

# **Dr. Jonathan Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 3, Early Israel Resources from NotebookLM**

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

## **1. Abstract of Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 3, Early Israel, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL**

**Dr. Jonathan Greer's lecture** on archaeology and the Old Testament, specifically focusing on early Israel, examines archaeological evidence alongside biblical narratives. **Key archaeological findings** discussed include the Merneptah Stele (first mention of Israel), a significant settlement explosion in the 12th-11th centuries BC, and the cultural distinctions between Israelites and Philistines. The lecture also **places early Israel within the broader context** of the Late Bronze Age collapse and the rise of new kingdoms in the region. Finally, **the lecture emphasizes** that while biblical accounts are rooted in historical realities, they also serve as artistic renderings conveying deeper religious and cultural meanings.

**2. 25 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of  
Dr. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 3 –  
Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the  
Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link  
there (Introduction & Languages → Introductory Series →  
Archaeology).**



**Greer\_Archaeology\_  
Session03.mp3**

### 3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided source, "Greer\_Arch\_EN\_Session 03.pdf," focusing on Dr. Jonathan Greer's discussion of Early Israel within the context of archaeology and the Old Testament:

#### **Briefing Document: Archaeology and Early Israel**

##### **Introduction**

This document summarizes the key points made by Dr. Jonathan Greer in Session 3 of his lecture series, "Archaeology and the Old Testament," focusing on the topic of Early Israel. Greer emphasizes the importance of integrating archaeological evidence with biblical texts to understand the historical and cultural context of ancient Israel, while acknowledging the complexities and limitations of both disciplines.

##### **Key Themes and Ideas**

##### **1. The Merneptah Stele as the Earliest Mention of Israel:**

- The Merneptah Stele, dating to either 1229 or 1209 BC, provides the earliest extra-biblical reference to "Israel" as a people.
- The stele is a victory hymn of Pharaoh Merneptah celebrating his conquests, where he claims "Israel is wasted, its seed is not."
- Significantly, the stele uses Egyptian determinatives to identify Israel not as a settled city-state, like Ashkelon and Gezer, but as an unsettled, nomadic people group. As Greer notes: "The throwing stick here indicates that they're a foreign people group, and the three strokes, the plural strokes, indicate that it's plural. So, what's significant about this is it identifies Israel as an unsettled people in contrast to, you know, Am and Gezer and Ashkelon as settled peoples in a city."
- This aligns with the biblical portrayal of early Israel as a mobile, tent-dwelling people.
- The debate exists as to whether the "Israel" mentioned is the same as the "Israel" in the biblical accounts.

##### **1. The Settlement Explosion of the Iron Age I:**

- Archaeological surveys reveal a dramatic increase in settlements in the Hill Country of Canaan during the Iron Age I (c. 1200-1000 BC).

- The number of settlements grew significantly from the Late Bronze Age, with a jump from roughly 88 settlements to 678. As Greer states: "There were as many as 678 settlements from 88 to 678, or 36 to 319 in the Hill Country."
- This settlement explosion cannot be solely attributed to natural population growth, suggesting a large influx of people.
- This phenomenon, combined with the Merneptah Stele's reference to Israel, is often seen as evidence for the emergence of ancient Israel.

#### 1. **Material Culture and Early Israel:**

- Several material culture features are traditionally associated with early Israelite settlements, although these associations are now debated.
- **Four-Room Houses:** A unique architectural style characterized by a courtyard, two side rooms, and a back room. As Greer points out: "Traditionally, archaeologists have noted a particular architectural style, the four-room house that has a courtyard, two side rooms, and a back room. And notice that this architectural style comes in conjunction with this settlement explosion."
- **Collared Rim Storage Jars:** Large vessels with a distinctive rim, used for grain and oil storage.
- **Terrace Farming:** An agricultural technique to maximize land use in hilly terrain.
- **Cisterns:** Water collection systems carved into the limestone bedrock.
- **Dietary Patterns:** The absence of pig bones in hill country sites was traditionally interpreted as an indicator of Israelite settlements (as Philistines were thought to consume pork) and now complicated by the presence of these patterns in Canaanite areas as well. As Greer explains: "Archaeologists...noticed a distinction in the faunal profiles, the animal bone remains from sites of the hill country with sites of the coastal plain, traditionally associated with Israel and Philistia, in that there were far more pig bones in the coastal plain of the traditional heartland of Philistia...We have another piece to this puzzle, and that is Canaanites, they also didn't like pigs so much."
- Greer emphasizes that these markers are not definitive for Israelite ethnicity. The material culture cannot be applied too rigidly.

### 1. The Late Bronze Age Collapse:

- A major societal collapse occurred around 1200 BC, impacting major civilizations such as the Mycenaean, Hittite, and Egyptian empires.
- This collapse led to a power vacuum in the Levant, creating opportunities for smaller kingdoms to emerge.
- The "Sea Peoples," mentioned in Egyptian texts, are implicated in the disruption and collapse of established societies.
- The Philistines are thought to be one group among these "sea peoples". As Greer says: "One of these sea peoples is known in the Egyptian inscriptions as the Peleset, the P-L-S-T, Peleset... most scholars would agree this is, in fact, the Philistines."
- Environmental factors, like drought and resource scarcity, are also cited as triggers for this upheaval. As Greer explains, "Recent research has identified environmental factors as the trigger for this upheaval. Intense desiccation, a drying out that then led to a series of droughts."
- The collapse created the geopolitical context for the rise of Israel as one such kingdom. As Greer explains: "Well, one of these little kingdoms is we might identify as Israel. So, when we put all of these pieces together, and we look at the big picture, the story of the Bible, these pieces fit very well for the large time frame, the big picture of what's going on."

### 1. The Emergence of the Alphabet and Scribal Culture:

- The alphabet, invented earlier, became more widely used in this period.
- The increased accessibility of writing allowed for smaller kingdoms to develop their own scribal cultures.
- This suggests that the biblical texts could have begun to be written down within this context. As Greer explains: "it does seem in this context, even the very fact of the scribal culture of the late Bronze Age that is now being adapted to local kingdoms, that this is the time frame when someone besides the superpowers can afford to hire a scribe."

### 1. **Biblical Narratives: Historical Roots and Thematic Layers:**

- Greer emphasizes that the biblical stories are rooted in real historical contexts, people, places, and times but also have thematic layers of meaning that go beyond historical accuracy.
- He uses the example of Emanuel Leutze's painting of Washington's crossing of the Delaware River to illustrate how a historical event can be portrayed with artistic license to convey a particular message. As Greer explains: "This represents a perspective from the mid-19th century, looking at what he envisioned in his own home country and what he was hoping would play out in the United States. There's a star of hope, the idea that we are all in this boat together, whatever our ethnic background, whatever our country of origin, whatever our linguistic background that we could go for."
- The purpose of the biblical stories is to communicate about God and his people, not just to provide a historical record.
- The creation stories in Genesis are compared with those of the ancient Near East, highlighting their shared cultural context and different emphases.
- Greer argues that understanding the cultural context allows a deeper appreciation of the message of the Bible, using the image of God in humans as an example.

### 1. **Ancestral Narratives and the Exodus:**

- The ancestral narratives (Abraham, Isaac, Jacob) have cultural parallels in the ancient Near East, but it's difficult to pinpoint them to any specific historical period.
- The Exodus, a key redemptive act in the Bible, lacks unambiguous archaeological evidence but has clear links to ancient Egyptian culture.
- The concept of a "mixed multitude" coming out of Egypt is mentioned, which allows for the possibility of multiple cultural groups contributing to the development of ancient Israel.

### 1. **The Conquest and the Period of the Judges:**

- The conquest of Canaan is portrayed with different perspectives in Joshua (sudden, violent) and Judges (gradual).

- Archaeological findings of destruction layers are not always consistent with the descriptions of conquest in Joshua.
- Greer emphasizes the importance of "being bothered" by the violent texts, recognizing the moral tension that is inherent within them, instead of trying to quickly move past their difficulty. As he says: "So, if we're not first bothered, we're skipping over the real essence of being Christian to try to jump to some kind of connection with history."
- He argues that the biblical narratives are not simply a reflection of actual historical events. Instead they are artistic renderings rooted in time and place which speak about God's relationship with his people.

## **Conclusion**

Dr. Greer's lecture highlights the complex interplay between archaeological evidence and biblical texts in understanding Early Israel. He cautions against simplistic interpretations, stressing the importance of historical context, and emphasizes the role of biblical stories to communicate spiritual and theological truths. The major themes are:

- The Merneptah Stele and its significance
- The settlement explosion in Iron Age I
- The challenges in using material culture to identify ethnic groups
- The collapse of the Late Bronze Age and the rise of new kingdoms, including Israel.
- The importance of considering the cultural context for interpreting biblical narratives.
- The limitations of both archaeology and biblical interpretation, stressing the importance of humility and open inquiry.

By understanding these themes, a more nuanced understanding of early Israel can be achieved.

## 4. Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 3, Early Israel

### Archaeology and the Old Testament: Early Israel Study Guide

#### Quiz

**Instructions:** Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. What is the significance of the Merneptah Stele in relation to early Israel?
2. How do the determinatives used in the Merneptah Stele describe the early Israelites?
3. Describe the settlement explosion that occurred during the Iron Age I and its significance.
4. What are some of the material culture features traditionally associated with early Israelite settlements?
5. Why is the presence of pig bones in archaeological sites a complex issue when identifying early Israelites?
6. What major geopolitical event occurred around 1200 BC, and how did it impact the region?
7. Who were the "sea peoples," and what role did they play in the late Bronze Age collapse?
8. How did the collapse of major powers like Egypt affect the emergence of new kingdoms in the Levant, including Israel?
9. Explain the significance of the development and spread of the alphabet in the context of early Israel.
10. What is Dr. Greer's main point when comparing the painting of "Washington Crossing the Delaware" with biblical stories?

#### Quiz Answer Key

1. The Merneptah Stele is the earliest extra-biblical mention of Israel as a people, dating to either 1229 or 1209 BC. It's a victory hymn by Pharaoh Merneptah that mentions Israel as a people that he has "wasted," providing an important historical and archaeological reference point.

2. The determinatives used in the Merneptah Stele identify the Israelites as an unsettled, foreign people group, unlike the city-states of Ashkelon and Gezer, which are described as established peoples. This characterization aligns with descriptions of early Israelites as nomadic herders living in tents.
3. The Iron Age I saw a significant increase in settlements in the Hill Country, from 36 to 319, which suggests an influx of people. This "settlement explosion" is too large to be explained by natural population growth and coincides with a period of political upheaval, thus often linked to the emergence of early Israel.
4. Material culture features include the four-room house, collared-rim store jars, terrace farming, and cisterns. These features have been traditionally used to identify early Israelite sites, though their association is debated.
5. Pig bones were found more often in coastal plains sites associated with Philistines, and the absence of pig bones in the hill country was linked to Israelites. However, Canaanites also avoided pigs, thus complicating the equation and making pig bones alone an unreliable marker for ethnic designation.
6. Around 1200 BC, major superpowers in the Late Bronze Age collapsed, including the Hittite kingdom, the Mycenaean civilization, and a weakening of Egypt. This collapse was due to a combination of political, social, and environmental factors, like intense desiccation and drought.
7. The "sea peoples" were a group of marauders who came from the West, including Anatolia and the Aegean. They contributed to the destabilization of the Late Bronze Age and played a role in the collapse of several major powers and the emergence of new political entities.
8. The collapse of major powers created a power vacuum, allowing new kingdoms to emerge in the Levant, including Israel. The region saw a transition from centralized control by superpowers to smaller, independent entities.
9. The alphabet, while invented earlier, became more widespread during this period. The transition from more complex writing systems to the alphabet facilitated the spread of literacy and scribal activity and made writing more accessible outside of the superpowers.
10. Dr. Greer uses the "Washington Crossing the Delaware" painting to illustrate how biblical stories are rooted in historical events but often shaped by the perspectives and intentions of the storytellers. They communicate significant



themes and messages that go beyond the factual details, thus we should be aware that biblical narratives are both historical and purposeful.

## Essay Questions

**Instructions:** Answer each question with a well-structured essay.

1. Discuss the significance of the Merneptah Stele, the settlement explosion, and the collapse of the Late Bronze Age in understanding the emergence of early Israel, citing and explaining the evidence discussed by Dr. Greer.
2. Analyze the complexities of using material culture, such as pig bones, four-room houses, and collared-rim store jars, to identify early Israelite settlements, explaining the difficulties and debates surrounding their interpretation.
3. Evaluate the factors that led to the Late Bronze Age collapse, including environmental factors and the role of the "sea peoples," and explain how this collapse reshaped the political landscape of the ancient Near East.
4. Compare and contrast the biblical account of the Israelite conquest of Canaan with the archaeological evidence, exploring the different perspectives presented in Joshua and Judges and considering the difficulties of aligning specific destruction layers with particular events.
5. Explain how understanding the historical and cultural context of the ancient Near East can enhance or change the way we interpret the early narratives of the Old Testament, using examples such as the story of the Exodus and the ancient understanding of the image of God.

## Glossary of Key Terms

**Determinative:** An unpronounced symbol in ancient writing systems, such as Egyptian or Akkadian, that indicates the semantic category of a preceding word.

**Faunal Profile:** The types and quantities of animal bone remains found at an archaeological site, which can provide insights into the dietary practices and economic activities of past populations.

**Four-Room House:** An architectural style characterized by a courtyard, two side rooms, and a back room, traditionally associated with early Israelite settlements in the Iron Age I.

**Habiru/Apiru:** A term found in ancient Near Eastern texts, especially the Amarna letters, referring to landless, marginalized individuals or groups often described as marauders or outlaws.

**Iron Age I:** An archaeological period in the Levant, roughly from 1200-1000 BC, characterized by a shift in material culture, the collapse of Late Bronze Age superpowers, and the emergence of new political entities.

**Late Bronze Age:** An archaeological period in the Levant, roughly from 1550 to 1200 BC, characterized by powerful city-states and the influence of major empires like Egypt, the Hittites, and others.

**Merneptah Stele:** An Egyptian victory stele, dating to either 1229 or 1209 BC, that contains the earliest extra-biblical mention of Israel as a people.

**Sea Peoples:** A coalition of seafaring peoples who caused significant disruption in the Late Bronze Age, contributing to the collapse of several major powers in the eastern Mediterranean region.

**Settlement Explosion:** A rapid increase in the number of settlements in a particular region during a specific time period, often used to describe the growth of settlements in the hill country during the Iron Age I.

**Stratigraphy:** The study of layers of soil and rock (strata) at an archaeological site, which can provide a relative timeline of past human activity.

## 5. FAQs on Greer, Archaeology and the Old Testament, Session 3, Early Israel, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

### Frequently Asked Questions About Early Israel and Archaeology

**1. What is the significance of the Merneptah Stele in the study of ancient Israel?**

The Merneptah Stele, dating back to either 1229 or 1209 BC, contains the earliest known mention of "Israel" as a people. It's a victory hymn of Pharaoh Merneptah, and it lists Israel among various defeated groups. The way Israel is written on the stele, with determinatives indicating a foreign, unsettled people, contrasts with the determinatives used for established city-states like Ashkelon and Gezer. This aligns with descriptions in the Bible of early Israelites as nomadic or semi-nomadic, moving around and herding flocks, rather than being established in urban centers. This makes it a key piece of evidence for the historicity of ancient Israel as a distinct people group.

**2. How does the archaeological record show a settlement explosion in the Iron Age I, and what does it suggest about early Israel?**

Archaeological surveys reveal a dramatic increase in the number of settlements in the hill country of Canaan during the Iron Age I (c. 1200-1000 BC). The number of settlements rose from less than 100 in the late Bronze Age to nearly 700. This sharp rise cannot be explained through normal population growth alone. This explosive increase coincides with the timeframe of early Israel's emergence, according to biblical accounts, and the increased density of settlement, suggests a population shift and settling down of peoples. Many new settlements were in locations that did not have late Bronze Age settlements. This pattern provides a significant material context for the formation of Israel as a settled people in the region.

3. **What are some material culture features that have been traditionally associated with early Israelite settlements, and what are the complications of using them for identification?** Traditionally, archaeologists have associated several features with early Israelite settlements, including four-room houses, collared-rim storage jars, terraced farming, cisterns, and a low presence of pig bones in dietary remains. However, there are challenges in using these features to definitively identify Israelite sites. Four-room houses have been found in areas not historically associated with Israel; collared-rim store jars and terraces are very difficult to date precisely, and may be much later; cisterns also predate the historical period of early Israel; and the absence of pig bones is not unique to Israelites, since Canaanites also had low rates of pig consumption. Thus, while these items provide material context, they cannot be used definitively for ethnic identification.
4. **What was the "Late Bronze Age Collapse," and how did it affect the emergence of early Israel?** The Late Bronze Age Collapse around 1200 BC involved the decline and destruction of several powerful empires, including those of Egypt, the Hittites, and Mycenaean Greece. This led to a power vacuum and widespread disruption of trade routes, causing de-urbanization and shifts in settlement patterns. In this weakened state of major powers, smaller kingdoms had a space to emerge. Early Israel is presented as one such group, rising from the ashes of these collapsing civilizations. The collapse context allows the story of Israel to fit into the larger historical context.
5. **Who were the "Sea Peoples," and what is their connection to the Philistines?** The "Sea Peoples" were a confederation of maritime groups from the West who migrated to the Eastern Mediterranean around the time of the Late Bronze Age Collapse. One of these groups, known as the Peleset in Egyptian texts, is believed to be the Philistines. After being defeated by Pharaoh Ramses III, they were settled in the southern coastal plain, marking their emergence as a key regional power and competitor to early Israel. The emergence of the Philistines provides a historical backdrop for the conflicts described in the early biblical texts and serves as a historical explanation for the presence of non-semitic culture in the coastal plain.

6. **How does the archaeological record help us understand the culture and lifestyle of the Philistines?** Archaeological findings reveal that the Philistines, unlike the hill country Israelites, were a more cosmopolitan culture. Their settlements exhibit architectural styles, pottery, and hearth structures that bear connections to the Aegean region, highlighting their foreign origin. They also tended to have more pig bones in their faunal remains compared to inland regions. Their position on the coastal plain indicates an engagement with international trade, and material remains reveal a higher level of sophistication than the hill country peoples. This challenges some traditional views, suggesting the Philistines were not simply "uncouth" barbarians, but rather a sophisticated, well-established culture of the region.
7. **How does the emergence of the alphabet impact the understanding of the development of biblical texts?** The development and spread of the alphabet in the Iron Age, though invented earlier, provided a new way for more widespread literacy and the capacity for regional kingdoms to hire scribes, unlike in the earlier era of powerful empires. With the alphabet's simplicity, it became more practical to preserve stories and religious texts. This allows some scholars to posit that this is the time period in which some of the stories that are now in the Bible began to develop and spread in written form, as writing was no longer the domain of just a few super powers.
8. **How should we approach biblical stories of the ancestors and the exodus, and what does this have to do with the story of Washington crossing the Delaware?** Biblical narratives, such as the stories of the ancestors and the Exodus, are rooted in historical context, yet they are much more than mere historical accounts. Like the painting of Washington crossing the Delaware, they have a particular perspective, aim to communicate something beyond the specific historical details, and are meant to convey deeper theological and cultural meaning. The exodus accounts, while potentially reflecting a historical event, do not have unambiguous archaeological evidence. As such, the focus shouldn't be solely on historical accuracy, but on the theological message the texts intend to convey. Similarly, some of the violence in the conquest stories, when it is taken from its narrative context, can be problematic for some; it is important to engage with these stories from a place of discomfort and to look at the way the story is constructed rather than jumping immediately into a historical understanding of the stories.