

# Forensic scientists reconstruct 'Lost Faces of the Bible'

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JERUSALEM (RNS)—Many artistic renderings of biblical figures hang in churches and museums, but no one really knows what they and their contemporaries looked like.

Now, an international team of archeologists, forensic anthropologists and facial reconstruction experts has tried to answer this question by recreating the faces of three adults and a newborn whose skeletal remains date back to biblical times.



“Lost Faces of the Bible”

is new four-part TV series on the National Geographic Channel. (RNS Photo courtesy of AP Faces Ltd.) A new four-part TV series on the National Geographic Channel, [Lost Faces of the Bible](#), follows the experts as they recreate long-gone faces utilizing the same state-of-the-art technology used by police investigators.

The series, created by Simcha Jacobovici, a controversial Canadian-Israeli filmmaker and amateur archaeologist, suggests who these four anonymous people might have been. Along the way, it illustrates what life in the Holy

Land was like thousands of years ago.

Dramatizations woven into the investigation bolster the narrative. The series is hosted by David Berman who stars in *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*.

The first episode, "Delilah Revealed," focuses on a Philistine woman who, the producers say, "lived at the time of the biblical Delilah," the temptress who betrayed Samson.



Printed 3D Skull from the "Delilah Revealed" episode of "Lost Faces of the Bible." (RNS Photo courtesy of AP Faces Ltd.) The second, "Ancient Warrior," asks whether a man buried in a desert cave with a walking stick, a pair of sandals and a broken bow lived "the same challenging life of a desert nomad like Esau," the twin son of the biblical patriarch Isaac.

The third episode, "The Man Who Saw Jesus," attempts to recreate the life of a man from pre-Canaanite times whose bones were interred using a special funerary practice common in Jerusalem from 20 B.C. to A.D. 70.

The bones were found in a burial cave in a region of Galilee strongly associated with the ministry of Jesus. The show's promotional material states "if Jesus was a well-known miracle worker and/or healer," this unknown man "surely knew him."

The final episode, “Sacrificial Child,” explores whether a baby whose remains were discovered in a Canaanite jar under a house was sacrificed by her parents, a common practice in those times.

While forensic experts already have reconstructed the faces of people from several ancient civilizations, this apparently is the first time scientists have worked with Bible-era remains, Jacobovici said. One reason—the difficulty of obtaining the ancient bones for examination due to religious sensitivities.



Baby face sculpture complete in the “Sacrificial Child” episode of “Lost Faces of the Bible.” (Photo courtesy of AP Faces Ltd.) “Ultra-Orthodox Jews believe you shouldn’t move the bones of the deceased,” Jacobovici explained. To get around the problem, the show’s forensic experts scanned the remains but did not incorporate them into the reconstructions.

Although Jacobovici has achieved success in the entertainment field—he’s won three Emmys, among other awards—his films, including *Nails of the Cross*, a 2011 documentary that suggested nails discovered in an excavation quite possibly were the nails that pinned Jesus to the cross, were criticized by some of the archaeologists whose work he profiles.

In a statement at the time, the Israel Antiquities Authority said the “interpretation” put forward in *Nails of the Cross* “has no basis in archaeological findings or research.”

But the forensic experts who worked with Jacobovici on the *Lost Faces* series say his dramatic style of filmmaking actually helps educate the public about the Bible in a new way and heightens appreciation for the scientific processes utilized to recreate the four figures.



Experts puzzle over the skeleton of a 6,000-year-old warrior in the “Ancient Warrior” segment of “Lost Faces of the Bible.” (National Geographic Channel Image) At a Jerusalem press briefing earlier this year where the four reconstructed heads/faces stood, somewhat eerily, on a table in the corner of the room, Victoria Lywood, a Montreal-based forensic artist, explained how she had printed three-dimensional skulls from CT scans using a rapid prototype printer designed for facial reconstructions. The rest, she said, was based on soft tissue depth measurements and other forensic methodology.

“The science in the series is sound,” said Lywood, who often assists in law enforcement identification cases.

Israel Hershkovitz, professor of anatomy at Tel Aviv University, said he decided to participate in the series as way to get the younger generation “excited about the history of the Holy Land.”

Hershkovitz said he has “no idea” whether the newborn found in the jar was sacrificed, “but it is a possibility” because it was a common practice

during biblical times.

Judaism, he noted, “was embedded in local custom but also found ways to convince people to abandon that custom.”

Most people think the story of Delilah is about sex and violence, HersHKovitz said. If the show’s Delilah segment succeeds in teaching the history of the Philistines and the Israelites, “it’s served its purpose,” he said.