Christ*, p. 81.)

To paraphrase the nineteenth century editorial called “Is There a Santa Claus?” we may with confidence conclude: **Yes, Virginia, the people in the Bible are real!** 

**Sources:** Articles referenced for this article are all by Lawrence Mykytiuk. “Archaeology Confirms 50 Real People in the Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, March/April 2014; “Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, January/February 2015; “Archaeology Confirms 3 More Bible People,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, May/June 2017; “New Testament Political Figures Confirmed,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, September/October 2017. “New Testament Religious Figures Confirmed,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Summer 2021.



### Scary Baggage Claim

Parents checking their bags at the Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport suddenly realized their small son was nowhere to be seen. Panic set in as the airport police were called and began a search.

They found him some minutes later out back, unhurt, riding the conveyor belt around. 



Source: *World Magazine* Vol. 38, No. 11, p. 19.

**“...let endurance have its perfect result...” James 1:4**

A Polish man has spent \$1,550 in fees over seventeen years for **192 attempts** to pass the nation’s written driver’s license test.

He may get encouragement—or consolation—to hear that a sixty-eight-year-old South Korean woman finally passed her driver’s exam in 2009, after **900 tries!** 

Source: *World Magazine*, 11.09.19 Volume 36, No. 8, p. 17.

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