

# JESUS AND HIS WORLD

## The Archaeological Evidence

Craig A. Evans

### Questions for Discussion and Reflection

The following chapter-by-chapter questions will help facilitate group discussion and/or individual reflection while studying *Jesus and His World: The Archaeological Evidence* by Craig A. Evans (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012). These questions ideally will stimulate thinking and further study about the evidence Evans presents. Group leaders should divide the book into as many sessions as they feel are appropriate. We hope you enjoy this introduction to the fascinating field of archaeology as it brings you closer to fully understanding Jesus and the world in which he lived.

#### Chapter 1: In the Shadow of Sepphoris

1. How does the archaeological evidence presented in this book confirm and/or challenge your impressions of Nazareth, the town where Jesus grew up?
2. What have archaeological excavations of Sepphoris revealed about the importance of this town in the time of Jesus?
3. Though the New Testament says nothing explicitly about Jesus visiting Sepphoris during his public ministry, what evidence suggests that he might have visited there, perhaps earlier in his life? What might Jesus have encountered in Sepphoris, and how might it have influenced his teaching and ministry?
4. What does archaeological evidence suggest about urbanization in the region of the Galilee in the time of Jesus? In what ways is this urbanization hinted at in Jesus' teachings?

5. What do you find surprising about the archaeological evidence regarding Jesus' geographical origins? What insights have you gained?

## **Chapter 2: Among the Devout**

1. The New Testament makes clear that Jesus was a Jew and gives some clues to how Judaism was forming and developing in Jesus' time. What sorts of archaeological evidence have helped provide a window through which we can get a glimpse of Judaism in the first century?
2. What do we know about synagogues in Jesus' time? Where were they located? What did they look like, and how did they function? What do they tell us about Judaism in Jesus' time?
3. What evidence is there that Jesus frequented the synagogues of Galilee? For what reasons is Jesus' synagogue participation significant to interpretation of his teachings and actions? Provide examples.
4. What insights have you gained from examining archaeological evidence of early Judaism in Jesus' time? How might understanding Jesus' Jewish identity and context illuminate New Testament study?

## **Chapter 3: In the Books**

1. The ability to read and write was not widespread in the first century. What does the archaeological and literary evidence tell us about literacy rates in the time of Jesus?
2. What do literacy rates tell us about the culture in Jesus' time, and how would this reality shape his methods of teaching?
3. What is the evidence for or against Jesus' own literacy?
4. Given the literacy rates in Jesus' time and place, discuss how Jesus' teachings might have been passed along from person to person, community to community.

## **Chapter 4: Confronting the Establishment**

1. How do archaeological discoveries shed light on the importance of the Jerusalem temple for first-century Jews? What do these discoveries tell us about how the temple functioned?
2. How have archaeological discoveries shed light on Jerusalem's aristocratic priesthood? What was their origin and role?
3. How do archaeological discoveries regarding the temple and priesthood illuminate aspects of Jesus' teaching?
4. What have we learned about health and longevity in the time of Jesus thanks to archaeology and medical examination of human remains?
5. What insights have you gained into the Gospel narratives through evidence of health and longevity in Jesus' time?

## **Chapter 5: Life with the Dead**

1. According to Jewish Scripture and Jewish writers of late antiquity, what was the importance of burial in first-century Jewish culture?
2. The New Testament describes Jesus' execution by Roman soldiers. What does archaeological and literary evidence say about the burial of executed persons during peacetime in Israel? Does the archaeological and literary evidence support the Gospels' narrative that Jesus was buried after his crucifixion?
3. List several (possibly conflicting) conclusions about what the literary and archaeological evidence suggests happened to Jesus' body. What do you find surprising? What new insights do you have into the Gospel passion narratives?

## **Appendix 1: Have We Found the Family Tomb of Jesus?**

1. What reasons have been given to support the claim that an ancient

tomb discovered in East Talpiot, Jerusalem, was that of Jesus and his family? What are the problems with these reasons?

2. What is a more probable explanation for the marks and inscriptions found in the tomb? What does the evidence tell us about the type of family the tomb more likely contained?

### **Appendix 2: What Did Jesus Look Like?**

1. What does facial reconstruction technology tell us about what ancient Egyptian and Jewish men and women looked like? What kind of clothing did they wear?
2. Based on this information, what can we conclude about Jesus' appearance? Would he have stood out in a crowd or blended in?
3. Does it matter what Jesus looked like? Why or why not?