

Transcript 94

Shea Houdmann

Welcome to the Got Questions podcast. We'd like to spotlight or highlight different ministries or different individuals who are doing something that you find interesting, and that's definitely the case in today's episode. I'd like to introduce you all to Titus Kennedy he's the author of Excavating the Evidence for Jesus, a fascinating book, especially if you're at all interested in biblical archaeology. So Titus welcome to the show.

Titus Kennedy

Hey, thank you for having me.

Shea Houdmann

So Titus why don't you tell our listeners a little bit about your background, about who you are, what you do and why you do it.

Titus Kennedy

Sure, well I'm a professional archaeologist. That's what I spend most of my time doing in various forms and that could be excavating, research, writing articles, books, teaching. And I kind of got into archaeology because I had always enjoyed and had been interested in history even in elementary school. And I got introduced into archaeology itself when one of my teachers gave me a book on the excavation of Troy and I then began to start reading books about the archaeology of the Bible and notice how there were so many discoveries that connected to the Bible, both the Old and New Testaments, some of it helped us understand the text better and other times it demonstrated the historical accuracy of the Bible and eventually end of high school I decided I wanted to try to study archaeology and see if that would be a viable career path for me, so I ended up doing my bachelors at Biola University and then I did a masters in Near Eastern Archaeology at University of Toronto. Followed by another Masters and a doctorate in Biblical Archaeology at University of South Africa. During that time I volunteered on various excavations and then got hired as a staff member and now I'm directing some of my own archaeological excavations and projects.

Shea Houdmann

So it's amazing, So what specifically leads you to write Excavating the Evidence for Jesus?

Titus Kennedy

So I had ideas for a few different books and some of them focused on particular time periods, other or more general issues. My first book was a focus on artifacts or objects throughout all the different time periods of the by Bible and then another one that I'm working on right now is sites, locations connected to all different regions and periods of the Bible. But I also really wanted to write a book on the archaeology of Jesus, because Jesus is the focal point of the Bible and Christianity. The most important person in history. Really, the most famous person in history, no matter who you are or where you're from. And so I thought that was something that I should really try to work on and get out there,

especially since I thought it was something that we could benefit from in an updated version of what have been the more recent finds in archaeology or what are some of the questions that may have been figured out that 20-30 years ago people were unsure of and so I came at it from a perspective of an archaeologist rather than a literary scholar and New Testament scholar, and I'm hoping that I can give some different insights and some updated material for people.

Shea Houdmann

One thing that I found most interesting about your book is how it how archaeology argues for the historicity of the Gospels, and obviously the rest of the Bible as well. But your book focuses mostly on the gospel. So why do you think it is important for us to have confidence in the historicity of the gospel accounts of Jesus and His life?

Titus Kennedy

Well, if we don't have confidence that the Gospels themselves are giving us accurate information about historical matters, then why would we rely on it for accurate information about theological or spiritual matters? I think that those two tie together. If a writing, a work if you will, a biblical book, is going to be considered reliable then it should be reliable no matter what it's talking about, whether it's geography or historical characters or theology, and so archaeology can help us to understand a component of that. And then we can say well from this perspective, at least the text, is reliable.

Shea Houdmann

Yeah, for sure. So what place does evidence have in the life of believers? But as you run across a lot of believers, they're just like all we need is faith. We don't need to be able to prove everything. So what's what's the right balance there between faith and trust and ultimately things we can't approve. For example, Hebrews 11 talks about even the existence of God cannot be explicitly proven. So with the balance between faith and evidence and trust me, I am on your team. I love, I love evidence. I love research, I love some of the things you bring out in your book that give credence to the historicity of the gospel accounts, but in your experience, what is the right balance for us to have there as is followers of Christ.

Titus Kennedy

But we should have reasons for what we believe. First, Peter 3:15 is often cited or quoted as a verse that gives this idea. So we need to know why we believe these things. It's not just a nonsense or irrational blind faith. That's one of the reasons why we have all of these stories and all this information in the Bible is, it's showing that God is actually working through history. In reality, it's not just a set of random spiritual commands or laws, and if it is true, if this is the truth in the Bible, then we should be able to see corroborating testimony at evidence that that demonstrates that it's true. You know, we don't need to or we, we can't prove every little thing but where we see interplay between the historical record and the Bible we we should see agreement there. If the Bible is true, and so I think if it's important that people recognize that they understand that and that they know some of these things, that they have some reasons for what they believe other than otherwise it's no different than any other religion that just says believe this spiritual tenant, follow this spiritual law.

Shea Houdmann

Well, one of the things I found most interesting about your book was different things that you've discovered over the years, or even things that were meaningful to you in archeology in your study of the Bible helping you to understand the Bible better, but to give us a couple of those things that archaeology has helped ordinary Christians, even theologians to understand the Bible better.

Titus Kennedy

Well, a few examples that I can think of that I didn't necessarily have anything to do with, but one comes from the Old Testament, and that is a passage which talks about this odd word that's only found once "him" and originally translators had no idea what this was. They didn't have any other sources which talked about this word, and so they just guessed on the translation it's it's found in the book of Samuel and then excavations at the site of Gezer uncovered this stone weight with the inscription "him" on it, and they weighed it, and they found that it was 2/3 of the of a shekel in weight, and they and later other "him" weights had been discovered and so we know that this was a specific type of weight that was used in the Judges period in the monarchy, early monarchy period, but it went out of use later and that's why it doesn't appear in other text. Later, biblical texts or even beyond that, and so it was, the information was lost. And here's the case where archaeology is helped to allow us to translate the text correctly.

Shea Houdmann

Been shifting gears a little bit and started giving evidence and when we're arguing for the Christian faith, what are some archaeological discoveries that you think are tremendous evidences that we can use to maybe convince someone who's skeptical or convince someone who's doubting how, how can archaeology help us to make a better case for the validity of the Christian faith.

Titus Kennedy

In terms of the Gospels specifically, we can look at really a conglomeration of the evidence. Almost all of the locations that are mentioned in the Gospels have been found, and many of the cities and towns have been excavated and what's found in those excavations agrees with the texts and the Gospels, you know things like Capernaum for example, where there was a 1st century synagogue, and then Peter's house, which is located very nearby, or Nazareth, that it was a town occupied in the 1st century by Jews who observe the mosaic law, or that Bethlehem was occupied in the 1st century. The pool of Bethesda and Jerusalem, that it had five stoas. And then you know that explains we're able to explain what it looked like. Because John he mentions that, but he doesn't say what the shape is. Or the pool of Salome, there's just so many locations, and not just towns or cities, but even specific buildings or structures like I've been mentioning.

Shea Houdmann

So let me give our audience a good example of this and that over the years I think was probably made about 10 years ago. We first received this question and like so, why should I believe the Bible when, according to Jordan history, Nazareth wasn't even inhabited during the time of Jesus? And what would you say in response to that that claim?

Titus Kennedy

Well, that we've now found that Nazareth definitely was inhabited at the time of Jesus. They found much 1st century pottery there, stone carved vessels which were used in ritual purification and Judaism, they found houses and tombs also from the 1st century, so we definitely know that the historical context, many of the claims of the Gospels that are accurate. They've been verified through archaeology and, you know, we could go into specific sections of the Gospels too and see how much archaeological information lines up with those, like the trial of Jesus, for example, has an immense amount of corroboration through archaeology.

Shea Houdmann

So go ahead and give us a couple more of these. I I don't want you to completely spoil the book, but just kind of wet our appetites a little bit more of this sort of things that people are going to discover if they or learn about at least if they were to purchase your book.

Titus Kennedy

So in the trial of Jesus, we have a few different characters and locations that are presented with characters we have Anise, we have Caiaphas, we have Pontius Pilate, we have Jesus. We could even say Herod Antipas, although he plays very minor role in that and also Peter of course appears. And then the locations that we have are places like the the House of the High Priest and then we have the meeting place of the Sanhedrin. And then we have the pretorium. So all of those places and all those people are corroborated by archaeology. We have ancient historical texts in our, most notably Josephus, who mentions these various people. But then we have the tomb of Anise, which has been discovered. A high priestly House of the 1st century in Jerusalem, which may have been the same one that was occupied by Anise and Caiaphas.

Titus Kennedy

We have the oshiwara or burial box of Caiaphas, with his name, inscribed upon it, as well as one of his granddaughter, which states that their family was of the priestly line of Masaya. Mentioned way back in the Book of Chronicles and then we have some remains of the the capitals, the column capitals from the place where the Sanhedrin met. Which was about on the South eastern side of the Temple Mount, and then we have the pretorium of pilot which has been partially excavated. It was located in the former palace of Herod the Great. We've got an inscription of Pilot that was found at Cessario. We have a ring with pilots name on it that was found at Herodium. We have the James oshiwara which has Jesus name inscribed on it, which has been shown to be an ancient inscription and not a forgery. And so we just have so much evidence corroborating even this one little day in the life of Jesus. All these characters, all these places.

Shea Houdmann

So let me ask you a question, that something is fascinating to me. I've been to Israel on two different occasions and both were fantastic trips, but on one of them I saw two who definitely knew more about history of Jerusalem archaeology than I do arguing about whether what's commonly called the Temple Mount, where the Dome of the Rock is, is that actually where the Solomon inherits temple were located, or was that actually some other spot somewhere in the city? I'm sure you're very familiar with this, but how can archaeology help us even discern an issue like that?

Titus Kennedy

No, there's no structure in the city of David that we could identify with anything relating to the foundations of the temple. I mean, the Temple mount is called that because that's where the temple was located. The dimensions for the temple, or for the whole temple complex are actually given in Josephus, and they wouldn't even fit in the city of David. You also don't build your holy places on lower ground. You build them on higher ground and it's Mount Moriah up there. That's why it was up there. We could look at a variety of different things, but no, there's no professional archaeologists that thinks that the temple was located in the city of David and not on the Temple Mount.

Shea Houdmann

We're good. Well thank you for that's what I believe. But it's it's kind of weird when you hear, what? Every other person I've ever said it said it was that this is where Zerubbabel and in the later, Harry temple was in Solomon, simple before that. And now you're saying it was in this location, and this is actually complex of the Romans up there now. So archaeology gives super handy and even helping us to settle some these debates, when again, 2000 years ago a lot can change in the geography and so forth, but not to the point that we can deny this discoveries of archaeologists.

Titus Kennedy

Right and there are always various theories floating around out there about all sorts of different time periods in biblical history, so it's good to to look into things and double check. And I, you know, I'm not against new new ideas or hypotheses, but oftentimes we have the same kind of fringe theories that are floating around out there for many many years, and they've they've been refuted on several different levels by a variety of scholars. And then they just persist because people aren't thinking critically about certain things.

Shea Houdmann

Sure, so let me ask you for you personally, whether it's something that's you've discovered or something that someone else has discovered in biblical archaeology. What are some of the most meaningful archaeological discoveries for you personally?

Titus Kennedy

We're talking about the entire Bible, then I could I could pick a few out. So one one that really changed drastically the views in modern scholarship was the Tel Dan Stele. So in the 80s and early 90s, many, many archaeologists and ancient historians and even biblical scholars were starting to say or agree that David was a mythological king. Because we had no evidence from ancient times that he exists.

Titus Kennedy

And then in 1993, the fragment of this Aramean victory stele was discovered at the site of Dan in northern Israel, and it talked about these different Israelite kings that the Arameans had supposedly defeated. Then it said that they were from the House of David, and which is a phrase that's also found multiple times in the Old Testament.

Titus Kennedy

So finally we had this 9th century BC inscription that is mentioning David as king and founder of the Israelite dynasty, and that completely changed almost overnight the views of many archaeologists and historians, so that would be a big one I would say for the Old Testament. And then as far as the New Testament.

Titus Kennedy

You know, we've got so many one of my favorites is pretty controversial still, just because it was involved in this antiquity trial, and that's the James Oshirari. And now I find that so interesting because it's got the names James, Joseph, and Jesus on it.

Titus Kennedy

But if I were to pick another one, I would probably say the Nazareth inscription is one of my favorites. Because what we have here is essentially the official Roman reaction. The Emperor of Rome actually reaction to the story of the resurrection of Jesus. And their idea that the disciples must have gotten together and stolen the body of Jesus from the tomb, and then spread this, and it went around the empire like wildfire and they they wanted to stop it and make sure nothing else like that ever happened again.

Shea Houdmann

That's that's fascinating. It's so interesting, and again, many more of these in in your book, Excavating the Evidence for Jesus. Highly recommended, it will include links to where you can learn more about Titus and his work and the books he's written in the show notes at podcast.gotquestions.org and also at the description field on YouTube when this video goes live, so Titus anything in closing? Why should Christians be interested in archaeology and archaeological discoveries?

Titus Kennedy

I would say 2 main reasons for that. So first of all, a discipline like archaeology can reveal new information from the past so it can help us to better understand the historical context of the Bible, whether that's the Old Testament or the New Testament and in so doing then we can get a fuller picture of what the author was writing and what the author's intent was in those books, and even to more accurately translate and interpret those passages, so that's that's one item.

Titus Kennedy

The second would be that archaeology provides evidence that demonstrates the reliability of the scriptures, and this is something for Christians which just can help them to continue to have confidence in their faith and in the Bible. But it can also be used in discussions with seekers or skeptics when they ask questions like why would I believe what the gospel say? Why would I believe what the Bible says about the Exodus or or about King David or Solomon you know. Is there any evidence because I I want to know that there is some evidence that this is actually correct before I'm going to consider believing the spiritual and theological claims in the Bible.

Shea Houdmann

Absolutely. So again, this is been the Got Questions podcast with Doctor Titus Kennedy. Titus, thank you for again for coming on the show and sharing some tidbits from your book with us.

Titus Kennedy

Oh my pleasure. Thank you for having me.

Shea Houdmann

This has been the Got Questions podcast. Got Questions? The Bible has answers. We'll help you find them.