

Arguments from Silence

By Stephen H. Funck 2012

The popular idea for theologians and archeologists is to be “scientific”. One popular result of that is to base everything on “evidence”. At times there should be room for an argument from silence. In science great discoveries have come from silent instruments when results were expected. Everyone “knew” light traveled through the “ether” until it could not be found, which led to relativity.

Following the data can, has, does, continues to, lead us to misunderstanding. In all the images of Jesus’ arrest, trial and crucifixion, there are Roman Soldiers. There is no data to say otherwise. But, What happened to Herod’s army? What happened to his vast income? We know from the data that Pilate had 6 cohorts, 3600 men, for the province. It was a frontier province, under threat from Parthia with raiders coming from Arabia. Some of us have learned that foreign armies of long term occupation are not welcome. The Romans normally had local rulers and local forces maintain daily order. If and when locals rebelled, the Romans corrected matters. Roman soldiers were needed for the crucifixion since only Rome had the legal right to execute, even there Judean soldiers likely were present to demonstrate Judean authorities supported the execution.

Pilate did not have the bureaucracy to provide the requirements of daily Judean government. To the Romans the High Priest functioned as the King with the Sanhedrin as the cabinet of bureaucrats. The “evidence” is that they were in charge of religious matters. There is little evidence that they were the government. Silence. So that means there was no government in Judea? Herod had great wealth. His date orchards in the Jordan valley were the greatest source of sugar to the Roman Empire. Mark Anthony offered Cleopatra anything she wanted. The only thing the richest woman in the world, Queen of Egypt, could think of was Herod’s date orchards! Herod was a friend of Mark Anthony. The orchards were leased to Cleopatra.

Silence. No one owned the orchards after Herod died. No one collected his income. His army was disbanded. His taxes went uncollected. Silence. The Romans collected their normal share of income. No one collected the local portion. Silence. There would have been loud complaint if the Romans took the money used for local needs. Herod was a builder of great palaces and fortresses. We know the Romans occupied the Antonia overlooking the Temple Mount, the Palaces on the western side of Jerusalem and at Caesarea. Silence on the Herodium, Jericho, Masada. They were abandoned? Herod Agrippa did have Machaerus east of the Jordan.

We know Herod built a glorious Temple, what would his palace be like? It was totally obliterated. Nothing remains. Josephus who was familiar with the greatest of Rome was astounded by it’s magnificence. Even the walls 45 ft. high built of stones 30 by 20 by 7.5 ft. are totally gone and there is no record of what happened or when. You would think some remains would be discovered. Argument from silence, after the Bar Kochba revolt the Romans eliminated the Jewish population and on the rubble of demolished Jerusalem, they built a new city Aelia Capitolina. They even moved the location of the city walls, gates and main roads to where they remain today. They did that with a minimal population. I think it is logical that they used the great wall stones as a quarry for the new walls and other construction.

The silence is in the popular writings of today, not in the historical record. As Wellhausen reported over 100 years ago, the Sadducees: administered the state domestically, represented the state internationally, participated in the [Sanhedrin](#), collected taxes, (also international tribute from the Diaspora.),

equipped and led the army, regulated relations with the Romans, mediated domestic grievances. I expect they were also in charge of the Temple Mount construction.

In 64 AD the work force on the Temple Mount was disbanded. Who was paying them? Who arranged for the valuable properties to be bought and cleared to make room for the expansion? The economists would say that many workers would mean a population of over 100,000 family members and shopkeepers to provide for their needs. There were in addition 50,000 nearby priests and levites assigned to the Temple. The local population spread into the local towns around would be near 250,000. A village 8 miles away is a two hour walk, commuting distance in that day. What is inside the walls is no measure of the size of a city.

Somehow I think the 200 foot by 150 foot swimming pool of Herodium was used after his death along with the rest of the glorious Herodian attractions. The religious scholars who recorded the important religious matters hundreds of years later were descended from the Pharisees. They were bitter enemies of everything about the Romans, Priests and Sadducees and did not find their secular accomplishments worth reporting. Edersheim does a marvelous work in reporting the Mishnah and Talmud. We can not base our understanding of Jesus' day on what was written far later about a mythological "Golden Age". The silence reveals that much was going on for which we do not have the data. Is it forbidden to speculate? Is it false to fill in the missing information from what we know is normal? If we saw Max in New York and then meet him in Chicago, is it a lie to say he must have traveled from one to the other?

Does any of this matter? Does it make a difference in our understanding if the High Priest and Sanhedrin controlled the government, taxation and military forces? We do not understand them, if we only think of them as a bunch of religious leaders talking about spiritual matters. For much of its history, until very recently, the Papacy was the government for a large area, millions of people.

The villages in Jesus' time were building synagogues at an increasing rate. There is silence on who the leaders were. Were they priests? There were priests all around. There were not Pharisees. There were too few and tended to be in larger places. Were there any religious meetings in the villages before the synagogues were built? Who led them? What did they do? Rabbi means teacher, but there is silence about schools, how a person became a rabbi or what he did? Any man was permitted to read the scroll. Maybe there is silence because nothing was regulated. There were many different practices.

Would it be proper to make a suggestion? It is known the period before the time of Jesus was marked by great economic increase, long distance trade and travel. Among the Jewish people there was a great increase in popular piety and zeal, marked by a great increase in Mikvehs near Jerusalem (ritual immersion pools) and Kosher stone jars in a wider area. Everywhere people support local religious leaders. He talks to them about religious matters, prays for them. Peasant farmers have a lot of free time in the off seasons. Talking about religion fills the time, no TV, radio, movies. Some might collect money to buy a scroll for the village. There was a great increase in publishing even though scrolls were very expensive. They would read and study it, and trade it with other villages for different ones. After a while they could work their way through the whole Old Testament in Hebrew and other writings, Apocrypha and commentaries in Greek and Aramaic. They spoke Aramaic. More to talk about and learn. Children have a lot of free time. Some would be interested in finding out what their parents are talking about. The local leader who teaches them is going to be given more money by the villagers. This is a self organizing religious practice and school, not worth recording years later by scholars. It is the same today in third world Islamic Maktab.

They learned the Hebrew scrolls by rote repetition and discussion. It was the basic way of learning until recently. Learn the Hebrew alphabet and it would be easy to read what was already memorized.

Reading was fairly common. We think reading and writing are two sides of a coin. They are not. Until recently writing was expensive, both what was written on and the ink. That is why there are few things written in archeology. The exception that proves the rule: there are hoards of cuneiform clay tablets, cheap and durable. Popular writing in the Roman world was on wax covered wood boards, smoothed and reused like a chalk board. Papyrus, leather, ink were very expensive and decay. The average person had little reason to write anything durable.

A professor of mine met about 1960 a Yemeni Jewish boy just after he emigrated to Israel. He could recite the entire Old Testament in Hebrew. It was not considered unusual. He had been from a small village. After a few years in Israel, he had forgotten most of what he had memorized.

Many times I have heard and read that Mary was maybe 14 or 15 when she was betrothed to Joseph. It is a misunderstanding of the data. Upper class Romans did write such marriage contracts, some in India do today. Those weddings are financial contracts between families. After the wedding the children go home with their parents. Later after they mature they live together. Judean data reveals the normal age for marriage was 18 to 20. Upper class men might wait till near 30 while they were establishing their careers. Usually they hired a concubine to fill in. Saint Augustine, before he was saint, hired the daughter of a local Christian. Later when he dismissed her, he kept their son.

Pregnancy for immature women is dangerous for girl and child. Until modern medicine, 1920, in most cultures it was taboo for young girls to be sexually involved. The bad outcomes for those who broke the taboo enforced the prohibition. Even for mature women death was not an unusual result of pregnancy. One of the tasks of the midwife was to kill the baby in the birth canal if it was necessary to save the woman's life. On rare occasion, the baby might be saved at the cost of the woman. Caesarian births are named for the way Julius Caesar was born. His mother was dying anyway.

What is set forth are arguments from silence. Are they irrational? Or are they just undocumented? Do they supplement what our scholars write? Does this increase understanding? There is a well known but seldom practiced maxim: The absence of proof is not proof of absence.

The questions are: can this be remedied and how? What are the factors that block and limit correction? The issue is critical. An example of the importance is a parallel question. Would it make any difference, if the popular idea of Native American life - Indians - was that in the present day they lived in tepees and chased buffalo on horseback? At the opposite end, many think the Hasidic Jews represent the old beliefs and practices. They do not. They come from the same cultural time and situation as the Amish. I do not think anyone really thinks the Amish represent original Christianity. Lack of knowledge leads to profound misunderstanding. Most Christians and Ministers I know believe Jews today believe the same things they did in Jesus day. Many Protestants seem to think Roman Catholics have not changed since the time of the Reformers. Wrong! Wrong! Indeed many Protestants do not believe what the Protestant Reformers believed. Luther and Calvin would be appalled.

There are opposing forces that block understanding. One the one side are scholars dedicated to the "scientific" methodology. In that there is a bias against the validity of legend and a denial that the core of legend may reflect historical truth. Did Homer exist? Did the Trojan war have any reality? Why should Greeks go to war with Troy in the far off Dardanelles? Does it matter that before 900 BC Athens was buying large amounts of grain from their plantations in the Crimea, that was brought in ships that sailed past Troy? Warfare between Greece and Troy was not empty legend. Today the sides of the argument are carried on by Biblical Minimalists and Maximalists. The issues are real, but in many ways for practical understanding not worth attention.

Theologically the fundamental position for a Christian is that it is all by Faith. Scientific proof - knowledge and faith are antithetical. If there is a God and He wanted us to base our relationship with Him on faith, He would, of necessity, have to "hide" all the proof. Proof is a real issue for the historian. Proof is not an issue for the believer. Notice he is called a "believer"! However there is a major difference between the "religion" of the Bible and other "religions" The God of Scripture claims he acts in history. Islam and Judaism both claim to follow that God. Hindu, Buddhism, Taoist, and the multitude of religions of gods, goddesses, myths do not make that claim.

The result is that a believer in the God of Scripture, believes in a God who acts in history and believes that there is no "scientific proof" He does. This is a very uncomfortable position for many people in this age of "knowledge". Many people are making a good living with reasons and proofs what they believe is correct. Such will always be. The only counter is to produce truthful accurate presentations. That will be in the middle ground and come under attack from both sides. "Intelligent Design" is a good illustration. It is hated by the atheistic scientists and by many "believing" Christians.

The questions are: can this be remedied and how? The arguments between the professionals cannot be remedied. It is how they maintain their positions and earn their income. The popular concepts of the people can be modified. All the pictures of dinosaurs created a foundation for acceptance of evolution. The people are deeply influenced by the pictures they see.

That means the people have to be shown new correct images in articles, books movies. Gibson's "The Passion" used a small 1300's Italian village to represent Jerusalem, not good. There are several replicas and large scale models of the Temple Mount, much better. As more people see them their mental images are changed. However the Temple Mount models are false to what Jesus saw. They show the completed work 62 AD after 18,000 workers and 1000 oxen were laid off after 80 years of work. What Jesus saw in 30 AD was a vast construction site. At his birth there was even less.

The damage of false images can be seen in the result of non historical portrayals of the crucifixion. The Medieval knew they were not meant to show the actual site. We have a different concept. In this age we need Christian artists to accurately portray the setting. In a real sense the actual lay of the land has always been known, and preserved in the underpinnings of the Church of the Holy Sepulcher. The cave where Jesus was born is ignored for St. Francis' 1300s Italian stable. The cave is still there under the church in Bethlehem, where St. Jerome lived for many years. The long term results of historically accurate images would be good for both the "believer" and the one still outside by underpinning the faith with historical reality. There are grounds to faith not only a leap into the void.

Authors of Christian Historical novels and short stories need to accurately portray the culture and describe the setting. Telling a 21st century story in ancient costume is harmful. I am offended when I read such made up tales. Lewis's Narnia Tales as fantasy are truer to the mark. The most accurate books set in Jesus day that I have read are "Pontius Pilate" and "The Flames of Rome" by Paul L. Maier.

My dream would be for movies to be made with fidelity to the culture and times of Christ, Abraham, David and others. Long ago there were some financially successful movies like that. They were severely criticized for their lack of fidelity to both scripture and culture. Better should be possible.

I have written some stories telling the back story of what is in the Gospels. Instead of retelling what is in the Scripture, it sets out the background, times and culture. This presents the truth hopefully without attracting excessive conflict. What might strike the reader as strange is true to the time, setting and oldest

extra biblical records. There is little reason to prefer the ideas of a 21st Century commentator over the memories close to the events.

Before the time of David and Solomon, whose existence and kingdom are questioned by reputable scholars, the Land had been under the rulership by Egypt or Mesopotamia. They had organized religion with recorded mythological histories. Since we have no records from Jerusalem are we to think that the 1500 years of close association by peoples with cognate languages had no effect on them? Jerusalem is a day's walk from one of the oldest cities in the world Jericho. It is the intersection of the road between Jericho and the Mediterranean Sea and the North - South road. It would be reasonable that the Israelites were like all the nations around. Tribal structure does not preclude that.

Silence can be very significant. The Bible is silent about the unique character of both the "foundation stone" and the spring Gihon. To any primitive people, they both were touched by gods, spirits, demons. The Rock of the Dome of the Rock, foundation stone, upon which the Ark rested, has a natural cave in the side. Judea is filled with caves. They never ever occur at the very top of the hill. Did a spirit touch the rock and make the cave? Gihon means gusher. It is more than twice the size of the second largest spring in the area. The Gihon waters burst forth forcefully at intervals. Was there a spirit controlling it? The normal steady spring was seen as the home of a spirit. It can not be an accident that the Bible makes no mention of the spiritual character of the rock or spring. The earliest peoples must have considered Orphel a sacred place in between powerful spirits.

The most logical place for the David's royal palace is under the southern extension of the Temple Platform, closest to the Temple. Since that is under the Temple Mount, it is inaccessible to archeologists. Some day, if the world has not ended by then, its secrets may be revealed. The Royal Tombs could be in that area as well. In Samaria some were under the palace. Personally I think what is called a quarry at the southern end of Orphel is more likely as the site of the tombs. It is so damaged nothing can be proven.

The scripture is not silent in places where all other national histories would be. They record disastrous information about the high and mighty and the entire nation. The greatest king of all, Solomon when he built the Temple for God, buys with 120 talents of gold and 20 villages, help from a foreign king. The great nation and its greatest king are unable to manage the project on their own. There were over eighty thousand foreign workers who spent 20 years building the First Temple and royal buildings. This is the only time the records portray a situation that would allow the construction of the great Temple platform. It was 750 feet square with walls up to 100 feet high, before the later expansions.

The ancient peoples of the area around Jerusalem erected "standing stones" for worship. Very unusual in ancient times for an object of worship, they have no faces. The people were nomadic. Their gods had no fixed location, also unusual. The Midianites worshipped the same God as Moses. At Sinai, Moses asked God what His name was. He had been known as the God of Abraham, (Isaac and Jacob), El Shaddai - God Almighty, El Elyon God Most High and other references. Unusual, a god with no image, no place, no personal name who reveals himself to Moses as "I am or Being". Anthropologists could argue that this would be the "ur-god" from which all other gods derived. It is not logical that multiple male and female gods with names, faces and places would turn into a solitary god lacking such.

Following are a few of the Internet sites that are laying a foundation for change. Wikipedia and Google are good places to start. Computer Graphics enable the visualization of what was. The Lord of the

Rings and other modern films have demonstrated what can be accomplished in CG, creating huge sets and large numbers of characters.

Go though and view bookmarks

<http://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/>

<http://www.ritmeyer.com/>

FZOZ <http://www.fzo.org/>

In the footsteps of Rabbi Jesus Jews for Jesus etc etc. <http://ourrabbijesus.com/>

The Church of the Holy Sepulchre : SOME PERSPECTIVES FROM HISTORY, GEOGRAPHY, ARCHITECTURE, ARCHAEOLOGY, AND THE NEW TESTAMENT by Tom Powers, in Israel ©2004/5