

These 6 archaeology discoveries reshape what we know about the Bible.

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From a cheeky slingshot to Paul's letters and information on King Nebuchadnezzar, new research is offering insight into some of the Bible's best-known stories.

By Kelly Faircloth. Published June 30, 2026

The year has already brought an array of fascinating discoveries in Biblical archaeology and early church history. The finds range from central Iraq to northwestern Turkey to upper Egypt, illustrating both the spread and the early evolution of Christianity, telling stories of the emergence of the monastic tradition and offering hints of baptismal practices on the shores of the Sea of Galilee. Researchers have used cutting-edge technology to uncover invisible traces of a long-lost manuscript of the Apostle Paul's letters. There's even a tantalizing testimony to the works of one of the Old Testament's greatest antagonists: King Nebuchadnezzar.

These discoveries shed light on early church history, illuminating the ways that ancient peoples wrestled with the Bible—both its meanings and its commandments.

The public works of Nebuchadnezzar II .

Neo-Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar II, who reigned until the mid-sixth century B.C., is one of the towering figures of ancient history. He appears repeatedly in the Old Testament, where his pride and his power make him a foil for figures such as the prophet Daniel, and God uses him as an instrument of divine punishment when he oversees the destruction of Solomon's Temple and the Babylonian Captivity.

During his reign, Nebuchadnezzar forcefully expanded his empire, turning his capital at Babylon into one of the most influential cities of the ancient world. He was deeply invested in maintaining important religious sites—and now, we have evocative new evidence illustrating his works.

Ziggurats, pyramidal structures made of sunbaked mud bricks that bridged the space between ground and sky, were a mainstay of Mesopotamian religious life for millennia, serving as houses of the gods across numerous dynasties and empires. A newly published paper in the journal *Iraq* examines two baked clay cylinders discovered by locals in the vicinity of the ziggurat in the ancient city of Kish, already centuries old before Nebuchadnezzar's birth.

Only inches long and covered in cuneiform, the cylinders document Nebuchadnezzar's efforts to restore the enormous structure, dedicated to a god of war named Zababa, who was closely associated with the city, and Ishtar, a Mesopotamian goddess of love, war, and sex, who also appears in the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, the oldest surviving literary work dating from roughly 4,000 years ago.

The text demonstrates how Nebuchadnezzar presented himself to the world, as well offering a glimpse at the Neo-Babylonian cosmos:

Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, whom Marduk, Enlil of the Gods, called (him) by his name for the kingship of all the lands, to provide for Esagil (and) Ezida, and to keep the cult centres of the great gods in good order. Nabû the overseer of the totality of heaven and earth, made (Nebuchadnezzar) hold in his hand the just sceptre. The wise, the pious, the provider of Esagil (and) Ezida, the foremost heir of Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, am I.

Nebuchadnezzar paints himself as commissioned by the gods themselves; his public devotion to the ancient Mesopotamian pantheon—and to the upkeep of major temples like Esagil and Ezida—is part of what makes him a worthy king.

The translation continues:

I adorned Esagil and Ezida and made them beautiful as the starry sky. I kept the shrines of the great gods in good order, (and) I constantly set up proper procedures (inside them). At that time, I gave reverent attention to Zababa, the strong(est) one among the gods, the one who kills my enemies, (and) Ishtar, my lady, the one who magnifies my kingship.

The cylinders speak to the broader world from which the monotheistic deity of the Christian Bible emerged. The Old Testament condemns the Babylonian pantheon as false

idols, including the preeminent god Marduk (also referred to as Bel); these texts set themselves at odds with not just Nebuchadnezzar and his earthly regime, but his entire cosmology.

(These 2025 archaeological discoveries reshaped what we know about the Bible.)

A new discovery in Nicaea.

The modern city of Iznik, Turkey, is descended from an important site in the early history of Christianity: Nicaea, where the Roman Emperor Constantine convened a council of bishops in 325 A.D.—including possibly the now-famous Saint Nicholas—to hash out basic principles of the faith, resulting in the Nicene Creed.

Archaeologists excavating a tomb in the area have made a particularly interesting discovery: a fresco of Christ as Good Shepherd, a Roman-style depiction in which he's shown as a fresh-faced, toga-clad youth, a goat slung over his shoulders. Archaeologist Eren Erten Ertem of the Iznik Museum said that the frescoes illustrated “a transition from late paganism to early Christianity, depicting the deceased being sent off to the afterlife in a positive and fitting manner.”

The fresco likely dates to the third century, predating the Nicene Creed, offering insight into how the earliest Christians conceived of Jesus and his relationship to the faithful.

Glimpses at the world and letters of the Apostle Paul .

An international team of researchers based out of the University of Glasgow have used cutting-edge technology to revive 42 long-lost pages of another important early Christian manuscript: Codex H.

Codex H is a sixth to eighth-century A.D. copy of the Apostle Paul's letters, but it has not survived intact: It was broken apart in the 13th century at the Great Lavra Monastery on Mount Athos, Greece, its parchment repurposed for other manuscripts, and eventually, pieces dispersed across Europe. This was a common practice at the time: parchment was valuable, and one manuscript might be sacrificed to repair another, particularly if it was damaged. Before the manuscript was broken apart, it was re-inked, meaning somebody painstakingly went over each letter with fresh ink. That left traces on the opposite pages—traces that aren't visible to the naked eye but are detectable by

sophisticated modern imaging techniques. Researchers teamed up with the Early Manuscripts Electronic Library to investigate.

“Researchers used multispectral imaging to process images of the extant pages, in order to recover ‘ghost’ text that no longer physically exists, effectively retrieving multiple pages of information from every single physical page,” team lead Garrick Allen said in a statement. “To ensure historical accuracy, the team also collaborated with experts in Paris to perform radiocarbon dating, confirming the parchment’s sixth-century origin.”

‘Given that Codex H is such an important witness to our understanding of Christian scripture, to have discovered any new evidence—let alone this quantity—of what it originally looked like is nothing short of monumental,’ Allen added.

The images reveal new details, such as the earliest known chapter lists, which are different from today’s divisions, meaning the text would have been broken up slightly differently for ancient readers. What makes Codex H important is that it also provides the earliest evidence for something called the Euthalian Apparatus, a sort of editorial supplement designed to help make sense of the text.

Overall, researchers argue, the story of Codex H is important for understanding the lives of such manuscripts and the faithful’s relationships with them over the centuries—and therefore key background for Biblical scholarship more broadly. The team has also made images available online.

Evidence of early Christian monastic life.

Archaeologists working in Egypt have uncovered vivid testaments to the spread and development of Christianity in the early centuries of the first millennium A.D., in the form of the remains of monastic settlements. Excavations in northern Egypt have uncovered the remains of a fifth-century guesthouse within a sprawling monastic complex known as Al-Qalaye. During the Coptic period, Egypt was a crucial site in the development of the Christian monastic tradition, as ascetics turned to the solitude of the desert to commune with the divine. Their example of piety inspired others to seek them out, and over time, monasteries emerged, built around contemplation and devotion. This find is a snapshot of that tradition as it emerged: “The site’s architectural style reflects the earliest nucleus

of monastery establishment,” Secretary-General of the Supreme Council of Antiquities Hisham El-Leithy told Ahram Online. Archaeologists found wall paintings featuring monastic figures, an array of plant-based decorative elements, and intricate knotwork designs that offer a window into the development of early Coptic art.

Further up the Nile at a separate dig in Sohag, archaeologists found the remnants of a monastery complex. The team uncovered mudbrick foundations of multiple buildings, including what was likely the main church for a community of monks. They found storage amphorae, tools, and broken pottery pieces known as ostraca, covered in Coptic. These finds shed light on how early monastic communities might have lived and worked, evolving from small clusters into sprawling, sophisticated complexes.

Baptisms on the shores of Galilee .

Founded during the Hellenistic period (dating roughly between Palestine’s conquest by Alexander the Great in 332 B.C. and the solidification of Roman control in the first century B.C.), the site of the ancient city of Hippos in the Jordan Valley sits high on a hill above the Sea of Galilee. Part of a group of 10 Greco-Roman cities known as the Decapolis, Hippos later became a local Christian center in the Byzantine period until it was abandoned after a devastating earthquake in A.D. 749. Recent discoveries at the site expand “our knowledge of Byzantine-period Christian communities and their rites,” archaeologists Michael Eisenberg and Arleta Kowalewska wrote in their 2026 paper. Baptism has been a central rite in the Christian tradition since its earliest days, but it’s been practiced and interpreted in dramatically different ways over the millennia. In recent years, archaeologists have been excavating a Byzantine-era cathedral on the site, the biggest of at least seven churches in the city, which were built during the fifth or early sixth century. Five of those have been excavated, but only the cathedral has a baptismal font. This was no bare-bones operation: Previous work uncovered a large hall for baptisms, including a font that could be continuously fed fresh water from an incoming pipe. Known as a photisterion, from a Greek term meaning place of illumination, it appears to have been the largest building dedicated to baptism in the region. Recent excavations have uncovered a second photisterion in the cathedral, this one smaller and without running water. It’s not clear why the cathedral would have had two of these spaces; it’s currently the only known early cathedral with two photistera, suggesting that the site may have

been highly sought after for baptisms. The second baptismal font may have been added as part of renovations in the late sixth century to make it possible to perform simultaneous baptisms or to accommodate children. The smaller scale suggests it may have been dedicated to infant baptisms. Hippos was destroyed by an earthquake in the eighth century, collapsing the cathedral and sealing several liturgical items inside the second photisterion, including a bronze candelabrum and a reliquary. But archaeologists also found something unusual: a marble block with three bowl-like indentations. It's not clear how the object was used, but the team believes that it might have held oil, and that it's possible there was a local tradition of threefold anointing to match the threefold immersion of the baptism practiced in the early church (once for each element of the Trinity: Father, Son, Holy Ghost).

A cheeky sling weapon .

Also at Hippos, archaeologists recently uncovered a lead sling bullet—a weapon that evokes the story of David and Goliath. Though the slingshot was a common—and lethal—weapon in the ancient world, this lead bullet dates to sometime in the Hellenistic period, around the same time as Rome's rise to power. Archaeologists believe that it was fired at attackers advancing up an ancient road toward the city. What made this find stand out is its inscription: the Greek word, ΜΑΘΟΥ. In a paper published in *Palestine Exploration Quarterly*, researchers suggest it could be translated as something similar to, “Learn your lesson!” Nor is this the only example: other sling bullets have been found elsewhere with inscriptions like “take a taste” and “take it!”