

## KING DAVID AND HIS DYNASTY

**K**ing David's existence and kingdom have been the crucial topic of debate for Bible critics of the past century. If David existed at all, they argue, he certainly did not have a dynasty of kings that followed after him, nor was the influence or territory of his kingdom widespread. Israel under David, according to critics such as Israel Finkelstein of Tel Aviv University, was little more than a tribal chiefdom, not a bustling tenth-century BC kingdom.

However, nineteenth- and twentieth-century discoveries in northern and southern Israel, Jerusalem, and Jordan have made it extremely difficult for critics to sustain these views. David is now considered to be a historical king who ruled over a unified Israel that covered a vast territory. He was the father of an eternal dynastic line of kings that extended through his son Solomon and that would ultimately culminate in Christ inheriting David's throne (Luke 1:32). For Christians, the battle for David's historicity is crucial since he is mentioned

over 1,000 times in the Old and New Testament, is the key figure in Christ's genealogy, is the writer of nearly half the psalms, and is the father of the kings of Judah. If he didn't exist, then neither do the spiritual benefits that flow out from him.

### David's Story

Our picture of David begins with his youth, when his father, Jesse, marches his seven older sons before Samuel the prophet in order to discover which of these would be Israel's next king. When none of these young men are chosen, Jesse promptly sends for his



The Valley of Elah is the location where David and Goliath fought their historic battle around 1000 BC (1 Samuel 17).

eighth and only remaining son. Upon David's arrival, Samuel follows the Lord's instructions and anoints David as the future king of Israel (1 Samuel 16:1,12). Soon after, as the Philistines sought to encroach on the hill country south of Jerusalem, David found himself in the Valley of Elah (near Azekah and Socoh, 17:1), disturbed by what he encountered. The Philistine giant, Goliath of Gath, continued to blaspheme the God of Israel every day for more than a month. Therefore, the Bible records that David, armed with a sling and five smooth stones, accepted Goliath's challenge (1 Samuel 17:40).

Slings were lethal weapons, being able to propel objects up to nearly 100 miles per hour and accurate up to nearly 100 yards. Goliath, armed with a spear, javelin, and sword, met David in the valley for the decisive duel. During this period of time, opposing armies would often either taunt the opposition until one side attacked, or send out a champion as a representative of each army who would fight to the death. The loser's army would retreat, while the opposing army would attack. The story ends with David slinging a stone that lodges in Goliath's forehead, thus defeating the Philistine aggression (1 Samuel 17:50).

The famed story of David and Goliath has been thought by some to be a moral metaphor on which the historicity question should not be imposed. Very little in the way of historical evidence has surfaced in the past supporting the events recorded about these two individuals, much less the battle itself. However, archaeological research in the southwestern region of Israel has supported the historical dimension of this ancient battle scene.

## Archaeology Sheds Light on David's Kingdom

### *Tell es-Safi (The City of Gath)*

Ongoing excavations conducted since 1996 by Aren Maeir of Bar-Ilan University at Tell es-Safi have unearthed the biblical city of Gath, Goliath's hometown (1 Samuel 17:4). The location, situated halfway between Jerusalem and Ashkelon, is identified with Canaanite, Philistine, and Crusader Blanche Garde inhabitants, though the site also contains remains from the later Middle Ages. According to Maeir, it is the largest preclassical site in the southern Levant, and it has been settled continually from the Chalcolithic period (fifth millennium BC) up to modern times, its occupation thus spanning six millennia. Several features and artifacts discovered at the site confirm its historical connection to David, Goliath, and the city of Gath.

First, through the use of aerial photography at the site, Maeir noticed a previously unknown man-made trench that



Excavations led by Professor Aren Maeir have revealed that Gath (Tell es-Safi) was a thriving Philistine city during the tenth century BC, at approximately the same time 1 Samuel 17 says David fought Goliath.

circles the site, measuring 8 meters wide and 2.5 kilometers long. After further review, the trench was found to be the earliest siege system in the world, designed to contain the inhabitants of the city and keep them from fleeing. Analysis of the trench system has confirmed an Iron Age II dating, which has subsequently been associated with the Aramean siege of Gath by King Hazael (2 Kings 12:17). This find as well as evidence of destruction supports the current location of Tell es-Safi as being ancient Gath.

Second, the discovery of destroyed dwellings that preserved hundreds of pottery vessels, utensils, cooking implements, jewelry, ivory, metal weapons, and cultic objects have confirmed the city of Gath was well-established in the ninth century BC. This represents the crucial time immediately after Solomon's reign, in which the separation of the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah took place. Bible critics have long dismissed the biblical portrait of life in Israel during this time period due to the lack of archaeological support. However, these finds support the biblical view that Gath and the Philistines played a prominent role prior to David's time, making the battle between the two warriors historically plausible. It is now understood that the Philistines are Indo-European (Aegean) peoples who migrated to Israel by about 1200 BC and figured prominently as Israel's antagonists, as the Bible records.

Third, in 2005 while a team of archaeologists were excavating through a debris layer of pottery shards and animal bones, they unearthed an inscribed ostrakon (pottery fragment) containing two Philistine names.<sup>1</sup> The secure context in which the object was found has established a date of approximately 950 BC, making it the earliest known alphabetic inscription from a Philistine site. The inscription itself is difficult to discern and was likely made by a sharp instrument such as a flint point or metal needle or peg; it is incised in a proto-Canaanite script and reads *alwt / wlt*. According to Maeir, the names on the inscription do not enable comprehensible reading in a Semitic language, though they are scrawled in a local alphabetic script. The names themselves are indeed Philistine names possibly related to Greek or Anatolian names—and remarkably, they are similar to the name *Goliath*!

Maeir notes that there is no *direct* connection between the two inscribed names and the name *Goliath*, and perhaps what is more appropriately noted here is the *indirect* relationship between the ostrakon and Goliath. That is, the accumulation of evidence such as the tenth-century BC date of the shard and the location and dating of the ruins



The tenth-century BC Gath inscription discovered at Tell es-Safi (Gath) contains two Philistine names written in Proto-Canaanite script, which offers cultural, chronological, and linguistic details consistent with the biblical account of David and Goliath. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

of Gath, coupled with Philistine names written in proto-Canaanite alphabetic script,\* would make the David and Goliath story entirely plausible. In other words, Tell es-Safi yields the right time, the right material data, and the right location. Additional pottery shards and the many reconstructed colorful vessels reminiscent of Mycenaean pottery gathered from the excavation, as well as visible surface pottery material, indicate that the Philistines lived in Gath in the late eleventh or early tenth century BC, during the time Goliath fought David.

### *David a Tribal Chieftain?*

Soon after the battle, David's fame and popularity grew, but so did the number of his enemies. King Saul summoned David in order to bring comfort to his tormented life, yet David found himself on the run from the angry and jealous king. He would spend the next several years hiding from Saul while navigating the desolate caves and wilderness of En-Gedi near the shores of the Dead Sea and fighting the Amalekites (2 Samuel 1:1).

Things changed soon after Saul and his sons were killed in battle (2 Samuel 1) by the Philistines on Mount Gilboa (1 Samuel 31). David tore his clothes and mourned their deaths (2 Samuel 1:11-12). The book of 2 Samuel records that he was anointed king and subsequently ruled Judah from Hebron for seven years and six months, and then ruled over all Judah and Israel in Jerusalem for thirty-three years (2 Samuel 5:5; 1 Kings 2:11; 1 Chronicles 12). Though critical scholars such as Finkelstein and Silberman have adopted the notion that David's kingdom was more or less a loosely associated group of tribes without urbanization, fortified cities, or centralized authority, archaeological finds from this period reveal just the opposite.

### *The Evidence of Khirbet Qeiyafa*

An example of a find that demonstrates the high level of David's kingdom is found in the recent (2007) excavation of Khirbet Qeiyafa by Yosef Garfinkel, who currently holds the Yigael Yadin Chair of Archaeology at Hebrew University in Jerusalem, and Saar Ganor of Hebrew University.<sup>2</sup> They have uncovered a fortified city near the Valley of Elah that covered an area of nearly six acres and held a population of nearly 600 people. The city has been dated to the period from 1025 to 975 BC (Iron Age), during the reign of David. The dating has been supported by extensive pottery reading and the radiocarbon testing of olive pits (by Oxford University) found at the site.<sup>3</sup>

Critics originally assumed the site was a Philistine city due to its close proximity to Gath, which is a short distance away; thus the Khirbet Qeiyafa site would not fall

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\* In 1996, Seymour Gitin and Trude Dothan unearthed a seventh-century BC inscription at the biblical city of Ekron that provided the names of two kings, Achish and Padi. First Samuel 21:11; 27:2 tells of David fleeing from Saul and joining Achish, the king of Gath. Though the Achish of the Ekron inscription is not the same person as Achish that lived earlier during David's time, it shows a remarkable continuity of names that spans centuries within Philistine culture. The other individual whose name is contained in the inscription, Padi, is mentioned several times in the Taylor Prism (Sennacherib's annals of his campaigns in Judah in 701 BC) by Sennacherib as the one he made king over Ekron. The annals of Sennacherib also mention that King Hezekiah had placed Padi under arrest for a short time (between 705 and 701 BC) prior to the latter's assuming his role as Assyria's vassal king in Ekron.

under David's authority or be considered part of the Davidic kingdom. However, further research into the style of pottery and architectural features such as the massive fortified walls of the city refute this notion. The construction resembles the fortified cities of Gezer and Hazor, as do the dwelling structures and pottery samples that do not appear in Philistine culture or cities.

It would appear that the sheer size of this city would, by extension, refute the notion that David's capital city of Jerusalem was simply an unsettled community of nomads.<sup>4</sup> The construction of the fortifications and many of the building structures at Khirbet Qeiyafa would have required cooperation with an organized city-state network; it would seem impossible for a mere chiefdom to accomplish such a feat. Some of the huge stone ashlar that comprise the construction of the four-chambered gate complex of the city weigh an extraordinary five tons!<sup>5</sup> The sophistication of culture and complexity of its architecture alone would appear to severely damage Finkelstein's tribal-chiefdom theory, since no mere tribe or chief would have the technology to achieve such a project. What is more, the strategic fortified location of the Khirbet Qeiyafa site, between the much larger city of Gath and the capital city of Jerusalem, may reflect an attempt by David to defend against Philistine incursions into the Jerusalem area.

In addition to these, objects unearthed at the site reveal a diet consistent with the Israelites. Most noticeable is the lack of pig bones, unlike Philistine cities, which commonly show evidence of the raising and consumption of pigs (and dogs) as a dietary staple. Unlike the Philistines, the Israelites only ate bread, vegetables, olives, grain, fish, lamb, and beef, a diet in line with the Mosaic law.\*

Even more telling in identifying the city's inhabitants is its location in proximity to another biblical city of Judah dating to the same time period (Iron Age), namely, Khirbet Gudraya (known as Gederah). We see these two sister cities mentioned in 1 Chronicles 4:23 as the place where the descendants of Judah lived and were called "potters" in the "king's service." The reference in Chronicles to the king's employment centers, and the archaeological remains found at both sites, suggest that they were the administrative cities on the Philistine boundary known as Netaim (Khirbet Qeiyafa) and Gederah respectively.

This identification could be supported by the discovery of an early alphabetic script inscription on a piece of pottery at Khirbet Qeiyafa dating to the eleventh to tenth century BC. Recent analysis of the inscription does not give a certain conclusion as to the identity of the script or the language used, but most scholars<sup>6</sup> involved believe its language could be Hebrew, while its script is early alphabetic (perhaps Canaanite, Phoenician, or Hebrew).<sup>7</sup> Some have suggested that if the inscription was written in the Hebrew language and script, it would confirm Khirbet Qeiyafa as a Judahite site, thus strengthening the argument for a thriving Davidic kingdom. However, others have pointed out that even if the script or language turns out to be other than Hebrew it would not preclude the site from being designated as Judahite. This is because there is precedence for

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\* There are some Israelite sites that reflect the eating of pigs, but these are primarily found in cities that were destroyed by the Assyrians and Babylonians, and they reflect the backslidden religious and moral condition of the population, as expressed in the messages of the prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

the use of a diplomatic language other than one's own native language and script. The ostrakon may have been carried to Khirbet Qeiyafa by a scribe or written there in a diplomatic language by Judahite scribes. Its contents were analyzed by Gershon Galil of the University of Haifa and said to reflect a high caliber of scribal work and culture at the city, which is consistent with the site being identified as one of David's administrative/provincial outposts, namely Netaim.<sup>8</sup>

### *The Convincing Nature of the Khirbet Qeiyafa Discoveries*

It now seems there is no reason to reject the biblical descriptions of David's kingdom based on lack of evidence for urbanization or centralized authority. Based on the scriptural, epigraphical, and archaeological remains, Khirbet Qeiyafa could be a late eleventh- or early tenth-century BC fortified administrative center, most likely inhabited by descendants of Judah, that possessed a high level of scribal and cultural activity and is attested in the biblical text (1 Chronicles 4:23 or 4:31). It would seem reasonable then to assume that David's kingdom, especially at Jerusalem, had achieved a high urbanized functional level and technology during his (and Solomon's) reign.

The identification of the city as Netaim by Galil is not certain; Garfinkel and Ganor believe that the discovery of two gates at the site suggest that the city should be identified as *Shaaraim* (1 Chronicles 4:31), since that Hebrew name means "gates" or "two gates."\* This would be a notable feature, since not even larger cities would have two gates; most operated with a single gate system.

Khirbet Qeiyafa has dealt a severe blow to the minimalist critics of David's kingdom since it has effectively demonstrated that Judah possessed the technology and development during David's reign to establish a well-developed urbanized kingdom.† In a recent

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\* The distinction between Netaim and Shaaraim appears to be of little consequence to the argument we are making for the authority, development, and comprehensive nature of David's kingdom. The archaeological evidence can apply to both name identifications. For discussion on the Garfinkel and Ganor position see Yosef Garfinkel and Saar Ganor, "Khirbet Qeiyafa: Sha'arayim," in *The Journal of Hebrew Scriptures*, vol. 8, art. 22 (2010): 2-10. Access at [www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article\\_99.pdf](http://www.arts.ualberta.ca/JHS/Articles/article_99.pdf).

† Supporting this thesis is Jane M. Cahill's excellent article responding to Margreet Steiner's contention that during David and Solomon's reigns Jerusalem was only a small town of a few administrative buildings (see Margreet Steiner, "David's Jerusalem: Fiction or Reality: It's Not There: Archaeology Proves a Negative," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24:04 [July/August 1998]). Cahill bases her critique of Steiner on her research as a member of Yigal Shiloh's staff responsible for publishing the results of his excavations in Area G, which is the area in which he investigated the famous Stepped-Stone Structure and the soil- and stone-filled terraces (Jane M. Cahill, "David's Jerusalem: Fiction or Reality? It Is There: The Archaeological Evidence Proves It," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24:04 [July/August 1998]). Also see the more recent Ronny Reich, *Excavating the City of David: Where Jerusalem's History Began* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 2011) for more information on the various stages of excavation in the City of David.

From a textual perspective, Nadav Na'aman demonstrates through a closer look at the Amarna letters (fourteenth century BC) that six of them were sent by 'Abdi-Heba, king of Jerusalem (Urusalima), thus refuting Margreet Steiner's notion that there was no city or town prior to the Israelite settlement (Nadav Na'aman, "David's Jerusalem: Fiction or Reality? It Is There: Ancient Texts Prove It," in *Biblical Archaeology Review* 24:04 [July/August 1998]). Worthy of note is Na'aman's discovery of phrases that indicate Jerusalem was indeed in existence and under rule. For example, one Amarna letter refers to "house(s)" in Jerusalem and a "town belonging to Jerusalem."

In addition, a more recent artifact discovered by Eilat Mazar through sifting revealed Jerusalem's earliest writing in the form of an Akkadian cuneiform clay fragment that was dated to the fourteenth century BC. Yuval Goren, a clay petrologist from Tel Aviv University, has confirmed that the clay used in the fragment came from Jerusalem, thus indicating high-level scribal activity in a thriving Jerusalem prior to the Davidic kingdom. Confirming the Amarna letters, this

article responding to Welsh scholar Philip Davies, Garfinkel summarizes the evidence supporting Khirbet Qeiyafa as a Judahite city and also spells out the death of minimalism as a viable option.<sup>9</sup> The article responds to the minimalist “Mythical Paradigm” (that is, the Hebrew Scriptures are products of the Hellenistic era and are only late literary compositions, not describing historical events); the “Low Chronology Paradigm” (that is, lowering the transition time from agrarian to urbanization from c. 1000 BC to c. 925 to 900 BC, casting David and Solomon as tribal agrarian leaders living in tents, not urbanized kings); and the “Ethnic Identification of Khirbet Qeiyafa” (that is, was the city Judahite, Canaanite, or Philistine?). Garfinkel answers these minimalist ideas with the archaeological evidence from Khirbet Qeiyafa that has been detailed above—evidence that supports the site as an urbanized Judahite city that dates to c. 969 BC (within the reign of David), too early for Solomon’s reign (965–930 BC).<sup>10</sup> This dating refutes the minimalist notion that urbanization in the southern Levant began c. 925–900 BC.<sup>11\*</sup>

The evidence from Khirbet Qeiyafa, combined with that of the “House of David” inscription (discussed below), attests to an urbanized and organized state in the region capable of supporting such material characteristics. The notion of David and Solomon being tent-dwelling tribal chiefs of an agrarian society is quickly fading away in light of the mounting evidence uncovered at Khirbet Qeiyafa.

### Evidence for the “House of David”

In addition to the urban evidence supporting David’s well-developed kingdom, there is also evidence in the form of monumental inscriptions that confirm his historical existence and God-given dynasty (his throne would last forever—2 Samuel 7:8-17).

#### *The Tell Dan Stele*

One of these inscriptions mentioned above is an Aramaic-inscribed stele found in 1993 and 1994 by Avraham Biran at Tell Dan in the northern territory of Israel.<sup>†</sup> Most believe it was originally erected as a memorial inscription by Syria’s King Hazael (1 Kings

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find offers evidence that Jerusalem had an organized government that employed scribes to correspond at a high diplomatic level (see Hershel Shanks, “Jerusalem Roundup: Sifting Project Reveals City’s Earliest Writing,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 37:02 [March/April 2011]).

\* Garfinkel cites recent evidence to support Khirbet Qeiyafa as an urbanized Judahite city based on 1) its location (strategic); 2) its new settlement and its importance in late eleventh century BC; 3) its massive stone and casemate wall fortifications (not present in Philistine brick construction or Late Bronze Age Canaanite construction in Israel); 4) its two identically sized gates with four chambers; 5) its urban planning, which included dwellings incorporated into the city wall, already present in the eleventh century BC and consistent with other later Iron Age II Judahite sites such as Beersheba, Beth-Shemesh, Tell Beit Mirsim, and Tell en-Nasbeh; 6) its pottery vessels and their place of origin (stamped handles; Khirbet Qeiyafa area is their place of origin); 7) its diet and food preparation (no pig bones, pottery usage, and carbon-14 dating on olive pits dates to eleventh to tenth century BC); and 8) the script/inscription (the 70-letter inscription contains words associated with Hebrew language; epigraphist Haggai Misgav agrees that most likely the language of the inscription is Hebrew (for example, based on *talas*, meaning “to do”). (These are a sampling of the 14 points in Yosef Garfinkel, “A Minimalist Disputes His Demise: A Response to Philip Davies,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, online article accessed at [www.bib-arch.org/scholars-study/minimalist-response-garfinkel.asp](http://www.bib-arch.org/scholars-study/minimalist-response-garfinkel.asp) on July 2, 2012.)

† Excavations at Tell Dan have unearthed the altar erected by King Jeroboam I (reigned 931–910 BC) when he established calf worship at the city (and at Bethel) during the beginning of the divided kingdom (1 Kings 12:25-33).

19:15) in the ninth to eighth century BC to boast of his military campaigns over Israel. It is possible that the stele commemorates Hazael's campaign against Jehu (2 Kings 10:32-33), and it is probable that Dan was part of the territory that Jehu lost.



The Tell Dan Stele measures 13 inches high but originally stood nearly 3 feet tall. It contains the first extrabiblical mention of David, thus confirming the historicity of the biblical king. The highlighted portion of the Aramaic text reads “house of David” (*bytdwd* or *Beth-David*). (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

When it was discovered, the basalt stele was being reused in three separate pieces as building stone in structures securely dated to the eighth century BC; however, its Aramaic script dates comfortably to the late ninth century BC. Alan Millard has provided a translation as follows:

Then my father lay down and went to his [fathers]. There came up the king of I[s]rael beforetime in the land of my father, [but] Hadad [ma]de [me] king. . . . Hadad went before me [and] I went from. . . of my king(s) I killed ki[n]gs who harnessed. . . [ch]ariots and thousands of horseman. . . son of. . . king of Israel and kill[ed] yahu son of [I overthr]ew the *house of David*. I set/imposed [tribute] . . . their land to [ ] . . . other and to [was/ became kin]g over Is[rael] . . . siege against.<sup>12</sup>

The presence of the dynastic title “house of David” (*bytdwd* or *Beth-David*) on an inscription written by an enemy of Israel in the context of Israelite kings speaks volumes in support of the Davidic dynasty. That is, Israel’s enemies viewed the Israelite kings collectively as being of the house of David, thus supporting the biblical concept of David’s kingly lineage. What is more, the inscription is the first extrabiblical mention of King David found anywhere.

### *Criticism of the Tell Dan Find*

Due to the Tell Dan discovery, biblical critics have found it difficult to deny the historicity of David, though as expected there are some who still challenge the reading. Because there are no dots (word spacers) in between *byt* and *dwd* (which would look like *byt • dwd*), it is argued that the phrase refers to a eponymic place name (a location or city such as *beth-Haran* or *Beth-el*) that has been drawn from the larger-than-life legendary hero known as “David” in the Hebrew narrative and included in the stele as a revered location with an honorable title.

This interpretation is unlikely for several reasons. First, those familiar with Aramaic inscriptions have rejected this idea, including British scholar Alan Millard, since there are instances in which word dividers are not present, such as the ostrakon from Tell Qasile (excavated 1948 to 1950 and 1971 to 1974), which reads *bythrn*, meaning “Beth Horon,” without a word divider.\* According to Anson Rainey, the absence of word dividers is appropriate especially if the combination of words is a well-established proper name,† which certainly is the case with the house of David since it was a familiar political title to surrounding nations for at least 150 years prior to the stele. Rainey also points out that the same construction is seen in the “Balaam son of Beor” inscription, where no word dividers are present between the phrase “son of” and “Beor.”

Second, there is a complete absence in ancient Near-Eastern literature or inscriptions of a place name with the title “Beth-David.” Third, the phrase “House of David” appears nearly two dozen times in the Hebrew Scriptures, thus providing the phrase the context appropriate for its usage and understanding when it presents itself in extrabiblical sources. It is not good hermeneutical or historiographical practice to transfer a phrase that obviously finds its meaning and context informed by the Hebrew Scriptures to something alien to its common usage. To force *bytdwd* to designate a place name when the stele clearly uses the phrase in the context of the kings of Israel—and the Old Testament uses it in the context of a dynastic title—is something the text simply cannot support.

It is also important to note that two additional pieces of the stele were later recovered;

\* The Hebrew-inscribed ostrakon is clearly a commercial document; it reads, “Ophir gold to *bythrn* (Beth Horon), 30 shekels” (see 1 Kings 9:28). See Benjamin Maisler [Mazar], “Two Hebrew Ostraca from Tell Qasile,” in *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*, vol. 10, no. 4 (October 1951), 265-267.

† Anson Rainey, “The House of David and the House of the Reconstructionists,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 20, no. 6 (November/December, 1994). Rainey offers an additional example of the ancient Aramaic personal name BRRKB (Bir-Rakib) from Zenjirli (Zincirli) in southern Turkey, where the absence of word dividers does not hinder a proper two-word rendering.

they offered several biblical names such as Jehoram (son of Ahab), Ahaziah, and Ben Hadad (1 Kings 15:20; 2 Kings 8:7-26; 9:6-10) that nicely fit the context and time period described.

### *The Mesha Stele (Moabite Stone)*

In addition to the Tell Dan Stele, more evidence has emerged supporting David's dynasty and the political and military climate surrounding the events of the ninth century BC. In 1868, F.A. Klein discovered (then purchased for about \$400) a ninth-century BC monument known as the Mesha Stele (also called the Moabite Stone) east of the Dead Sea in the biblical city of Dibon (in present-day Jordan). The inscribed basalt monument originally stood over 3 feet tall and 2 feet wide; it records the military victories of the Moabite king Mesha over the Israelite kings' territory east of the Jordan River (see 2 Kings 3:4). The stele is written in the first person (by King Mesha) and is the longest monumental inscription yet recovered in Jordan, though parts of the text have been reconstructed. Originally, the stele was complete, but due to later unfortunate circumstances in the negotiations with Bedouin to secure the artifact it was smashed into separate pieces. Fortunately, an impression of the stone inscription was made by Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1846–1923) prior to these events.

The value of the stone is seen in the damaged portion of line 31 of the inscription. Through an analysis of the paper impression and the stone itself (which is housed at the Louvre Museum in France) by epigrapher Andre Lemaire, a reconstructed translation reveals yet another "house of David" phrase.<sup>13</sup> The stone reads *b[—]wd*; however, through additional independent analysis by several scholars (for example, Mark Lidzbarski and Rene Dussaud) traces of a *t* were discerned after the *b*, thus making the inscription read *bt[-]wd*. Lemaire was then able to confidently supply the last remaining letter as a *d*, giving the complete phrase *bt[d]wd* ("House of David").<sup>14</sup> What is interesting, and a cause for objection for some, is that "house" is spelled with the shortened *bt* instead of the Tel Dan Stele spelling of *byt*. However, Lemaire answers this concern by explaining that the stone's Moabite inscription appears to spell "house" both ways; five times it is spelled as *bt* and once as *byt*. The *y* may have been an optional consonant or an archaic spelling of the word.<sup>15</sup>

The Mesha Stele provides us with a remarkable extrabiblical reference to the dynasty of David, a view into the political and military climate of the ninth century BC (2 Kings 1–3), the names of surrounding geography (Moab, Israel, Dibon, Arnon, Madaba, Aroer,



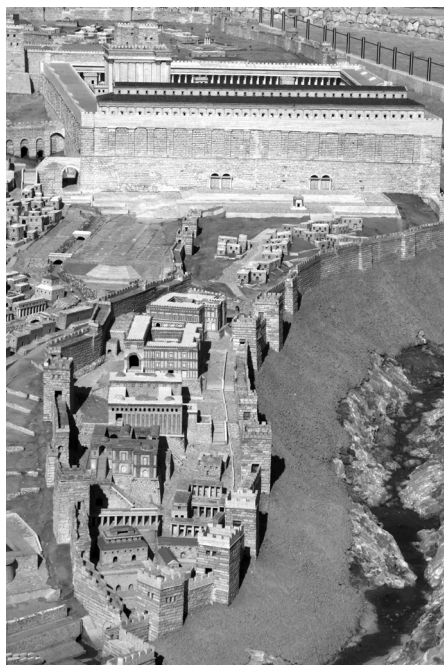
The ninth-century BC Mesha Stele was discovered at the biblical city of Dibon in 1868. The smooth portions of the stele are reconstructions of the text based on the paper impressions taken of the original inscription by Clermont-Ganneau. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

territory of Gad), and personal names mentioned in Scripture (Yahweh, Mesha, Omri,\* Omri's son [Ahab], David). It also provides us with information not stated explicitly in the Bible—how Moab repossessed the land that was for so long controlled by David and Solomon. We now know that King Mesha wrested control of the region from Israel soon after the beginning of the divided kingdom.

## The City of David

After more than seven years of rule from Hebron, David began making plans to move the capital to Jerusalem. Its central location and topography of mountains and valleys offered good natural defenses; however, the area was occupied by the Canaanites.

The particular piece of land that interested David, known today as the City of David, was occupied by the Jebusites. Fresh water was supplied by the Gihon Spring on the east side of the Jebusite-occupied territory, though by David's time the Jebusites had carved a tunnel to channel water into the city itself. It appears from the biblical text (2 Samuel 5:8) that Joab conquered the city by going into the tunnel and up a shaft (known as Warren's Shaft) and into the city (1 Chronicles 11:6). Subsequently, David used the stronghold as his central location to rule Israel, and began building his city and house that he collectively called the "city of David" (2 Samuel 5:9-11). Soon after, he would purchase the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite located on the top of Mount Moriah, where he would offer burnt sacrifices to the Lord (2 Samuel 24:18-25; see Genesis 22:2; 2 Chronicles 3:1).



The narrow walled slice of land known as the City of David is represented here in a reconstructed model at the Israel Museum. It shows the territory being located south of the Temple Mount (background) and immediately west of the Kidron Valley ravine. Its geographical orientation made it a desirable defensive position. It was seized from the Jebusites by David's military commander, Joab. Later, David would purchase the threshing floor of Araunah the Jebusite to build an altar (2 Samuel 24:18-25); the floor would later become the land on which Solomon would build the first Jewish temple.

\* According to Alfred J. Hoerth, *Archaeology and the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 308, Assyrian records from the ninth to seventh century BC often mention Israel as *mat-Omri* (land of Omri) or *bit-Omri* (house of Omri). Omri's descendant Joram (or possibly Jehu) is also depicted and inscribed on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III (858–824 BC) as paying tribute or making an alliance with Shalmaneser III (2 Kings 9–10).

## Major Finds

Excavations at the city of David have spanned parts of three centuries, beginning in 1867 with Charles Warren and continuing to the current excavations begun in 2007 by Doron Ben-Ami and Yana Tchekhanovets. Through the decades of excavation many features alluded to or explicitly mentioned in the Old Testament have been located. These include Hezekiah's water tunnel, the Siloam inscription, architectural remains of a large stone structure that some (for example, archaeologist Eilat Mazar) believe to be the palace of King David, Warren's Shaft, the Canaanite tunnel, the royal steward inscription,\* the typical Israelite four-room house of Ahiel, Gihon Spring, the Spring and Pool Towers, tombs, the tenth-century BC retaining wall to David's palace known as the Stepped-Stone Structure, and much more. What is more, the high concentrations of ceramic storage jars found in the area (and at other locations mostly in the Judean territory) containing stamped impressions bearing the Hebrew words *Lmelech* (*LMLK*, "belonging to the king")† testify to the city's location as the royal seat of Israel's and then Judah's government.

### Stamp-Seal Impressions Confirm David's Dynasty

Among the finds more closely associated with the dynasty of kings descending from David are the many small stamp-seal impressions (called *bullae*; singular, *bullā*)‡ found at the city, as well as some unprovenanced seals. During the excavation of



*LMLK* Storage Jar Handle reads "Belonging to the king." (Photo by Zev Radovan.)



This eighth-century BC seal impression (with fingerprint—see left side) reads, "Belonging to Ahaz, [son of] Jehotham, king of Judah." (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

\* The royal steward inscription is a lintel tomb inscription written in paleo-Hebrew discovered by French translator Charles Clermont-Ganneau (1870) in the modern Arab village of Silwan (ancient Siloam), which is located directly across the steep valley from the City of David. Nahman Avigad later deciphered a biblical name in the inscription as "[Shebna]yahu," the royal steward over the house of King Hezekiah. The prophet Isaiah prophesies against Shebna for heaving out a tomb and living above his means (Isaiah 22:15-25; 1 Kings 4:6; 16:9). The entire inscription is dated to the seventh century BC and reads, "This is the [sepulchre of . . .]yahu who is over the house. There is no silver and no gold here but [his bones] and the bones of his amah with him. Cursed be the man who will open this!" The rock containing the inscription was cut out by Clermont-Ganneau and transported to the British Museum, where it resides to this day.

† A high concentration of these kinds of stamped storage-jar handles was discovered at various sites in Judah, most of which have the city to which they correspond stamped on the handle. These include cities such as Sochoh, Ziph, Hebron, and *MMST* (perhaps referring to Jerusalem), which were most likely administrative centers Hezekiah established to store rations for an anticipated Assyrian military response to his revolt. Archaeologists have excavated layers at various sites dating to the Assyrian invasion of Judah in 701 BC and have located a high number of these types of stamped handles.

‡ *Bullae* (singular, *bullā*) are tiny nickel-sized impressions left by the pressing of a seal or ring into a piece of moist lump of clay. These would seal documents and small packages identifying the sender's name and usually their position, if any, as well as ensuring that only the recipients would open the correspondence. Hundreds of these impressions have been located,

the city of David by Yigal Shiloh in 1978, perhaps the greatest discovery was the nearly 50 seal impressions made by officials working in Jerusalem during the seventh century BC. The high concentration of seals near David’s palace indicates the presence of an archive. The documents are no longer attached—most likely they were burned as a result of the Babylonian attacks on Jerusalem in the late seventh and early sixth century BC.

The presence of multiple official bullae within the city confines attests to the Bible’s portrayal of David and his central government structure being located at the city of David. That is, if his successors had their administrations at the city, there is good reason to believe David did as well. The following chart is a summary of bulla impressions relating to persons mentioned in the Old Testament, though not all are from the city of David; some of them refer to people of the “house of David.”



King Uzziah’s (Azariah’s) burial plaque was found in 1931 by E.L. Sukenik of the Hebrew University (2 Chronicles 26; Isaiah 6:1). Second Chronicles 26:16-23 tells of Uzziah’s inappropriate action of burning incense in the temple, something prohibited by the Mosaic Law. As a result, he was struck with leprosy and isolated until the day he died. The funerary inscription reads, “To this place were brought the bones of Uzziah, king of Judah, do not open!” The first-century AD plaque was copied from an earlier eighth-century BC inscription. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

| Seal Impressions of People in the Old Testament |   |  |
|---|---|--|
| Biblical Person                                 | Inscription   | Scripture                                |
| Jezebel (873–852 BC)                            | Jezebel ([I]yzbl)*  | 1 Kings 16:29–22:40; 21:25               |
| Azariah/ Uzziah (788–735 BC)                    | Abiyah the servant of Uzziah<br>Shebaniah the servant of Uzziah | 2 Kings 14:21-22<br>2 Chronicles 26:1-23 |
| Jeroboam II (790–749/50 BC)                     | Belonging to Shema, the servant of Jeroboam †                   | 2 Kings 14:23-29                         |

some of which through excavations such as the Yigal Shiloh expedition and others through the antiquities trade market. For a scholarly treatment and cataloging of western Semitic bulla see Nahman Avigad, *Corpus of West Semitic Stamp Seals* (Jerusalem: The Israel Academy of Sciences and Humanities, The Israel Exploration Society, The Institute of Archaeology—The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1997).

\* Jezebel, the Phoenician daughter of King Ethbaal, was accustomed to sealing documents for her husband, Ahab (see 1 Kings 21:8).

† After the seal impression was discovered by Gottlieb Schumacher in the early twentieth century at Tell Megiddo, it was lost. Fortunately, impressions were made of the artifact prior to its disappearance.

| Biblical Person                               | Inscription   | Scripture                                     |
|---|---|---|
| Jotham (758–741 BC)                           | To Jotham   | 2 Kings 15:32–38<br>2 Chronicles 27:1–9       |
| Ahaz (742–726 BC)                             | Belonging to Ahaz, [son of] Jehotham, king of Judah /<br>Belonging to Ushna, the servant of Ahaz  | 2 Kings 16:1–20<br>2 Chronicles 28:1–27       |
| Hezekiah (726–697 BC)                         | Belonging to Hezekiah, [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah /<br>Belonging to Jehozarah son of Hilkiah, servant of Hezekiah /<br>Azariah son of Jehoshaphat, servant of Hezekiah /<br>Belonging to Domia, the servant of Hezekiah /<br>...servant of Hezekiah | 2 Kings 18:1–20:21<br>2 Chronicles 29:1–32:33 |
| Eliakim and Hilkiah (726–697 BC)              | Belonging to Eliakim the son of Hilkiah   | 2 Kings 18:18                                 |
| Amariah (726–697 BC)                          | Belonging to Amariah [son of] Hananiah, servant of Hezekiah   | 2 Chronicles 31:15                            |
| Hoshea (732–722 BC)                           | Belonging to Abdi, the servant of Hoshea  | 2 Kings 17:1–6                                |
| Shebna (8th century BC)                       | ...Shebna, servant of the king  | Isaiah 22:15–25                               |
| Manasseh (697–642 BC)                         | Belonging to Manasseh, son of the king /<br>Belonging to Manasseh son of Hezekiah   | 2 Kings 21:1–18<br>2 Chronicles 33:1–20       |
| Asaiah (late seventh century BC)              | Belonging to Asayahu (Asaiah), servant (minister) of the king   | 2 Kings 22:12,14<br>2 Chronicles 34:20        |
| Joezer and Igdaliah (late seventh century BC) | Belonging to Yehoezer son of Yigdalyahu   | Jeremiah 35:4<br>cf. 1 Chronicles 12:7        |
| Azaliah and Meshullam (621 BC)                | Azaliah the son of Meshullam  | 2 Kings 22:3                                  |
| Nathan-melech (640–609 BC)                    | Nathan-melech, servant of the king  | 2 Kings 23:11                                 |
| Ahikam and Shaphan (640–609 BC)               | Belonging to Ahikam, the son of Shaphan   | 2 Kings 22:12                                 |
| Baruch and Neriah (627–586 BC)                | Seal of Baruch (Berekyahu) son of Neriah the Scribe*  | Jeremiah 36:32                                |

\* This bulla was identified by the late bulla specialist Nahman Avigad as bearing the name of the prophet Jeremiah's scribe, Baruch, who penned the book of Jeremiah (Jeremiah 36:1–32)

| Biblical Person  | Inscription   | Scripture   |
|--|---|---|
| Priestly family name of Immer                              | [Ga'a]lyahu...[son] of Immer*   | Jeremiah 20:1-18  |
| Seraiah and Neriah (627–586 BC)                            | Seraiah son of Neriah   | Jeremiah 51:59  |
| Malchiah (627-586 BC)                                      | Malchiah son of the king  | Jeremiah 38:6   |
| Hananiah and Azzur (627–586 BC)                            | Hananiah the son of Azariah (Azzur)   | Jeremiah 28:1   |
| Gemariah and Shaphan (627–586 BC)                          | Gemariah son of Shaphan   | Jeremiah 36:10-12   |
| Jerahmeel (627–586 BC)                                     | Jerahmeel son of the king   | Jeremiah 36:26  |
| Elishama (627–586 BC)                                      | Elishama servant of the king  | Jeremiah 36:12  |
| Jehucal and Shelemiah (627–586 BC)                         | Jehucal son of Shelemiah  | Jeremiah 37:3; 38:1   |
| Gedaliah and Pashhur (627–586 BC)                          | Gedaliah son of Pashhur   | Jeremiah 38:1   |
| Azariah and Hilkiah (6th–5th century BC)                   | Seal of Azariah, the son of Hilkiah (the high priest?) / Seal of Hanan, the son of Hilkiah the priest | 2 Kings 22:4-14; 23:4<br>1 Chronicles 6:13; 9:11;<br>Ezra 7:1 |
| Jehoahaz (or Shallum) (609 BC)                             | Jehoahaz the son of the king  | 2 Kings 23:31-34<br>2 Chronicles 36:1-4                       |
| Pedaiah (598–586 BC)                                       | Pedaiah the son of the king   | 1 Chronicles 3:18   |
| Seraiah and Neriah (598–586 BC)                            | Seraiah son of Neriah   | Jeremiah 51:59  |
| Ba'alis (586–580 BC)                                       | Baal-yasha king of the [Ammonites] / Milcom the servant of Ba'alis                                    | Jeremiah 40:14  |
| Jaazaniah (597–580 BC)                                     | Jaazaniah servant of the king   | 2 Kings 25:23   |
| Shelomith was the “amah” (sister) of Elnathan (510–490 BC) | Belonging to Shelomith / Belonging to Elnathan the governor   | 1 Chronicles 3:19<br>Ezra 8:16                                |

\* This bulla was discovered by the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay as a result of sifting the Temple Mount dirt discarded from recent renovations of the Al Aqsa Mosque. Immer is the name associated with the priestly family that had oversight of the Temple Mount during the time of Jeremiah. Pashhur, the son of Immer, is described in Jeremiah 20:1-18 as the individual who beat Jeremiah and placed him under arrest.

| Biblical Person                | Inscription   | Scripture     |
|--------------------------------|---|---------------|
| Sanballat, Governor of Samaria | (Belonging) to [...]iah * son of [San-] ballat, Governor of Samar[ia] | Nehemiah 2:10 |

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## The Biblical Significance of Discoveries About David

The archaeological remains attesting to David's historicity have removed him from the realm of myth and legend and placed him in a well-established role as a historical king of Israel, as the Bible declares. The discovery of the Tell Dan Stele has provided a solid link in establishing David among the major contributors to the Israelite nation, as well as informing us of the political and military climate of the ninth century BC.

Though debate continues over how influential and widespread David's kingdom was during the tenth century BC, initial archaeological data (Tell es-Safi, Tell Rehov, Khirbet Qeiyafa) appear to indicate that his kingdom was extremely centralized and widespread.

## King Hezekiah

Nineteenth- and twentieth-century research in Jerusalem and Nineveh has turned up various materials relating to the historicity of the Judean king Hezekiah (726–697 BC) and the events surrounding him. Evidence of Hezekiah's preparation for the Assyrian siege (701 BC) has been discovered at the south end of the City of David and in Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter. Furthermore, excavation at Nineveh in the early nineteenth century recovered detailed Assyrian records that mention Hezekiah by name and describe Assyrian military exploits in Israel.

## Background and Setting

Immediately prior to the death of King Ahaz (741–726 BC), Judah stood alone as the sole remaining kingdom to survive the Assyrian takeover of Israel by Sargon II. Hezekiah, the son of Ahaz, reigned during the tumultuous times of the late eighth and early



The Pedaiah seal reads “Pedaiah, the son of the king.” Pedaiah was the son of King Jehoiachin (Jeconiah) (1 Chronicles 3:17-18). (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

\* Confirmation of this bulla is found in the collection of fifth-century BC Jewish manuscripts known as the Elephantine Papyri. The correspondence was written from the Jewish community living at Elephantine Island located in the midst of the Nile River near Nubia. One particular letter, known as the “Passover letter” (now on display at the Egyptian Museum of Berlin), contains a reference to “Delaiah and Shelemiah, the sons of Sanballat, the governor of Samaria.” These letters also confirm that the Persian king Darius was involved in the authorization to rebuild Jerusalem; they confirm as well the Israelites’ participation in its construction, as the Bible states in the book of Ezra and Nehemiah.

seventh century BC. Born to an ungodly father who tolerated the worship of pagan gods, Hezekiah was a reformer diligent to bring Judah back into line with the law of Moses (2 Kings 18:4-5; 2 Chronicles 29:25-30). He extended this offer of reform to those in Israel (the Northern Kingdom) who had not gone into Assyrian captivity by encouraging their return to the feasts of the Lord at Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:1-26).

As the reforms in Jerusalem increased, so did the power of Israel's enemy Assyria. By this time, the Northern Kingdom of Israel no longer existed, but Sargon II (722-705 BC) continued to have a military presence in these vassal territories. When Sargon died in 705 BC, Hezekiah appears to have stopped paying the Assyrian vassal taxes (2 Kings 18:14-16), reflecting what many believe to be an economic revolt by the remaining cities in Judea. In 701 BC, Sennacherib sought to crush the rebellion by conquering all the fortified cities of Judea, including Lachish\* (2 Kings 18:13-14). Hezekiah understood that in order for Jerusalem to survive the coming Assyrian siege, he would need to strengthen his fortification defenses and make sure the people had access to water. According to 2 Chronicles 32:5, Hezekiah strengthened the walls that had been broken down and built another outer wall to reinforce the existing wall structure. In addition, he stopped the flow of water that came from the Gihon Spring, which lay outside the city walls, and diverted its water to the west side of the City of David. This would ensure that the people would have access to water during a lengthy siege. We now know that both feats were accomplished with remarkable efficiency and engineering.

### *Hezekiah's Preparations for Assyrian Attack*

A 13-year excavation that began in 1969 of Jerusalem's Jewish Quarter by Israeli archaeologist Nahman Avigad led to the discovery of an outer defensive wall section built by Hezekiah immediately prior to the Assyrian siege in 701 BC. The wall fortification has been measured at a massive 23 feet wide and nearly 27 feet high, earning it the name "Hezekiah's *Broad Wall*." Hezekiah clearly understood that the Assyrian battering rams were powerful weapons to be reckoned with and that his fortifications and repairs to the wall had to withstand them. The



The remains of Hezekiah's broad wall in Jerusalem. The lower right side of the wall runs through the foundations of an eighth-century BC Jerusalem home.

\* Archaeologists have discovered Assyrian records and palace wall reliefs at Nineveh documenting the brutal destruction of Lachish. Excavations at Lachish have exposed earthen siege ramps piled against the city walls and high quantities of Assyrian arrowheads. One mass grave contains nearly 1,600 skeletal remains, testifying to the carnage experienced.

Scriptures imply that the wall and water tunnel projects were hastily completed due to the imminent threat of Sennacherib's army. This haste is confirmed by analyzing the construction of Hezekiah's broad wall. Avigad noticed that the stones used to build the wall were smaller than the usual stones used for such projects. It now appears that Hezekiah's hastily constructed wall utilized the stones from Jerusalem homes for its construction. In fact, a portion of the wall runs directly through people's dwellings. This is confirmed by Isaiah 22:9-10, which says, "You counted the houses of Jerusalem, and you broke down the houses to fortify the wall" (ESV).

In order to address the city's need for water, Hezekiah had to figure a way to route the water from the Gihon Spring outside the city walls to the inhabitants within Jerusalem. In what is considered to be an engineering marvel to this day, he stopped up the spring and dug a tunnel using two work parties digging from each end to reroute the flow of water to the Pool of Siloam (2 Kings 20:20). Discovered in 1838 by Edward Robinson, this tunnel measures 1,748 feet long and about 2 feet wide in most places.

After an examination of the tunnel by archaeologists had concluded, youths traveling up the tunnel area in 1880 discovered a Paleo-Hebrew inscription that the archaeologists had missed, describing the dramatic final moments of the work parties. The Siloam inscription reads in part, "The axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to cut...and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax and flowed water from the source to the pool for 1200 cubits." Dating to the eighth century BC, it remains one of the oldest Paleo-Hebrew inscriptions of its kind ever found.

The Bible records that Hezekiah's efforts to fortify the walls and bring water to the inhabitants of Jerusalem, along with his prayers, were successful. Sennacherib's siege of the Judean cities succeeded until he came to Jerusalem, where 185,000 Assyrian troops were killed overnight by the angel of the Lord (2 Kings 19:35-37; Isaiah 37:36-38).

According to 2 Kings 19:36-37, this event prompted Sennacherib to return to Nineveh in disgrace, and 20 years later (681 BC) he was killed by his sons Adrammelech and Sharezer while worshipping his god Nisroch. This assassination was a fulfillment of Isaiah's prophecy directed to Hezekiah that Sennacherib would return home and fall by the sword in his own land (Isaiah 37:7). Sennacherib's death is also confirmed in the Babylonian Chronicles.



Hezekiah's water tunnel.



Replica of the Siloam inscription found in Hezekiah's water tunnel. The original is displayed at the Istanbul Archaeological Museum.

Critical scholars have argued that a plague was the cause of the Assyrian deaths. However, this is not convincing since it requires one to dismiss the supernatural element at work here and to assume the disease could attack only the Assyrians and not the Jews. Either way it requires a miracle!

### *Confirmation by Assyrian Sources*

The discovery of the Taylor Prism (a hexagonal clay prism written in Akkadian cuneiform) in 1830 at Sennacherib's palace in Nineveh, along with a second identical record known as the Prism of Sennacherib (or Annals of Sennacherib), historically confirms the biblical account of the Jerusalem siege. The annals, dating to 701 BC, read as follows:

*As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, battering-rams brought by (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old, male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered them booty. Himself [Hezekiah] I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with earthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate. His towns which I had plundered, I took away from his country and gave them (over) to Mitinti, king of Ashdod, Padi king of Ekron, and Sillibel, king of Gaza....Hezekiah himself, whom the terror-inspiring splendor of my lordship had overwhelmed....\**

The annals continue on to describe how Hezekiah had sent tribute to Sennacherib in an effort to buy peace, something Isaiah had warned him not to do.



The Annals of Sennacherib. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)



The Hebrew-inscribed seal impression of King Hezekiah reads, "Belonging to Hezekiah, [son of] Ahaz, king of Judah." Its blackened color is due to burning, which also hardened and preserved the inscription. (Photo by Zev Radovan.)

\* James Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 288, emphasis added. The Taylor Prism records that Sennacherib brought a man named Padi back to Ekron and established him as king over the people there. This is confirmed in the Ekron inscription discovered in 1996 at Ekron, which lists Padi as the king.

However, we understand several things from Sennacherib's account contained in the annals of the siege that correspond to the biblical record: 1) Hezekiah did not submit to Sennacherib's army. 2) Sennacherib laid the Judean cities waste. 3) Sennacherib surrounded Jerusalem. 4) Sennacherib's boasting and splendor appears to have negatively affected Hezekiah. 5) Neither the Bible nor the annals record that Jerusalem was conquered. If in fact Sennacherib had conquered Hezekiah at Jerusalem he surely would have written about it, as he did in regard to the lesser 46 cities. For Sennacherib not to boast over his destruction or conquering of Jerusalem is to go against what we know about Mesopotamian/Assyrian kings. They liked to boast! The conquering of Jerusalem would have been something to boast about, but mention of it is strangely lacking in the annals. How could a world superpower like Assyria have conquered all the fortified cities in Judea, including Lachish, and then have somehow come to a complete halt when encircling Jerusalem? There appears to be no *natural* explanation in either the Assyrian records or the Bible.

### *The Biblical Significance of Discoveries About Hezekiah*

Challenges to the historicity of Hezekiah and his position among the kings of Judah have largely vanished due to these extrabiblical sources. The events surrounding Hezekiah's reign and Assyrian military exploits in Israel during this period are now well-established facts. The discovery of Hezekiah's broad wall, the Siloam tunnel, the Annals of Sennacherib, and more recently Hezekiah's royal clay seal impression (bullae) has solidified his historical place alongside other ancient figures.<sup>16</sup>