

30 People in the New Testament Confirmed Archaeologically

A web-exclusive supplement to Lawrence Mykytiuk's BAR article identifying real New Testament political and religious figures

Lawrence Mykytiuk August 22, 2020 8 Comments 17169 views Share

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Fifty-three people from the Hebrew Bible [have been confirmed by archaeology](#). What about the New Testament? In ["New Testament Political Figures Confirmed"](#) in the September/October 2017 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, Purdue University scholar Lawrence Mykytiuk examines the political figures in the New Testament who can be identified in the archaeological record and by extra-biblical writings. Below, see Mykytiuk's extensive evidence, covering Jesus and John the Baptist to King Herod and his royal family. —Ed.



The largest coin struck by King Herod the Great. Photo: Copyright 2010 by David Hendin, from *Guide to Biblical Coins, 5th Edition*.

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Subscribers: Read Lawrence Mykytiuk's article ["New Testament Political Figures Confirmed"](#) in the September/October 2017 issue, and ["New Testament Religious Figures Confirmed"](#) in the Summer 2021 issue of **BAR**.

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New Testament Figures Evidence Chart

Name	Who was he or she?	When did he rule?	Where in the New Testament?	Sample of evidence in historical writings	Evidence in inscriptions
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Religious Figures

1	Jesus	Religious Leader			Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> ; Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> ; Lucian of Samosata, <i>Passing of Peregrinus</i> ; Celsus, <i>On the True Doctrine</i> (via Origen, <i>Against Celsus</i>); Pliny the Younger, <i>Epistulae</i>	Numerous
2	Gamaliel the Elder	Renowned Pharisee			Mishnah: Orlah; Rosh ha-Shanah; Yebamoth; Sotah; Gittin; Josephus, <i>Life</i>	Numerous
3	John the Baptist	Religious Figure			Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Numerous
4	James	Brother of Jesus			Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Numerous
5	Ananus/Annas	Son of Seth/Sethi, High Priest			Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Numerous
6	Caiaphas	High Priest			Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Numerous
7	Ananias	Son of Nebedaios, High Priest			Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Numerous

Roman Emperors

8	Augustus	Roman Emperor	31 B.C.E.–14 C.E.	Luke 2:1	Numerous	Numerous
9	Tiberius	Roman Emperor	14–37 C.E.	Luke 3:1	Numerous	Numerous
10	Claudius	Roman Emperor	41–54 C.E.	Acts 11:28; 18:2	Numerous	Numerous
11	Nero	Roman Emperor	54–68 C.E.	Acts 25–26; 28:19	Numerous	Numerous

Herodian Family

12	Herod I, the Great	Rome's King of the Jews over all of Palestine.	37–4 B.C.E.	Matthew 2:1; Luke 1:5	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>	Coins
13	Herod Archelaus	Oldest son of Herod the Great. Ethnarch of Judea, Samaria and Idumea.	4 B.C.E.–6 C.E.	Matthew 2:22	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>	Coins
14	Herod Antipas	Son of Herod the Great; second husband of Herodias. Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea (Transjordan). He ordered the execution of John the Baptist.	4 B.C.E.–39 C.E.	Luke 3:1; 13:31–32; 23:7–12; Mark 6:14; 6:16–28; 8:15	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>	Coins
15	Herod Philip	Son of Herod the Great but not a ruler; Herodias's uncle and first husband; father of their daughter Salome.		Matthew 14:3–4; Mark 6:17–18; Luke 3:19	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)
16	Herodias	Granddaughter of Herod the Great; niece and wife of Herod Philip, mother of his daughter Salome; then Herod Antipas's wife. She brought about the order to execute John the Baptist.		Mathew 14:2–11; Mark 6:17–28; Luke 3:19–20	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>	(No coins because she was not a ruler)
17	Salome	Herodias's daughter. Her dance led to the execution of John the Baptist. Grandniece and later wife of Philip the Tetrarch.		Matthew 14:3–12; Mark 6:17–29	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Coins of her second husband, Aristobulus, king of Chalcis

18	Philip the Tetrarch	Son of Herod the Great. Tetrarch of Trachonitis, Iturea and other northern portions of Palestine. Eventually husband of his grandniece Salome.	4 B.C.E.–34 C.E.	Luke 3:1	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
19	Herod Agrippa I	Grandson of Herod the Great; brother of Herodias. King of Trachonitis, Batanea, gradually all of Palestine. Executed James the son of Zebedee and imprisoned Peter.	37–44 C.E.	Acts 12:1–6, 18–23	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
20	Herod Agrippa II	Son of Herod Agrippa I. Initially Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, then also over parts of Galilee and Perea, Chalcis and northern territories. Festus appointed him to hear Paul's defense.	50–c. 93 C.E.	Acts 25:13–26:32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
21	Berenice/Bernice	Sister and companion of Herod Agrippa II, rumored lovers. Attended Paul's trial before Festus.		Acts 25:13, 23; 26:30	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Inscription of King Herod Agrippa II in Beirut
22	Drusilla	Sister of Herodias and Herod Agrippa I; Jewish wife of Roman governor Felix.		Acts 24:24	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	(No coins; not a ruler)

Roman Legate and Governors

23	Publius Sulpicius Quirinius (= Cyrenius)	Roman imperial legate brought in to govern Syria-Cilicia after Herod Archelaus's rule led to rebellion.	6–9 C.E. and possibly earlier	Luke 2:2	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	The Lapis Venetus inscription discovered in Beirut
24	Pontius Pilate	Roman prefect of Judea who conducted Jesus' trial and ordered his crucifixion.	26–36 C.E.	Matthew 27:11–26; Mark 15:1–15; Luke 3:1; 23:1–24; John 18:28–19:22	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i> ; Tacitus, <i>Annals</i> ; Philo, <i>De Legatione ad Gaium</i>	Pilate Stone discovered at Caesarea Maritima; coins
25	Lucius Junius Gallio	Roman proconsul of Achaia who convened and dismissed the trial of Paul in Corinth.	c. 51–55 C.E.	Acts 18:12–17	Seneca, <i>Letters</i> ; Tacitus, <i>Annals</i>	Stone inscription discovered in Delphi, Greece
26	Marcus Antonius Felix	Roman procurator of Judea who held initial hearings in the trial of the apostle Paul.	52–c. 59 C.E.	Acts 23; 24	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Coins
27	Porcius Festus	Roman procurator of Judea who conducted a hearing in the trial of Paul, during which Paul appealed to Caesar and was sent to Rome.	59–62 C.E.	Acts 24:27–25:27; 26:24–32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i>	Coins

Independent Political Figures

28	Aretas IV	Arabian king of Nabatea. Father of Herod Antipas's first wife, before Herodias.	9 B.C.E.–40 C.E.	2 Corinthians 11:32	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	Inscriptions at Petra, etc.; coins
29	The unnamed Egyptian leader	His Jerusalem-area insurrection was suppressed by Roman procurator Felix.		Acts 21:38	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)
30	Judas of Galilee	Led a rebellion against the census of Roman imperial legate Quirinius.		Acts 5:37	Josephus, <i>Antiquities and Wars</i>	(No coins because he was not a ruler)

Sample Evidences from Ancient Writings and Archaeology

This list does not pretend to be exhaustive in its coverage of the evidence. As the above title indicates, the evidences listed below are intended as samples of both kinds of evidence: ancient writings (manuscripts) and ancient inscriptions (normally on hard objects, such as potsherds). In a few instances, given the ravages of time and the somewhat haphazard nature of archaeological excavations, we have ancient writings but lack inscriptions that are known to be authentic.

Why consider historical evidence from outside the New Testament?

In order to evaluate the historical reliability of any ancient writing, in the last analysis, established historical methodology calls for all evidence to be considered, whether from inside or outside of that writing. Thus many readers who are already familiar with the New Testament are very interested in the external evidence. Likewise, historians of the world to which the New Testament writings refer are obliged to consider relevant evidence or potential evidence in these writings.

1. Jesus.

Tacitus, *Annals* 15.44.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.63–64; 20.200.

Lucian of Samosata, *Passing of Peregrinus* 11.

Celsus, *On the True Doctrine* (via Origen, *Against Celsus*).

Pliny the Younger, *Epistulae* 10.96.

2. Gamaliel the Elder, renowned Pharisee.

Mishnah: Orlah 2.12a; Rosh ha-Shanah 2.5e; Yebamoth 16.7e, h; Sotah 9.15e, l; and Gittin 4.2b, e, 4.3c.
Josephus, *Life* 38.

3. John the Baptist.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.116–119.

4. James, brother of Jesus.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.200–201.

5. Ananus/Annas, son of Seth/Sethi, High Priest.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.26; 18.34–35; 20.198.

There is also potential but inconclusive archaeological evidence for the same high priest Annas. His tomb may have been uncovered in the Akeldama field south of Jerusalem's walls.

6. Caiaphas, High Priest.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.35; 18.95.

An archaeological find might potentially identify the high priest Caiaphas, but it does not provide enough information to draw a firm conclusion. It is a small family tomb, containing ossuaries, on the south side of old Jerusalem. An Aramaic inscription on one of the ossuaries contains at least one possible version of Caiaphas's name: *Yhwsf br Qyf*, "Joseph, son of Caiaphas," but it seems more likely to be read as *Yhwsf br Qwf*, "Joseph, son of Qopha," rather than "of Caiaphas." On another ossuary in the same family tomb, the name *Qf* appears alone. Unfortunately, none of the inscriptions discovered in this tomb makes any explicit reference to the priestly status of anyone buried there.

7. Ananias, son of Nebedaios, High Priest.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.103; 20.179.

During the 1960s at Masada, in a room in the fortress wall, excavators discovered a small inscription that might relate to Ananias. Written across a potsherd, the inscription consists of five Aramaic words: *Hlnnylh khn' rb' 'qby' bryh*, translated "Hlananiah the high priest, 'Aqavia his son." Hananiah in

Hebrew can be translated Ananias or Ananus (or Annas) in Greek. Extant ancient writings do not mention this son in relation to the high priest Ananias. Although the high priest Ananias is a candidate, two other high priests of the first century C.E., Ananus the Elder and the Younger, are also candidates, and we do not have enough information to know to which one the inscription refers.

8-11. Roman emperors Augustus, Tiberius, Claudius and Nero.

The four Roman emperors mentioned in the New Testament are all abundantly verified in the writings of Roman historians, such as Tacitus's *Annals*, which mentions all four, as well as in Josephus's writings and in many inscriptions. For these, no further verification is needed. (Gaius, nicknamed "Caligula," the Roman emperor after Tiberius, goes unmentioned in the New Testament.)

12. Herod I, the Great, Rome's King of the Jews.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.14.4, 15.6.7

Josephus, *Wars* 1.33.8-9

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Coins:

At Masada, 393 coins of Herod the Great were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, p. 71, pp. 87–91 no. 110–502, Plate 62 no. 115–461. These coins from Masada have the inscription, "Of King Herod," in Greek, sometimes abbreviated to only a few letters.

At Meiron, 6 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, pp. 21–22 no. 200–205, p. 127 (photographic plate) no. 200, 202, 203.

At Herodium, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Herodium*, p. 75 no. 2.

At Tel Anafa, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins 1968–1986 Tel Anafa*, p. 253 no. 249; also in *Ancient Jewish Coinage* 2, p. 237, type 17.

At Caesarea Maritima, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Caesarea Maritima*, p. 138.

13. Herod Archelaus, Ethnarch of Judaea, Samaria and Idumea.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.8.2-4, 17.13.1-3, 18.2.1

Josephus, *Wars* 1.33.9, 2.6.1-3, 2.7.3

Coins:

In the inscriptions in Greek on all his coins, he calls himself only "Herod" or "Herod the Ethnarch" (sometimes abbreviated), never using his name Archelaus.

At Masada, 176 coins of Herod Archelaus were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 91-93, and Plate 63 no. 503–677 (with gaps among numbered photographs).

In various parts of Palestine, including Galilee and Transjordan, other coins of Archelaus have been discovered, according to *Treasury of Jewish Coins*, p. 85.

14. Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee and Perea.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.2.1, 18.2.3, 18.4.5, 18.5.1, 18.5.2, 18.7.1

Josephus, *Wars* 2.9.1, 2.9.6

Coins:

Archaeology confirms his rule and title of Tetrarch (of Galilee and Perea) on several coins with the

inscription "Of Herod the Tetrarch" in Greek, without giving his name Antipas. Also inscribed on some of his coins is the name of a city, "Tiberias," which Antipas founded in Galilee and where he built a mint that produced these coins. Josephus's writings and modern analysis of Jewish coins reveal that the only tetrarch named Herod who ever ruled Galilee was Herod Antipas. Herod Antipas apparently produced fewer coins than his father and brothers did, and according to the dates inscribed on his coins compared with theirs, he minted them less often. As a result, fewer have been recovered in excavations.

Near Tiberias, where they were minted, is the area that has yielded most of Antipas's coins that have a known place of discovery.

At Meiron, 3 coins of Herod Antipas were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, p. 22 no. 206–208, p. 127 (photographic plate) no. 208 only (from year 37 of the Emperor Tiberius (33 C.E.). Meiron was north of the city of Dan in Galilee, which Antipas ruled. Coins no. 206 and 207, from the Emperor's 34th year (29/30 C.E.), are recognizably his by their decorations and visible Greek letters. At Jerusalem, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Treasury of Jewish Coins*, p. 85.

15. Herod Philip (not a ruler; compare Philip the Tetrarch, below).

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1 and 4

Josephus, *Wars* 1.28.4, 1.29.2, 1.30.7

16. Herodias, wife of Herod Philip, mother of Salome; then Herod Antipas's wife.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.1 and 4

Josephus, *War* 2.9.6

17. Salome, Herodias's daughter.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.4

Coins of her second husband, Aristobulus, king of Chalcis, display her image (Hendin, *Guide*, pp. 276–277, no. 1255).

18. Philip, Tetrarch of Trachonitis, Iturea and other northern portions of Palestine, sometimes called Herod Philip II, to distinguish him from his half-brother, Herod Philip, who was not a ruler (see above).

Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.1.3, 18.2.1

Josephus, *Wars* 1.28.4

Coins:

Philip did not have to avoid portraits on his coins because his subjects were generally not Jewish and had no religious prohibition against graven images. One of his coins from Tel Anafa features the head of Caesar Augustus on one side and the head of Philip on the other—literally a two-headed coin (*Coins 1968–1986 Tel Anafa*, p. 253 no. 250, p. 260 = coins plate 3, no. 250).

Most of his coins were discovered in his own tetrarchy in Palestine's northern territories.

At Meiron, 2 coins of Philip the Tetrarch were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, p. 23 no. 209 & 210, p. 127 (photographic plate) no. 209 and 210.

At Tel Anafa, 7 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins 1968–1986 Tel Anafa*, pp. 253–254 no. 250–256, p. 260 = coins plate 3, no. 250, 251, 252, 254.

On Cyprus, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Treasury of Jewish Coins*, p. 90.

19. Herod Agrippa I, King of Trachonitis, Batanea, gradually all of Palestine.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.4, 18.7.2, 19.5.1

Josephus, *Wars* 2.9.5–6

Coins:

At Masada, 114 of Herod Agrippa I's coins were excavated, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 79, 100 no. 1195–1198, Plate 66 no. 1195–1198.

At Meiron, 5 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, pp. 23–24 no. 211–214, p. 127 (photographic plate) no. 211 and 214.

At Herodium, 5 identical coins of his were discovered, according to *Herodium Coins*, p. 75 no. 4. In and near Jerusalem, as well as in all parts of Palestine, on Cyprus, at Dura-Europos in Syria, and

even on the acropolis at Athens, his prutah coins (Jewish coins of low value, made of copper; see Hendin, *Guide*, p. 270, no. 1244) have been discovered. They are distinctive in their decorations and the spelling of his name.

[20. Herod Agrippa II, Tetrarch of Iturea and Trachonitis, then also over parts of Galilee and Perea, Chalcis and northern territories.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.4, 20.7.3

Josephus, *Wars* 2.11.6

Coins:

Quite a few series of Agrippa II's coins are identified as his because they have the name Agrippa, sometimes abbreviated, and can be dated to his reign, rather than his father's (King Herod Agrippa I).

At Masada, 2 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 79, 100 no. 1308–1309, Plate 66 no. 1309.

At Meiron, 6 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, pp. 24–25 no. 215–220, p. 128 (photographic plate) no. 216–220.

[21. Berenice/Bernice, Sister and companion of Herod Agrippa II](#), distinguished by her fuller name Julia (in Latin, Iulia) Berenice from several other noted women of ancient times named Berenice.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.4, 19.5.1, 20.7.3

Josephus, *Wars* 2.15.1

In the National Museum of Beirut is a partly broken, Roman-era dedicatory inscription in Latin that mentions "Queen Berenice." The inscription states that she, and someone who is implied to be her fellow offspring, restored a building which "King Herod their ancestor" had made. Note the plural: "their ancestor."

By using facts of the historical background, it is possible to identify both her and her relatives as the ones to whom the inscription refers, because of its location and because the names of her family members seem uniquely suited to fit this inscription. Berenice is said to be "of the great king A—" (name broken off), and the prominent family ties in the inscription suggest a daughter or descendant. The "great king A—" is very likely her father, King Herod Agrippa I, who was a descendant of King Herod the Great. The other offspring, her contemporary, is very likely her brother, King Herod Agrippa II.

A scholarly book in Italian describes this inscription: Laura Boffo, *Iscrizioni Greche e Latine per lo Studio della Bibbia* (Brescia, Italy: Paideia Editrice, 1994), pp. 338-342, no. 41. For a photograph of this partly broken inscription in Latin and an English translation which fills in the broken portions using data from ancient historical writings, see www.livius.org/pictures/lebanon/beirut-berytus/beirut-inscription-of-king-agrippa-ii.

[22. Drusilla, Sister of Herodias and Herod Agrippa I; wife of Roman governor Felix.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.5.4

[23. Publius Sulpicius Quirinius \(= Cyrenius\), Roman Imperial legate to Syria-Cilicia.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 17.13.5, 18.1.1, 18.2.1

Josephus, *Wars* 7.8.1

The Lapis Venetus inscription discovered in Beirut is a stone inscription in Latin that mentions a census that this Quirinius ordered in a Syrian city. It is included in the *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum* vol. III, no. 6687. See Craig L. Blomberg, "Quirinius," in *ISBE*, vol. 4, pp. 12–13.

[24. Pontius Pilate, Roman prefect of Judea.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.3.1-2, 18.4.1-2

Josephus, *Wars* 2.9.2-4

Tacitus, *Annals* 15:44, in *The Annals: The Reigns of Tiberius, Claudius, and Nero* (trans. J. C. Yardley;

introduction and notes Anthony A. Barrett; Oxford World's Classics; New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2008), p. 438. Cornelius Tacitus (c. 55-c. 118 C.E.) was a historian, a Roman senator and a member of the priestly organization that supervised foreign religions in Rome; therefore he had exceptional access to information known by his colleagues and to archives accessible to the elite.

Philo, *De Legatione ad Gaium* 38, in *The Works of Philo, Complete and Unabridged* (trans. C. D. Yonge; new updated ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1993), p. 784. Philo Judaeus of Alexandria (c. 20 B.C.E.-c. 50 C.E.) was Pilate's learned contemporary.

The "Pilate Stone" was discovered at Caesarea Maritima in 1961 in the theater or arena of the ancient city of Caesarea Maritima, on Israel's northern seacoast. This limestone block—2.7 feet high, 2 feet wide and 0.6 feet thick—was lying face down and had been used as a step. It had been trimmed down to be reused twice. Two of its four lines read, in English translation with square brackets marking missing portions that have been supplied by scholars: "[Po]ntius Pilate ... [Preflect of Judaeal]," as shown in *Inscriptions Caesarea Maritima*, pp. 67–70, no. 43, Plate XXXVI. The inscription could potentially be dated to any time in Pilate's career, but a date between 31 and 36 C.E. seems most likely (*Inscriptions Caesarea Maritima*, p. 70.). The word for the building dedicated to the emperor Tiberius, "Tiberieum," is in the first line of *writing* (on the line above it is only a mark resembling an apostrophe). On the second line of writing are the last four letters of the family name Pontius, which was common in central and northern Italy during that era. Still visible, clearly engraved in the stone, is the complete name Pilatus, which is translated into English as "Pilate." Pilatus was "extremely rare" (A. N. Sherwin-White, "Pilate, Pontius," in *ISBE*, vol. 3, p. 867). Because of the rarity of the name Pilatus, and because only one Pontius Pilatus was ever the Roman governor of Judea, this identification should be regarded as completely certain and redundantly assured.

Coins:

As with other Roman governors, the coins Pilate issued do not have his name on them, but rather display only the name of the Roman emperor, in this case Tiberius. Pilate's coins also display his distinctive decorations.

At Masada, 123 of Pontius Pilate's coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 79, pp. 96–97 no. 851–973a, Plate 64 no. 851–912, Plate 65 no. 913–930.

At Caesarea Maritima, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Caesarea Maritima*, p. 139 no. 6, p. 146.

At Herodium, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Herodium*, p. 75 no. 3.

25. Lucius Junius Gallio, Roman proconsul of Achaia.

Seneca, *Letters* 104

Tacitus, *Annals* xv.73

Dio Cassius lx.35

Pliny the Elder *Naturalis Historia* xxxi.33

Near the Temple of Apollo in Delphi, Greece, a stone inscription in a now-fragmented stone block discovered in the late 19th century refers to this particular Gallio. Carved into a stone now broken into fragments, with some words missing, it takes the form of a letter from the Roman emperor Claudius and includes a date. See C. K. Barrett, ed., *The New Testament Background* (rev. ed.; San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1989), pp. 51-52, no. 49.

26. Marcus Antonius Felix, Roman procurator of Judea.

Josephus, *Antiquities* 14.11.7, 20.7.1-2, 20.8.5

Josephus, *Wars* 1.12.1, 2.12.8, 2.13.7

Coins:

Felix followed the custom of Roman governors, issuing coins that do not display his name. But they are identifiable as his, because they display the name and regnal year of the emperor. Several also have the name of the empress, Julia Agrippina.

At Masada, 39 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 79, 97-98 no. 974-1012, Plate 65 no. 974-1012 with gaps in the numbered photographs.

At Meiron, 4 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, pp. 25–26 no.

221–224, p. 128 (photographic plate) no. 221 and 223.

At Caesarea Maritima, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Caesarea Maritima*, p. 139 no. 7.

At Herodium, 1 of his coins was discovered, according to *Coins Herodium*, p. 75 no. 5.

[27. Porcius Festus, Roman procurator of Judea.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.9, 20.9.1

Coins:

During the reign of the emperor Nero, Festus minted coins in the custom of Roman governors, which do not show his own name. Still, as with Felix, we can identify them as his by using the name and regnal year of the emperor.

At Masada, 184 of Festus's coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 72, 79, pp. 98–99 no. 1013–1194, Plate 65 no. 1013–1194 with gaps among the numbered photographs.

[28. Aretas IV, king of the Arabian kingdom of Nabatea.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 13.13.3, 14.1.4

Josephus, *Wars* 1.6.2, 1.29.3

During Aretas IV's reign, the Arabian kingdom of Nabatea reached the height of its power, wealth through trade, and political influence.

Stationary inscriptions that name King Aretas IV and members of his immediate family have been discovered south of the Dead Sea at Petra, at Avdat (Obodat) in southern Israel and even at Puteoli, Italy (*Coins Nabataea*, pp. 48, 61).

Coins:

The fact that the coins Aretas minted have been discovered in "enormous quantity ... testifies primarily to a flourishing economy," as observed in *Coins Nabataea*, p. 41. Aretas IV's coins are treated on pp. 41–63, with photos on Plates 4–7 no. 46–122. These coins typically refer to him as "Aretas, king of the Nabataeans, who loves [lit., the lover of] his people" (*Coins Nabataea*, pp. 46–47, table: "Dated Coins and Inscriptions of Aretas IV.")

At Masada, 22 of Aretas IV's coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Masada*, pp. 76, 79, Plate 73 no. 3603–3623.

At Meiron, 2 of his coins were discovered, according to *Coins of Ancient Meiron*, p. 26 no. 225 and 226, p. 128 (photographic plate) no. 226.

At Curium on Cyprus, at Dura-Europas in what is now eastern Syria, and at Susa in Persia (present-day Iran), his coins have been discovered far and wide, according to *Coins Nabataea*, p. 41 note 2.

[29. The unnamed Egyptian leader who escaped after his violent uprising was suppressed by the Roman governor Felix.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.8.6

Josephus, *Wars* 2.13.5

[30. Judas of Galilee, the leader of the rebellion against Cyrenius \(also spelled Quirinius, identified above\) because of Cyrenius's census and taxation, which scholars usually date to 6 C.E.](#)

Josephus, *Antiquities* 18.1.6, 20.5.2

Josephus, *Wars* 2.8.1

Want more on Biblical figures? Read ["53 People in the Bible Confirmed Archaeologically," "Did Jesus Exist? Searching for Evidence Beyond the Bible"](#) and ["Herod the Great and the Herodian Family Tree"](#) by Lawrence Mykytiuk.

["Almost Real" People \(Not Certain, but Reasonable\): The Archaeological Evidence](#)

"Almost Real" People (Not Certain, but Reasonable): The Archaeological and Historical Evidence

The biblical figures in this category might potentially be mentioned in particular inscriptions or historical texts, but in each case, data in the text might also point to some other person(s). What is keeping these people in the Bible from being clearly identified?

It takes three things to identify a biblical figure in an inscription or historical writing:

- (1) Reliable data. Specifically, this means that the inscription or historical writing is authentic, not forged or altered, and that the biblical text is well based in the ancient manuscripts.
- (2) Setting. The time and place settings must match between the inscription and the biblical text. "Time" usually means the person in the inscription and the one in the Bible are within about 50 years of each other, which was a normal period of active life in the ancient world. "Place," culturally speaking, means the group to which the person belongs, usually a kingdom or ethnicity.
- (3) Matching attributes. Enough attributes of an individual must match between the person in the inscription and the person in the Bible to ensure that they are not two different people, but one and the same.

Lysanias, the first "almost real" New Testament figure below, lacks a match in one of the two elements in a time-and-place setting. Jonathan, the second figure, is well based in ancient manuscripts, but he lacks a reliable biblical text.

"Almost Real" Figures

Name	Who Was He?	When Did He Flourish?	Where in the New Testament?	Potential Evidence in Historical Writings and Inscriptions
Lysanias	The Later of Two Tetrarchs of Abilene named Lysanias	c. 29-29 C.E.	Luke 3:1	Inscription at Abila with a vague time reference.
Jonathan, Son of Ananias Son of Seth	Considered to be High Priest After Caiaphas, in some sources.	c. 36-37 C.E.	Acts 4:6	Josephus, <i>Antiquities</i> and <i>Wars</i>

[Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene](#)

The first New Testament candidate in this category is Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene. His identity is not clear enough in a relevant inscription to be certain he is the one referred to in Luke 3:1, but it is reasonable enough for some scholars to consider a New Testament identification probable. According to a dedicatory inscription carved in stone at Abila, capital city of the ancient tetrarchy of Abilene, a certain "Lysanias the tetrarch, a freedman" ruled there (Raphaël Savignac, "Texte complet de l'inscription d'Abila relative à Lysanias," *Revue biblique*, new series 9 [1912], pp. 533–540.). In line 1, the "august lords" are most likely the Emperor Tiberius and Tiberius's mother, Livia, who was granted the title Augusta in 14 C.E. and died in 29 C.E. Luke 3:1 dates the beginning of the ministry of John the Baptist using dates established with reference to several rulers, including Lysanias. By referring to these rulers and to other events, many scholars place the start of John's ministry at c. 28 C.E., which falls within the potential time span of the tetrarchy of the Lysanias in this inscription. On the other hand, the dates used are somewhat imprecise, and the date of the inscription is based on likelihood, rather than complete clarity. If the "august lords" were Nero and his mother Agrippina, then this Lysanias's rule might have lasted as late as the reign of Nero (54–68 C.E.). (Hemer, *Acts*, pp. 159–160, note 1.)

In Josephus, *Antiquities* 19.5.1 and *Wars* 2.11.5, the references to "Abila of Lysanias" and "the kingdom of Lysanias," respectively, are too vague in their time reference to be a clear confirmation of Luke 3:1. Lysanias, Tetrarch of Abilene, must not be confused with the earlier Lysanias, a tetrarch in the same area who is also mentioned in Josephus, *Antiquities* (Scott T. Carroll, "Lysanias," *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, vol. 4, p. 425). Josephus also mentions a third Lysanias, who ruled Chalcis and died in 36 B.C.E., in *Antiquities* 14.330; 15.92; and *Wars* 1.248.

[Jonathan, High Priest](#)

The second "Almost Real" New Testament candidate is the high priest Jonathan, son of Ananus son of Seth, but his identification is a matter of ancient manuscript evidence. In most of the ancient manuscripts of the New Testament, Acts 4:6—referring to the Jerusalem Sanhedrin's trial of Peter and John—mentions that "Annas the high priest was there, and so were Caiaphas, John, Alexander, and the other men of the high priest's family." These support the reading "John." But Codex Bezae (one of the ancient manuscripts consulted by the King James translators) does not have the Greek word for "John," but rather the Greek word for "Jonathan." Some of Jerome's writings and some manuscripts of his Latin Vulgate translation also support "Jonathan," as do three papyrus manuscripts of the old Latin translation (called the Itala). Most importantly, there is impressive agreement on the name Jonathan between, on one hand, Codex Bezae, the Itala, and some manuscripts of the Latin Vulgate, and on the other hand, the independent textual witness of Josephus in *Antiquities* 18.95; 18.123; 19.313–315; 20.162–164; and in *Wars* 2.240 & 243; 2.256. The reading of Bezae might be a correction of most manuscripts of Luke, according to historical facts, or it might be a substitution of a familiar name, John, for a less common one, Jonathan (see Bruce M. Metzger, *A Textual Commentary on the Greek New Testament: A Companion Volume to the United Bible Societies' Greek New Testament*, 3rd ed. [London: United Bible Societies, 1971], pp. 317-318). Following Josephus, James C. Vanderkam does not include any high priest John, son of Ananus son of Seth, and instead places Jonathan, son of Ananus son of Seth, as the immediate successor of Joseph Caiaphas as high priest in 36 or 37 C.E. (*From Joshua to Caiaphas: High Priests after the Exile* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 2004], pp. 436–440).

Because Josephus was raised in first-century Roman Palestine as a Jewish aristocrat from a priestly family, he was writing on matters with which he was very familiar indeed. Therefore, despite the quantity of manuscripts that have the Greek word for "John" in Acts 4:6, it is difficult to raise an objection against the Greek for "Jonathan" based on the quality of the reading. Ultimately, experts on the text of the Book of Acts or of the New Testament must settle the matter to the extent possible.

People Not Clearly Documented Outside the New Testament

Political figures who cannot be clearly identified in ancient writings and inscriptions outside the New Testament include:

- a. Lucius Sergius Paulus or Paullus, Proconsul of Cyprus during the reign of Emperor Claudius, appears in Paphos, according to Acts 13:6–13. But only the family to which this person might potentially have belonged is documented (Hemer, Acts, pp. 109, 166–167, 227, all on Acts 13:7).
- b. Theudas, who appears in Josephus, *Antiquities* 20.5.1, does not seem identifiable outside the New Testament in view of the chronological difficulties discussed in Hemer, Acts, pp. 162–163, on Acts 5:36.
- c. The Erastus of Corinth who is described in most detail in Romans 16:23 cannot be clearly identified in an inscription in stone discovered at Corinth (Acts 19:22 and 2 Timothy 4:20 might or might not refer to the same Erastus), in view of the difficulties and uncertainties raised by Steven J. Friesen, "The Wrong Erastus: Ideology, Archaeology, and Exegesis," in Steven J. Friesen, Daniel N. Schowalter and James Christopher Walters, eds., *Corinth in Context: Comparative Studies on Religion and Society* (Leiden: Brill, 2010), pp. 231–256. Difficulties in attempting such an identification were pointed out much earlier by Henry J. Cadbury, "Erastus of Corinth," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 50 (1931), pp. 42–56.

Nor can the Erastus of Romans 16:23 be clearly identified in a second inscription discovered in 1960 that might conceivably refer to him, according to Andrew D. Clarke, "Another Corinthian Erastus Inscription," *Tyndale Bulletin* 42.1 (1991), pp. 146–151.

- d. Candace turns out to be an inherited, dynastic title customarily conferred on Ethiopian queens,

Abbreviations and References

Ancient Jewish Coinage 2 = Ya'akov Meshorer, *Ancient Jewish Coinage*, vol. 2: *Herod the Great through Bar Cochba* (Dix Hills, NY: Amphora Books, 1982).

Coins 1968–1986 Tel Anafa = Y. Meshorer, "Chapter 4: Coins 1968–1986," in Sharon C. Herbert, *Tel Anafa I, i: Final Report on Ten Years of Excavation at a Hellenistic and Roman Settlement in Northern Israel* (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement Series 10, Part I, i and Kelsey Museum Fieldwork Series; Ann Arbor, MI: Kelsey Museum of the University of Michigan and Museum of Art and Archaeology of the University of Missouri—Columbia, 1994).

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ISBE = *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ed. Geoffrey W. Bromiley, 4 vols., fully rev. ed.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1979–1988).

Josephus, *Antiquities* = Flavius Josephus, *The Antiquities of the Jews*, in *The Works of Josephus, Complete and Unabridged* (trans. William Whiston; new updated ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), pp. 27-542. An alternative translation of the title is: *Jewish Antiquities*.

Josephus, *Wars* = Flavius Josephus, *The Wars of the Jews*, in *The Works of Josephus, Complete and Unabridged* (trans. William Whiston; new updated ed.; Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), pp. 543-772. An alternative translation of the title is: *The Jewish War*.

Treasury of Jewish Coins = Ya'akov Meshorer, *A Treasury of Jewish Coins: From the Persian Period to Bar Kokhba* (Nyack, NY: Amphora, 2001).

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