

Bible Study from an Archaeological Perspective

Lesson Five

The Iron Period (1200 – 586 B.C.)

Part One – continued: The Iron I A – II B Period (1200 – 800 B.C.) – From the Judges unto King Hazael of Damascus.

Scripture reading:

I Kings 6:1 – *And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month Zif, which is the second month, that he began to build the house of the Lord.*

1446 – 480 = 966

- If the fourth year of his reign was 966 B.C., then **Solomon became king in 970 B.C.** (966 + 4).

I Kings 2:11 – *And the days that David reigned over Israel were forty years: seven years reigned he in Hebron, and thirty and three years reigned he in Jerusalem.*

- **David became king in 1010 B.C.** (970 + 40).

I Kings 11:42 – *And the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.*

- 970 – 40 = **930 B.C. Rehoboam became king**

I Kings 11:29-32, 34-36, 40, 42-43

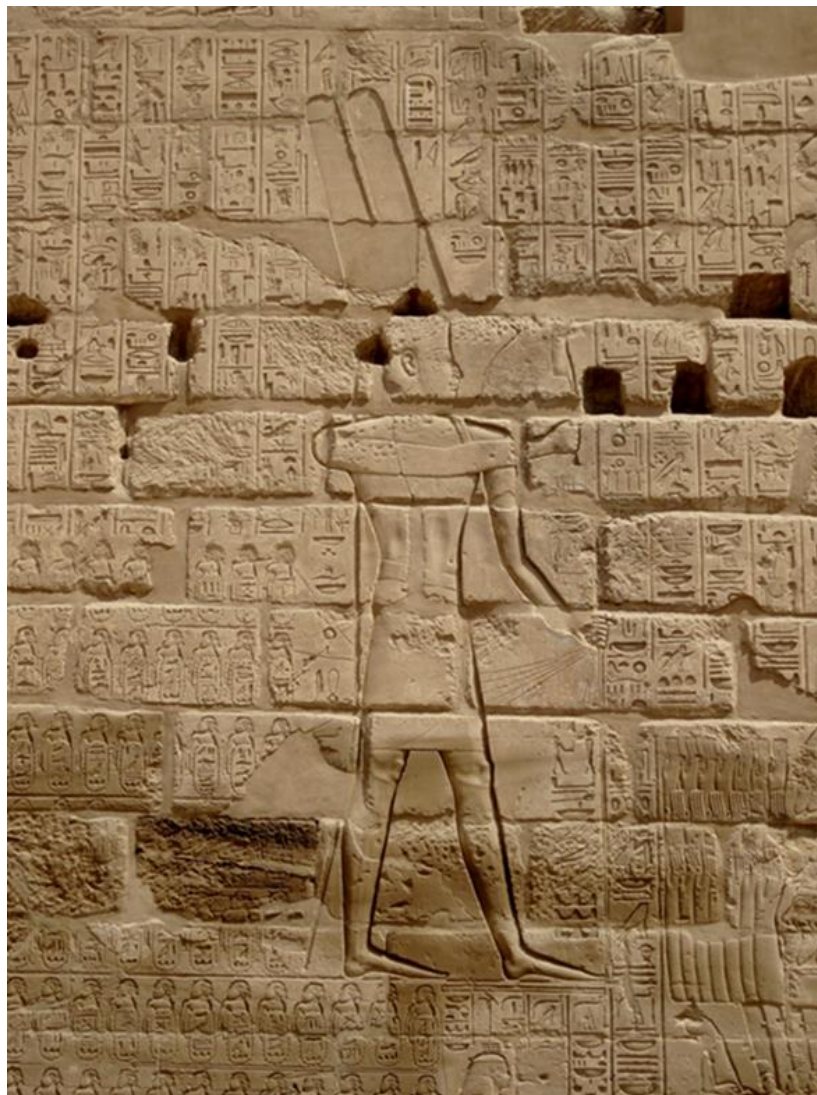


So David slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David (I Kings 2:10) And Solomon slept with his fathers, and was buried in the city of David his father: and Rehoboam his son reigned in his stead (I Kings 11:43). Credit: Bud Chrysler 1984.

I Kings 14:25-26 – And it came to pass in the fifth year of king Rehoboham, that Shishak king of Egypt came up against Jerusalem: And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house; he even took away all: and he took away all the shields of gold which Solomon had made.

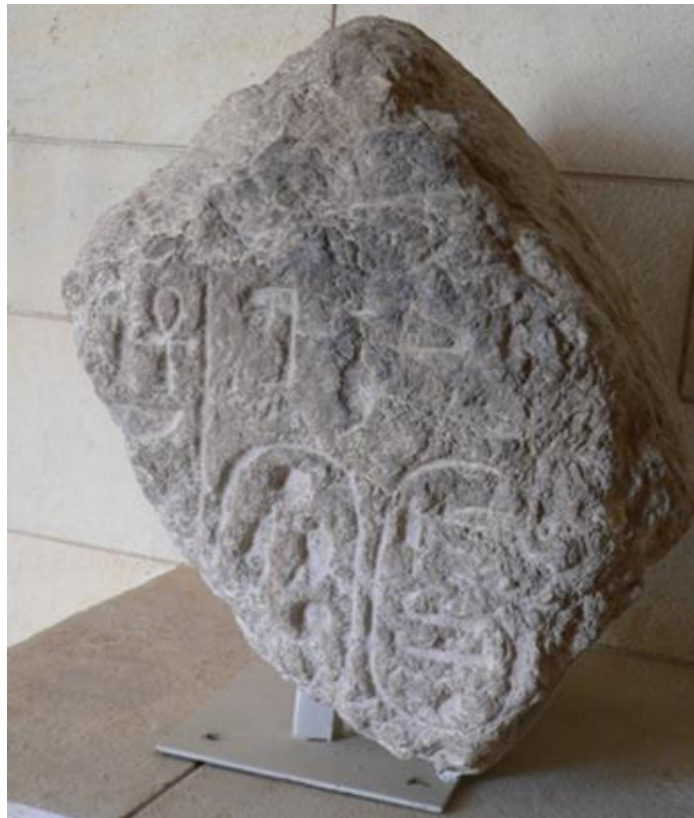
The majority of scholars agree that Shoshenq I was Pharaoh in Egypt from 945-924 B.C. and that the Egyptian ruler referred to in the Bible as Shishak (I Kings & II Chronicles) is, in fact, Pharaoh Shoshenq I. He was the first Egyptian king to be mentioned by name in the Bible (I Kings 11:40; 14:25; II Chronicles 12:2-9).

Pharaoh Shishshak (Shoshenq I) left an account of his campaign on a wall in the temple of Amun at Karnak, in Upper Egypt. The Bubastite portal includes a large, weathered relief in which the pharaoh lists more than 150 towns (including Megiddo) he conquered during his military campaign into Israel and Judah.



The archaeological evidence suggests that Shishak (Shoshenq I) was Pharaoh from 945-924 B.C.E.

“Today the vast majority of scholars believe that the Bubastite Portal records a real Egyptian campaign by Pharaoh Shoshenq in the mid-to-late tenth century B.C.E. As concluded by Israel’s leading Biblical geographer Anson Rainey: “This inscription can only be based on intelligence information gathered during a real campaign by Pharaoh Shoshenq.” Kenneth Kitchen has called the reality of Shoshenq’s campaign during the reign of Rehoboam “beyond reasonable doubt.” If this campaign occurred in 925 B.C.E. and, as the Bible says, this was the fifth year of Rehoboam’s rule in Judah, Rehoboam would have become king, and Solomon’s reign would have ended in 930 B.C.E. (925 + 5)” (Yigal Levin, *Did Pharaoh Sheshonq Attack Jerusalem?*, *Biblical Archaeology Review*, July/August 2012, pp. 48-49).

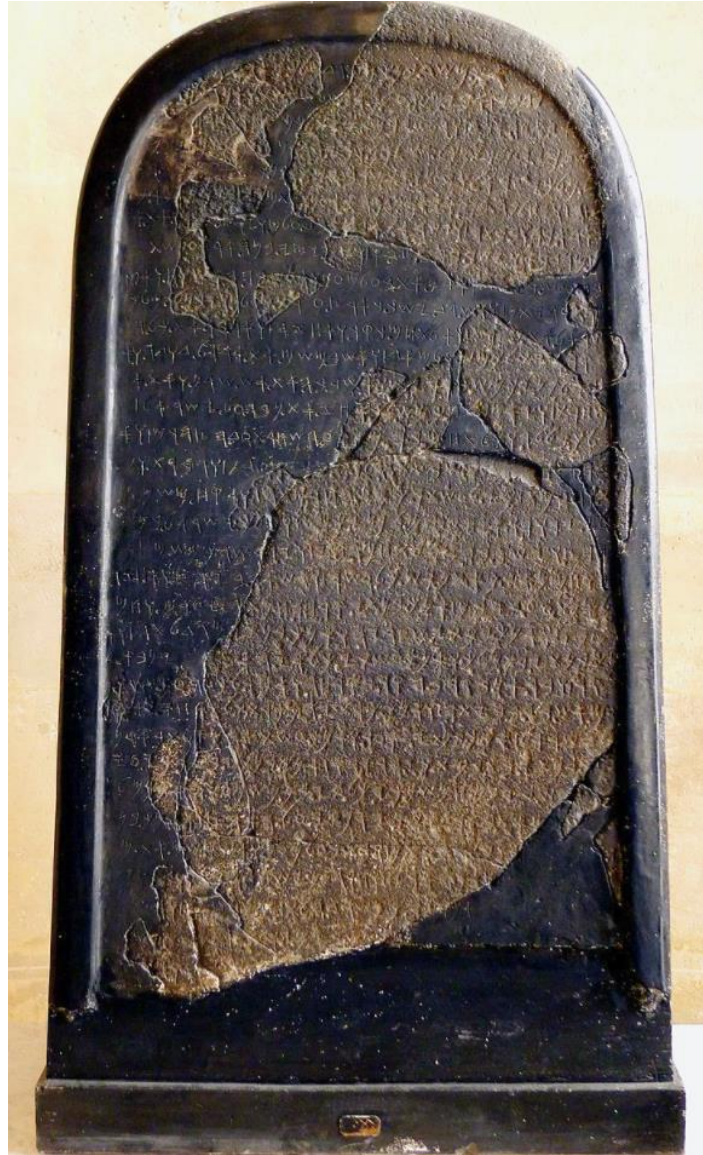


At the site of Megiddo a portion of a commemorative stela of Shishak (Shoshenq I) was found by the University of Chicago Oriental Institute excavations in 1926. His name can be clearly read, and the stela is undoubtedly related to the 925 B.C. campaign. Photo: D. Ellis/P. Van der Veen

Scripture reading:

II Kings 3:4–8

The Mesha Stele, or Moabite Stone



The Mesha Stele, or Moabite Stone was set in place around 840 B.C. by King Mesha of Moab (a kingdom located in what is now Jordan).

The stele refers to the kingdom of Israel (the "House of Omri") and it bears the earliest certain extrabiblical reference to the Israelite god Yahweh. André Lemaire reconstructed a portion of line 31 to read "*House of David*" which would mean it might contain the earliest extra-Biblical witness to David. Lemaire's reading is contested.

The Tel Dan Stele



The Tel Dan Stele, ca. 840 B.C. containing the House of David inscription was discovered in 1993 at the site of Tel Dan in northern Israel in an excavation directed by Israeli archaeologist Avraham Biran. Photo courtesy of Israel Antiquities Authority.

The writing on the stones is dated through paleography to the mid-9th century B.C. Although the Aramaic king's name is not found in the surviving text, the most likely candidate is **Hazael of Damascus**, whose rivalry with Israel is recorded in the Bible (II Kings 8:7-15).

The most notable feature of the inscription is the use of the expression "House of David" (Hebrew, *BYT DWD*) in line 9, making it the earliest known extra-biblical mention of David and the dynasty he founded. This is crucial for corroborating the biblical account, since many scholars have at least minimized the importance of the actual David, if not relegated him to fictional myth. The expression "House of David" is used repeatedly in the Bible for the Davidic Dynasty (for example, I Kings 12:19, 13:2; Isaiah 7:2; Psalm 122:5). It reigned over all Israel in the period of the United Monarchy (10th century B.C.) and over Judah during the Divided Monarchy until the capture of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 B.C.

The identification of the Aramaic king who authored the stele as Hazael fits well with the Bible's account of his frequent attacks on Israel. Hazael fought against the combined forces of Jehoram and Ahaziah at Ramoth-gilead (II Kings 8:28, 29; 9:14, 15). He frequently defeated Jehu in battle, devastating all his country east of the Jordan from the Arnon in the south to Bashan in the north (II Kings 10:32, 33). During the reign of Jehoahaz, Jehu's successor, he repeatedly encroached upon the territory of Israel, which was kept from complete destruction only by

God's mercy (II Kings 13:3, 22, 23). Hazael also moved into southwest Palestine, taking Gath; he compelled the king of Judah to pay a heavy bribe for sparing Jerusalem (II Kings 12:17, 18). It was not until the death of Hazael that Israel was able successfully to check the aggression of Syria under Benhadad III, the son of Hazael (II Kings 13:24, 25).

Cuneiform inscriptions show that Hazael played a large role in some of the campaigns of Shalmaneser III. In a pavement slab from Calah, Shalmaneser records that in 842 B.C. he joined battle with Hazael. He recorded that the Syrian king was defeated. Among his tributary kings he mentioned the name of Jehu son of Omri.

The Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III



Archaeological drawing of the black obelisk.



The earliest ancient depiction of a biblical figure - Jehu King of Israel. Panel showing king Israelite bowing to the king of Assyria. The text reads: **“Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri...”**

Instead of resisting, Jehu decided to bring tribute and make peace for which he likely received the protection of Assyria from his nearby foe, Hazael of Damascus. Within a few years, however, it would become abundantly clear that Jehu had made a poor choice (II Kings 10:32-33).

Part Two: The Iron II C Period (800 B.C. – 586 B.C.) – From Sennacherib’s Assyrian campaign unto Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian campaign.

- An important era (7th century B.C.) is well defined historically and archaeologically beginning with the destruction layers left behind by Sennacherib’s Assyrian campaign (Lachish, 701 B.C.) and ending with levels of destruction resulting from Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian campaign (Jerusalem, 605–586 B.C.).

Scripture reading:

II Kings 18:13 – Hezekiah and Sennacherib king of Assyria.

II Chronicles 32:1-5; Isaiah 37:33-36

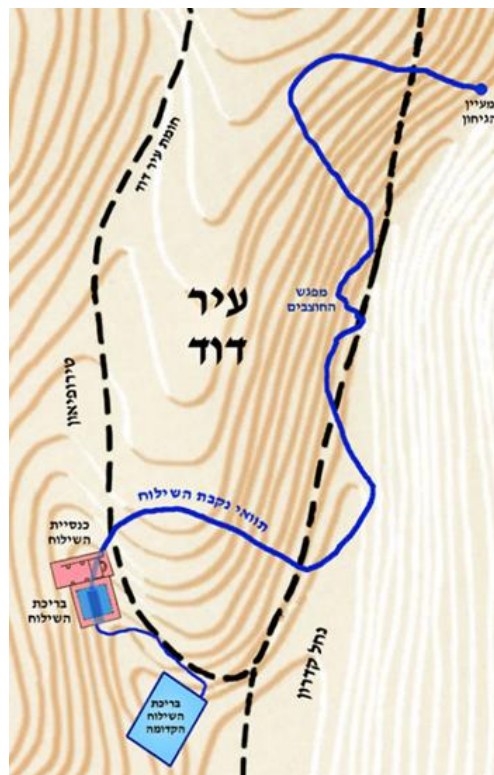
II Chronicles 32:2-4 – *And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city: and they did help him. So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran*

through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water?

II Chronicles 32:30 – This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David. And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.



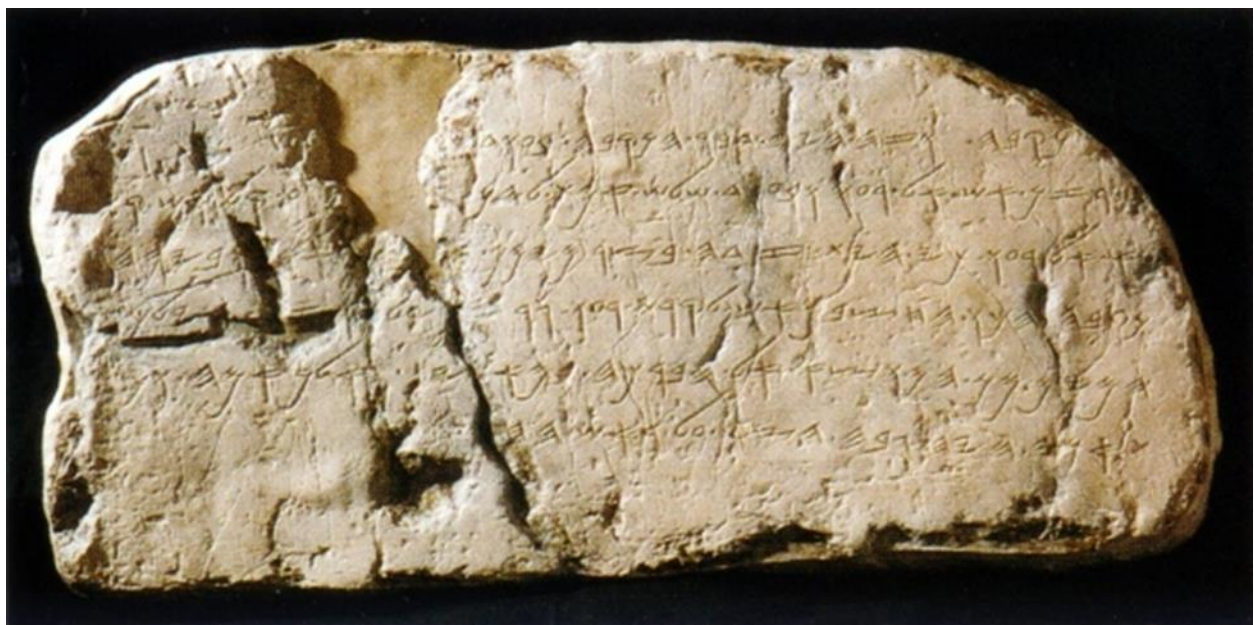
The beginning of Hezekiah's tunnel



Topographical map of the City of David and Hezekiah's Tunnel



The ending of Hezekiah's Tunnel on the west side of the City of David. Credit: Bud Chrysler 1984



All the features of the script on the **Siloam Tunnel Inscription** agree with a date in the reign of Hezekiah.



Seal impressions of King Hezekiah and the prophet Isaiah

Seal impressions (bullae) of Isaiah and King Hezekiah were found less than 10 feet apart in the Ophel excavations led by Eilat Mazar just south of Jerusalem's Temple Mount.

II Kings 19:20 – Then Isaiah the son of Amoz sent to Hezekiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, That which thou hast prayed to me against Sennacherib king of Assyria I have heard.

- The appearance of these bullae sees the perfect meeting between text, geography, and material culture.

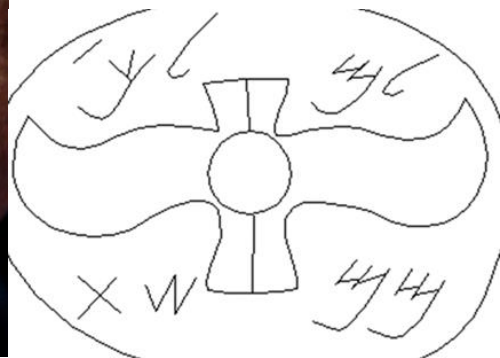
As recounted in the Bible, the prophet Isaiah served as counsel to the Judahite king Hezekiah, including during the critical period in which the Assyrian king Sennacherib waged war against Judah. It therefore seems heaven-sent that the bulla of King Hezekiah was located near that of Isaiah's in the Ophel excavations. Decorated with a two-winged sun disk flanked by ankh symbols and containing a Hebrew inscription that reads "Belonging to Hezekiah, (son of) Ahaz, king of Judah," Hezekiah's bulla from the Ophel represented the first time the king's seal impression was found in an archaeological excavation.

All the features of the script on the bullae agree with a date in the reign of Hezekiah. The script is almost identical to that on the royal jar handles known from the inscriptions stamped on them as LMLK (belonging to the king) handles. These handles date to the reign of Hezekiah, as shown by David Ussishkin's excavations at Lachish (The initial destruction of this fortified city is attested in both archaeological remains from the site and a pictorial relief of the Assyrian siege of the city on the wall of Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh).



Lidded storage jar with a stamp on the handle, "Belonging to the king, Hebron" Photo © The Israel Museum, Jerusalem, by Amalyah Oren

Storage jars found in all of Judah's major cities and bearing royal stamps on their handles appear to have been used for the collection of food in anticipation of war. Each stamp bears the inscription "Belonging to the King" along with the name of one of four Judahite cities - Hebron, Socoh, Zif, or the unidentified MMST.



Royal Jar Handle with two-winged "lmlk mmst" seal impression – Type m2d. Attributed to the reign of Hezekiah. The script on the royal jar handles is very similar to that of the Siloam Tunnel Inscription, which is also attributed to Hezekiah's reign. Purchased in 2015 from Licensed Dealer in Israel – Uri Shovanov.

Scripture reading:

II Kings 19:32-35 – *Therefore thus saith the Lord concerning the king of Assyria, He shall not come into this city, nor shoot an arrow there, nor come before it with shield, nor cast a bank against it. By the way that he came, by the same shall he return, and shall not come into this city, saith the Lord. For I will defend this city, to save it, for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake. And it came to pass that night, that the angel of the Lord went out, and smote in the camp of the Assyrians an hundred fourscore and five thousand: and when they arose early in the morning, behold, they were all dead corpses.*

Archaeological evidence:



Sennacherib's Prism, British Museum. Photo by Leon Mauldin.

Discovered at Nineveh in 1880, this prism describes Sennacherib's invasion of 46 cities in Judah. Jerusalem and Hezekiah were untouched. **"Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage".**



Esarhaddon tablet – 680-669 B.C. Found in Nineveh

The tablet: “On the twentieth day of the month Tebet, Sennacherib king of Assyria - his son slew him in rebellion... Esarhaddon his son sat on the throne of Assyria.”

II Kings 19:36-37 – So Sennacherib king of Assyria departed, and went and returned, and dwelt at Nineveh. And it came to pass, as he was worshipping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer his sons smote him with the sword: and they escaped into the land of Armenia. And Esarhaddon his son reigned in his stead.

(The perfect meeting between text, geography, and material culture)

NEXT – Lesson Six – The Iron Period (1200 – 586 B.C.)

Part Two: continued – The Iron II C Period (800 B.C. – 586 B.C.) – From Sennacherib’s Assyrian campaign unto Nebuchadnezzar’s Babylonian campaign.

