

# **Dr. Jonathan Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 4, Hebrew Kingdoms**

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This is Dr. Jonathan Greer in his teaching on archeology and the Old Testament. This is session 4, Hebrew Kingdoms.

Welcome back. We are going to now talk about the Hebrew Kingdoms and begin this, to continue our sweep, starting with early Israel, and now talk about the times when we have people transitioning from this existence of tribal nomadism, as it's traditionally understood, to the monarchy. But there's been a lot of debate and changes in the way people have conceptualized this, even in very recent years. It used to be thought that we'd think about the monarchy in terms of some kind of medieval paradigm that's marked out by monumentality, grand structures, and elaborate hierarchies, where new research is suggesting that it's a lot closer relationship to some of the social structures that are operational within these similar societies that practice nomadism.

So, we'll touch on that briefly, but we'll begin with the early monarchy and briefly the biblical depiction. So, you may remember we have Saul as the first king of Israel, anointed by Samuel in this transition out of the period of the judges. And even in the biblical portrayal, there's some tension about the kingship.

Who is this person who's now going to be greater than all of these other people? Is that a good idea or not? And the catalyst may have been this Philistine threat. We have the biblical record saying, give us a king like the other nations. Everybody's got one.

We want one too. But what is this motivation? Is it to bring these clan groups together to mount a military front against or to protect against the Philistines, as many would suggest? But we also see in these early stories that there's a tension between tribal groups from the north and tribal groups from the south. After Saul's rise and fall, we have David, a very complex portrayal of David as a shepherd, musician, mercenary, warrior, king, adulterer, murderer, and yet Messiah, an anointed one.

We have different traditions, it seems, contained about him that resonate within this cultural context again of this transition period here between the end of the Iron I and the beginning of the Iron Age II. Now there are, when we turn to archaeology, there are some challenges. One is the lack of mention of ancient Israel at this time in any inscriptions.

We've already mentioned the first description or first mention of Israel in the Meren Ptah Stele, but then there was no other one until the 9th century. So, during the 11th and the 10th centuries, there isn't any mention of a kingdom of Israel or a kingdom of Judah or David or Solomon or any such entity that we might connect with directly with the biblical text. And so, we do have one reference that comes very close, and that's an Egyptian reference, a campaign that was undertaken by a certain Shashank of the Libyan dynasty in this third intermediate period of ancient Egypt, and he left lists of these places that he conquered, most famously on the walls of Karnak, the great Karnak Temple.

He gives place names that he has conquered in this region, many of which can be correlated to biblical cities, so much so that his itinerary can be mapped out. Of course, there's debate about particularly how this itinerary connects, but it shows that he made an incursion into the central hill country, and he also went to the north as well as the south. This takes place right in the transition between Solomon and his son Rehoboam in the biblical story in the south and Jeroboam in the northern kingdom.

So, this takes place during the reign of Rehoboam. But aside from that, we don't have any mention of Solomon or Rehoboam, just some town names that line up. Besides that, we don't have any Assyrian records, but that isn't all that surprising because Assyria has still not begun to expand into the Levant.

That will come later in the 9th century when, in fact, we begin to have them mentioning Israelite and Judahite kings. But there are some complications with the lack of inscriptional material, particularly with Solomon. Solomon, following David, is kind of a gangster-style deathbed scene as the power is passed to Solomon, he incredible wealth develops, many alliances with foreign peoples through marriage, and rampant idolatry, rampant idolatry.

So, it's one of these ironies of the Old Testament story, this revered figure for his wisdom who is one of the greatest idolaters of these Israelite kings. Now, when we talk about Solomon, as he is described as this great monarch with a vast mini-empire, this is where we would really like to see some inscriptional material, and we don't have any. So, when we turn to archaeology, most of the connection with Solomon has come from a connection of monumental architecture that springs on the scene in what has traditionally been dated to the 10th century, and the problem is that there is a raging debate over the 10th century, how do we date these materials, are they, in fact, from the 10th century, or are they from the 9th century, and so it has become known as the difference between the high and low chronologies.

So, since there isn't any direct inscriptional evidence for the rule of Solomon, many have connected some of the monumental architecture that's traditionally been understood to date to this time period as evidence for a monarchy of Solomon. A

great, powerful monarchy because we have, in what's traditionally been understood as the 10th century, an explosion of monumental architecture, casemate walls made by an inner and an outer wall broken up by rooms that could be filled with rubble or used as spaces that would be connected to multi-chambered gates, most famously the six-chambered gate with vast guard towers, thresholds where large doors would have been placed, and a lot of excitement in the early days of archaeology with the discovery of this monumental architecture dated by particular pottery styles to the period of Solomon. So here it is, we don't have an inscription, but in fact, we see Solomon in this monumental architecture, even specifically at places that he is said in the Bible to have built.

So, this is all quite exciting. However, there's been another theory that has arisen and suggesting that, in fact, the architecture that has been traditionally understood as being dated to the 10th century should be dated to the 9th century and the reign of the Omrides. And therefore, the 10th century, the big architecture disappears, and Solomon is now back to an archaeological picture that looks more like that of David and Saul of some kind of tribal chieftain.

So, we call this the chronology debate. On the one hand, there's the high chronology, and on the other hand, there's the low chronology. These are represented in the debates of the last few decades by two prominent archaeologists, Ami Mazar, and Israel Finkelstein.

Mazar has since shifted his chronology a bit to what he would call the modified conventional chronology, but we'll use these terms just for ease here. The high chronology is the traditional framework and ascribes the monumental buildings that we view. Here, you can see one example from Hazor with guard towers and a six-chambered gate.

These are the foundations the walls would have been built upon, and a casemate wall going out one side. We also have pillared storehouses that have been attributed to chariot warfare, debate between if they were stables or storehouses or both. We have large cisterns that occur at these sites and major, major cisterns that have also been seen as one indicator of this monumentality that's expressed architecturally.

The low chronology, beginning with some re-dating of some of the Philistine phases from the previous period, the late Bronze Age, re-interprets those 10th century remains, traditionally understood as 10th century, to the 9th century, and associates them with the Omride dynasty, the most powerful dynasty of the Northern Kingdom that certainly dominated much of the South as well, as it's portrayed in the Bible and as it's understood archaeologically. Of the different factors that are involved in this debate, the biggest one is radiocarbon dating, C14. Now, the big problem is, you may remember, in our discussion of methods, there's a range of errors.

It's about 7,500 years. Well, this is precisely the difference between the high chronology and the low chronology. So, you have a great collation of data from those supporting the high chronology and those supporting the low chronology that are placed side by side, each arguing for their position.

There do seem, at least to my mind, many archaeological factors that would lead one to lean toward the high chronology, or at least Mazar's modified conventional chronology, that maybe asks us to shift our dates a bit while still recognizing a space between these different architectural phases that have traditionally been understood as the 10th and the 9th century. Because one of the problems is when the 10th century goes away, there is so much archaeological material that needs to be compressed into a short time frame. There are also particular pottery styles that fall below certain destruction layers, that some folks will associate with the Shishak conquest.

But even there, that's complicated because what is a conquest in the ancient world? Is it just coming into a town and saying, I'm the boss, and the people say, okay, there you go, there's a conquered city. So, we also have earthquakes that come through this region, and we have local skirmishes. So, just because we find a destruction layer that is around the time of Shishak, we should be cautious in ascribing that destruction layer to the specific campaign of Shishak, which is understood to have taken place around about 925 BC.

There are so many complications regarding dating, both in C14 and the pottery style that I've just mentioned. There have also been some exciting yet controversial new excavations. One in the city of David is complicated by politics and archaeological interpretation in that it is in a region that has been inhabited by Palestinians.

And so, you have a certain resistance to those who might try to use archaeology as a political tool to establish a presence in that region. So, this enters the modern political debate. But it also has served as fodder for an archaeological debate, in that in the excavations of Eliyat Mazar, and massive architecture has been discovered that seems very clear with dating based on pottery to date to periods earlier than the 9th century.

It's the 10th century, for sure. Many would ascribe this monumental architecture. So, the question then becomes, who built it? To whom should we ascribe this architecture? Is it David? Is it Solomon? Is it a later administrative building, the foundations of those? We have exciting discoveries in the names and seal impressions, one that we will talk about in a coming slide that has come out of this area.

So, there are very exciting excavations in this region, archaeologically speaking, that seem to show large buildings in this so-called city of David. They're also supported by

the stepped stone structure that I'll show a picture of in the next slide. This massive retaining wall that has been built to keep the city from sliding into the Kidron Valley.

And when you see that kind of massive retaining wall, it certainly suggests there was significant architecture on top. The dating of the step stone structure is, again, guess what? Debated. But we have lots of major architecture in this region that would have served as the capital for early Israel during this time period.

Another exciting site discovery is the city of Kirbit Qeiyafa, which has been, again, the subject of debate as to whom it should be attributed. So, it's an early site, if not at least 10th, but many would say 11th or the transition between those eras. And again, it depends on the dating here.

But if it is dated to the time of David, this would be some indication of a centralized government that could extend its reach even into the valleys. So, you have these valley fortresses that are protecting against any incursions from the coastal plains. So Qeiyafa has become an important piece in this discussion of the push-pull that goes back and forth through the valleys, not very far from Gath, which was a major Philistine center, probably the most significant Philistine center of this time period.

So again, the debate goes on, and a lot of it depends on how one understands the data in the Bible. So, we get back into some of those extremes between those who would minimize the historical data in the Bible and those who would maximize that historical data. When we think about, step back and look at Solomon in his context, we derive from the biblical data this presentation of Solomon's empire as a mighty empire.

This has been questioned based on archaeological material. But we have new excavations that have taken place in the modern Arava Valley, the traditional region of Edom, that has been the subject of much discussion as of recent. The height of activity dates to the 11th and 10th centuries, suggesting that there was a nomadic polity that was engaged in major, major copper production in the region between the Fainan in Jordan and Timna in the far south off of the Red Sea.

So, you have this massive area that shows extensive metal production. We have over 100,000 tons of slag identified in these sites, dozens of smelting sites, and more than 10,000 mines. Some of these shafts are as deep as 70 meters, which is unprecedented and not seen again until the Roman period.

So, this is a major, major polity that is acting but seemingly residing in tents. So, there's been this questioning of what we think of as far as social organizations. How does it work? Are we still working with a paradigm of the kingdom as some kind of feudal system with a king on top living in a fancy palace? Should we maybe be

thinking more in nomadic models of clan associations? And we'll talk about this some when we talk about the social setting of ancient Israel.

Some are suggesting that we rethink our expectations for Solomon's mighty empire. We do have biblical data that suggests that administrative lists in operation at this time can be correlated well with historical geography. And then we also have, of course, this memory preserved of a time when North and South were one kingdom, not two, under these monarchs of David and Solomon.

When we look at the archaeological context, we also could point out the importance of trade routes running through the land between. And there may be some reflection of this, for instance, in the story of the Queen of Sheba, the Arabian trade routes, mention of seafaring attempts, and the copper production in Wadi Finan and Timna Valley that I've just talked about. Then we also have a very exciting discovery, actually, perhaps a pair of discoveries that I'll mention in a coming slide.

The Tel Dan Stele found at Tel Dan, yes. The Mesha Stele, the first of which, the Tel Dan Stele, explicitly mentions the house of David. So, we'll talk about this coming, but that dates to the 9th century BC and refers to a dynastic house that came from David.

And we're within a few generations of this time period. So, if we look and go backward from this dynastic house, it seems to resonate historically and biblically. When we get to these building projects, this question of monumental architecture, here's the step stone structure that I mentioned.

And here we see the gates from Hazor, Megiddo, and Gezer that Yigal Yadin, one of the early Israeli greats, archaeologists, got very, very excited reading his text from 1 King and noting the architectural similarities with these six-chambered gates. And he said, here you go. We've got these gates that the Bible says Solomon built.

They've got the same architectural pattern. This, then, is one of these bedrocks for this traditional understanding of the high chronology. As I mentioned, some of this has been questioned.

Some excavations have determined that it no longer fits, particularly at Megiddo, while others, such as Hazor, seemingly still fit very well in this traditional understanding. Again, about each of these, there is, you guessed it, debate. It is archaeology, for one thing.

When we look at a temple and palace in Jerusalem, we note, again, this monumental architecture that has been discovered in the city of David and the stepstone structure that we see here. Folks have also pointed out, mentioned to the store cities

and chariot cities of King Solomon. Originally, those were identified at Megiddo, where we have some of these pillared storehouses or stables.

And again, within this debate of the chronological debate, those are dated variously by different archaeologists. When we turn to the particular kingdoms, beginning with the Northern Kingdom, or the Kingdom of Israel, we begin to see a more clear connection between history as we would describe it and history that can have some verification or connection with ancient records and also the archaeology. So, we'll see a few of those examples here.

The biblical account of the origins of the Northern Kingdom is that in response to Rehoboam's failure to heed the cries of his people, a certain Jeroboam I, who had worked as a faithful official under Solomon, was crowned king. Crowned king. There I go using those medieval metaphors.

He creeps into us all the time. According to the traditional understanding, he was elevated to the position of ruler of this kingdom of the north around 930. And he didn't want people to go to Jerusalem, the capital of the south.

So, we have descriptions of him building cult places at Dan and Bethel. Bethel hasn't been positively identified as any cult site in Beitim that many would understand to be Bethel. But tell Dan we do have extensive remains, clearly in the 9th and 8th centuries.

And the remains as well, plenty from the 10th century, that we, many of us would attribute to this early building project of Jeroboam I. And in particular, a temple at Dan that we will talk about briefly in a coming lecture. When we look at the big picture, I've mentioned in the introduction this battle of Qarqar in 853 BC. We have a lot of examples of the power of the Omrides.

They were certainly an international power to be reckoned with. As we see, regardless of high or low chronology, extensive building projects that may be attributed to the Omrides. We have, for instance, the city of Jezreel, the Jezreel Valley.

We have extensive architecture at Megiddo, regardless of high or low chronology. We have mentioned in Assyrian inscriptions the conflict between Israel and the great Assyrian empire. When we also need to bring in a really important inscription of the Mesha Stele, or the Moabite stone, an exciting inscription that mentions King Mesha of Moab, who is known from the Bible, and also mentions his god, Kamosh, as we know from the Bible.

And as well as Yahweh and some would argue, even in a broken section, refers to the house of David, as does the Tel Dan Stele. But what's significant about the

attestation to the Omrides is that the introduction to the inscription of King Mesha mentions the Omride oppression from the Moabite perspective, the Omride oppression of Moab. So, it speaks to the dominance of the Omrides over the Transjordanian area of Moab.

The Omride dynasty comes to an end in the biblical description at the hands of a certain Jehu, where Jehu kills not only the king of the north, Joram, but he also kills the king of the south, Ahaziah. And we find, again, an amazing connection here with the Tel Dan Stele. Now, the Tel Dan Stele speaks of a certain individual who kills a certain king, whose name is broken, but is reconstructed as Joram, king of Israel, and a certain Ahaziah, again the name is broken, who is king of the house of David.

So, this is Judah. So, you have this close connection with one major exception. The Stele is certainly speaking from an Aramean standpoint.

It speaks of worshiping the god Hadad. So, some would suggest this is a Stele of Hazael. Now, these two are not necessarily incompatible either, in that Jehu may have very well been acting in concert with the Aramean powers, and Hazael is taking credit for those two assassinations.

But there's, again, this rooting, this connection between what we find in the archaeological record and in the Bible. Jehu is also famously mentioned in the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III, and even some would say depicted kneeling before Shalmaneser, so we get a picture of an Israelite king. We know from the Bible, and this is also confirmed in the records of Sargon II, that Israel eventually succumbs to the Neo-Assyrian pressure.

So, we see, if we go back to the Battle of Qarqar, Ahab was able to hold off Shalmaneser III in 853, but by the 840s, Jehu was already capitulating to the Assyrian power, and with each annual campaign, Assyria went further and further and further, and finally succeed in the capture of Samaria. We don't have extensive archaeological evidence of destruction at Samaria, but we do have changes in architecture, though the archaeology of Samaria is very, very complicated. But we have records, both in Assyria and in the Bible, of this being the end of the northern kingdom.

So, we turn now to the southern kingdom of Judah and remember that as we've talked about this House of David, we have a peculiar reality where they are not known as Judah; they're actually known as the House of David. We have Aramean houses as well, which are these tribal dynastic houses, and we have, with the exception of Ataliah, every king in the line in the presentation of the biblical king line is in the House of David, father to son. So, it's smaller and weaker than the north.



We identify this archaeologically, even debates aside, based on comparative architecture and settlement patterns. But I say compare the biblical portrayal; the reason that we might get things a little bit backward or read things into the text that aren't there is because of the cultic importance of Jerusalem. Because Jerusalem was the temple of Yahweh, the national god for both the North, Israel, and the South.

And so, because that first national temple was in Jerusalem, that is why it is elevated in the texts, and it also endures longer than the northern kingdom. So the storyline continues after 722, 721. One of the greatest kings of the south, of Judah, is King Hezekiah, and believe it or not, we actually have a seal impression of none other than the king himself.

A royal impression of King Hezekiah was then used also; we have another one that was from years ago on the antiquities market that was then verified because we found one in situ in its situation excavated archaeologically. So very exciting to have a seal impression of the biblical king Hezekiah. He's also known in the Sennacherib inscriptions from the Sennacherib, a Neo-Assyrian ruler again, who campaigned in 701 BC through these lands of the southern Levant.

We have this dramatic story in scripture in Kings and Isaiah of the angel of the Lord right on the brink of destruction, saving Judah from the hands of Assyria. And then we turn to the Assyrian records, and there's some discussion and debate about whether it was one campaign or two and trying to fit these things together. But we find this mention that all he can say when he comes is that he's imprisoned Hezekiah the Judahite.

He mentions him specifically by name. Imprisoned him famously like a bird in a cage, which is a common literary motif from even back to Amarna and things. But he's imprisoned him in his royal city rather than destroying his city and capturing him.

So, there are different perspectives on that battle, but there are remarkable correspondences, even at the detail level, between the Sennacherib inscriptions and the biblical depictions. So, Sennacherib says that he took 30 talents of gold and 800 talents of silver in tribute from Hezekiah, whereas in the Bible it says that there were 30 talents of gold given, just like it said in Sennacherib, but 300 talents of silver that were given. So, there are a number of very close correspondences.

And then there is extensive archaeological evidence for the world of Hezekiah's preparation for the onslaught of Assyria. So, we have a certain form of marking jars, store jars, known as lamelek jars for the king that seem to represent some kind of economic provision coming from the hinterland into the capital to prepare for the onslaught of Assyria. We have the digging of Hezekiah's tunnel, this expansion of what might have been a natural crack that redirected the waters of the Gihon Spring to protect a more, presumably more secure location.

We have the construction of what's known as the broad wall to encompass the western hill that was previously unwalled. Some have suggested Jerusalem expanded significantly in population due to fleeing Israelites from the north on the brink of this Assyrian incursion, with many different indicators. Perhaps the most clear connection is in the archaeology of the site of Lachish, which was Sennacherib's greatest victory.

Since he didn't take the capital of Jerusalem, he brags most about his victory over Lachish. We have these elaborate palace reliefs and inscriptions that show the city of Lachish and can be correlated to the actual archaeology of where the towers and ramp were, the destruction of Lachish, and the parade of captives being brought before Sennacherib. And as again, we have this connection and correlation with things that really fit.

So, this is in the complementary relationship of archaeology and the Bible. Some of the details are not one-to-one, but very much this large picture of convergence of biblical and archaeological data. Another thing to point out with Hezekiah is that we have indications in the Bible and also in the material record that under Hezekiah and then also under Josiah, who followed, we have an increase in scribal activity.

So, it's likely that many biblical works were composed during this time. Even one mentioned in Proverbs of Hezekiah's men collecting wisdom sayings. Judah lasts for longer than their northern sister of Israel, and in that time frame, we have the Neo-Assyrian Empire that comes to an abrupt end.

It's one of those chilling facts of history where the Neo-Assyrian Empire was at its height under a certain Ashurbanipal who was, and they expanded all the way from Egypt to the edges of Anatolia to the sea and all of Mesopotamia. And also, during their height is also the end of their kingdom, so much so that we're not exactly sure when Ashurbanipal finished reigning. So, in this turbulent time at the end of the Assyrian Empire, we have Egypt in the mix.

We have several other powers, but eventually, the Neo-Babylonian Empire takes over and they inherit the Assyrian kingdom. They exercise a different perspective on foreign policy, more a destruction and bring all the to the capital rather than invest in the mechanics of the provinces. But it's the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar II who eventually took and destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple.

They begin in the first wave in 597 and then finally in the destruction of 587 or 586 BC. We have recorded in the Babylonian Chronicle of that first incursion in 597 and evidence even in Babylon of some curious connections with the ration lists, with other evidence of Judahites that then resided and stayed in Babylon. We have names showing up in archives from this period.

So that brings our discussion, a very brief discussion of the Israelite kingdoms from the early days to the parallel histories of Judah and Israel. And we think often when we look at kind of the history and culture of ancient Israel, there's this focus always on the elite, the kings, the movements of the great empires. So, in the final lecture, I'm going to talk about the culture of ancient Israel more broadly, the social structure.

We'll also look at some of the different food ways and then also religion that would have been an important part of ancient Israel's existence. And, of course, the inheritors. We are the inheritors of much of that tradition.

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