

Dr. David B. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 3, Tel Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism Resources from NotebookLM

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

1. Abstract of Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 3, Tel Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. David Schreiner's lecture discusses the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism, focusing on how these archaeological finds relate to biblical accounts. The **Tell Dan Stele**, an Old Aramaic inscription, is significant for its mention of "House of David," prompting debate about the historicity of King David. **The Taylor Prism**, one of several copies of Sennacherib's annals, offers an Assyrian perspective on the siege of Jerusalem, creating discrepancies with biblical narratives. Schreiner argues for a nuanced interpretation, suggesting that apparent contradictions can be reconciled by considering the rhetorical and literary conventions of ancient Near Eastern historiography, rather than viewing them as simple conflicts. He proposes that a synthesis is possible through careful analysis of the textual and archaeological evidence.

2. 15 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, 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).



**Schreiner_Ponderin
g_Session03.mp3**

3. Briefing Document

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and important ideas from the provided text, "Schreiner_Pondering_EN_Session03.pdf":

Briefing Document: Pondering the Spade, Session 3 - Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism, Narrow Convergences

Overview

This document summarizes Dr. David Schreiner's third lecture in his "Pondering the Spade" series, focusing on two key archaeological finds: the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism. The lecture transitions from discussing broad convergences between the Bible and archaeology to examining *narrow* convergences, which focus on specific points and passages within the Old Testament. The core idea revolves around how these specific archaeological finds challenge, complicate, and ultimately enrich our understanding of biblical history, requiring a nuanced approach to ancient historiography.

Key Themes and Concepts

1. Narrow Convergences vs. Broad Convergences:

- The lecture transitions from broad convergences (like the Gilgamesh epic and the Mari texts), to narrow convergences.
- Narrow convergences are defined as those that bring us up to specific points, specific passages, specific things within the Old Testament.

1. The Tell Dan Stele:

- **Discovery and Description:** The Tell Dan Stele is a broken basalt stone monument found at Tell Dan in 1993-94. It consists of three fragments that were reused as paving stones or parts of walls, indicating it was desecrated. The inscription is in Old Aramaic.
- **Significance:** The stele is significant because it contains the first extra-biblical mention of "House of David" (Beit David), "Beit Yod Tav, Dalet Vav Dalet", a phrase that became a lightning rod for debate.
- **Context of Debate:** The discovery happened shortly after influential historians argued that David was a mythical figure, lacking historical evidence. The stele's mention of David challenged this view.
- **Responses and Controversies:**

- **Forgery Claims:** Initial responses included accusations of forgery, claiming the inscription was chiseled onto the stone by excavators. This claim has been largely refuted by scholarly consensus, which affirms the inscription's authenticity.
- **Fragment Placement:** There was debate about the relationship of the fragments, specifically how to piece them back together.
- **Origin and Benefactor:** There is a debate over who commissioned the inscription. While the inscription doesn't explicitly say who commissioned it, educated guesses point to Hazael, an Aramean king during the time of Jehu, as the most likely benefactor. Ben-Hadad was also suggested, but it's difficult to specify which of the three individuals would have commissioned the text.
- **Meaning of "House of David":** There was initial controversy and disagreement about how the term "House of David" should be interpreted. This phrase was interpreted to mean other things, like "Dode," a deity, until consensus landed on the plain interpretation of what it actually says, which is "House of David."
- **Shift in Debate:** The debate has shifted from whether David existed to questions about ancient historiography. The focus moved to the Stele's claim that an Aramean king destroyed the Omride dynasty, contrasting with 2 Kings, which attributes it to Jehu. This creates a conflict in narratives and pushes the listener to consider:
 - Whose team to support - the Bible or the Tel Dan Stele?
 - Is there a more nuanced point at play?
- **Quote:** *"This find said, Nah, you're wrong, and really challenged some of those people. So, these responses, basically all the responses that happened in response to Tel Dan, they were very, very passionate."*

1. The Taylor Prism:

- **Description:** The Taylor Prism is one of three clay prisms containing Sennacherib's royal historical account (annals). The other two are the Jerusalem Prism, and the Chicago Prism. The text of the prisms is essentially the same, with subtle scribal variations. The prism shape was developed to accommodate more writing.
- **Provenance:** The prism is named after a British colonel who came into possession of it, with a lack of "paper trail" which makes some archaeologists nervous.

- **Content:** The prism recounts Sennacherib's exploits, particularly his third military campaign against a coalition of rebels in Syria-Palestine, which includes Hezekiah. Sennacherib moves through Phoenicia, the coastal plain, and Shephelah towards Jerusalem.
- **Sennacherib's Focus:** Sennacherib devastated Judah, especially Lachish, and set up shop there. The prism does not mention the destruction of Jerusalem and instead boasts about tribute payments received from Hezekiah after this event.
- **Comparison with Biblical Accounts:** The prism's account adds complexity and ambiguity to the events of 701 BCE. There is a tension between different biblical accounts of this same event (2 Kings 18:13-16 vs. 2 Kings 18:37-19), where the first seems to show that Hezekiah capitulated, and the other shows God's intervention, repelling the Assyrians.
- **Quote:** *"Sennacherib will talk about how he locked Hezekiah up like a bird in a cage, how he accepted tribute payment after the fact, all these men, slaves and goods, et cetera. Sennacherib will talk about how he accepted all of that from Hezekiah while not talking about the destruction of Jerusalem. "*

1. Ancient Historiography:

- **Challenge to Modern Notions:** Both the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism force us to confront the differences between ancient and modern historical writing. Modern history emphasizes facts, objectivity, and scientific precision. Ancient history involved rhetoric, literary artistry, and emphasized specific points, possibly even intentionally overlooking details.
- **Role of Rhetoric:** Ancient historical accounts use rhetoric to persuade and emphasize certain aspects of events.
- **Fickleness of Language:** Schreiner emphasizes that language itself can be elusive and that it must be understood to fully engage the material.
- **Quote:** *"But when you deal with ancient history writing, you deal with some things that, quite frankly, make me nervous. But it's the reality, and I can't ignore them."*

1. Moving Beyond Contradiction:

- **Avoiding an Apologetic Problem:** Schreiner argues against a binary "either/or" approach, where one side (Bible or archaeology) must be true, while the other is

false. This would create an apologetic problem, where one would have to ignore one side to stand firm in the other.

- **Living in the Gray:** Schreiner suggests that this archaeological evidence is useful and important because it compels us to live within the gray areas.
- **Synthesis Through Nuance:** A synthesis is possible by understanding that ancient history writing focused on emphasizing specific points, while not necessarily denying the existence of other events. Multiple agencies can be involved in historical events.
- **Example of Jehu:** The text says Jehu "conspired" to kill the Omrides, meaning that multiple agencies may have been involved. The passive nature of the verb in the Tel Dan Stele regarding the killing of the Omrides allows for this multiple-agency reading.
- **Example of Jerusalem:** The Bible emphasizes that Jerusalem stood because of God's miracle, while Sennacherib's annals highlight his successes (e.g., the tribute paid by Hezekiah) while avoiding discussing his failure to sack Jerusalem. Both texts emphasize what matters to them and downplay the other aspects.

Key Questions Raised

- How do we reconcile conflicting historical narratives from different sources?
- What is the relationship between historical events and their interpretation?
- How does our understanding of ancient history writing influence our interpretation of the Bible?
- How do we engage with the nuances and gray areas of ancient history and scripture?

Conclusion

Dr. Schreiner's lecture suggests that archaeological finds, such as the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism, do not necessarily contradict the Bible but rather provide a richer, more complex understanding of historical events. The lecture advocates for moving beyond simplistic notions of historical truth and embracing the ambiguities, nuances, and rhetorical strategies of ancient historical writing. This allows for a more nuanced and thoughtful engagement with both archaeology and the Old Testament. The lecture sets up a transition to the next session where there will be a "rapid-fire" discussion of other archaeological finds.

4. Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 3, Tel Dan Stele and Taylor Prism

Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism: A Study Guide

Quiz

1. What is a narrow convergence, and how does it differ from a broad convergence as discussed in the lecture? Narrow convergences are specific points where archaeological findings align with specific passages in the Old Testament. They differ from broad convergences by focusing on particular details, rather than general themes, allowing for more direct comparison and analysis.
2. Where and when was the Tell Dan Stele discovered, and what is its significance? The Tell Dan Stele was discovered at Tell Dan in 1993 and 1994 during dig seasons. Its significance lies in being the first extra-biblical mention of "House of David," which challenged the then-prevalent view that David was a mythical figure.
3. What are the main debates surrounding the Tell Dan Stele? The main debates surrounding the stele include whether it is a forgery, the proper relationship of its fragments, who sanctioned the inscription (its benefactor), and the meaning of the phrase "House of David." While the consensus is that it is not a forgery, the other debates continue to be explored.
4. How did some scholars react to the discovery of "House of David" on the Tell Dan Stele, and why? Some scholars, who had argued David was mythical, reacted poorly. They proposed alternate interpretations of the phrase to avoid admitting they were wrong about David's historicity, even proposing that the text said "Dode," a deity of love.
5. What is the primary disagreement between the Tell Dan Stele and the Old Testament regarding the Omride dynasty? The primary disagreement concerns who was responsible for the destruction of the Omride dynasty. The Bible claims Jehu was divinely ordained to eradicate the Omrides, while the Tell Dan Stele seems to attribute it to an Aramean king.
6. What is the Taylor Prism, and what is its purpose? The Taylor Prism is one of three copies of Sennacherib's official royal history and annals. Its purpose was to recount the exploits of Sennacherib, including his military campaigns and achievements as king of Assyria.

7. Why did Sennacherib undertake his third military campaign, as described in the Taylor Prism? Sennacherib undertook his third military campaign in response to rebellions in Syria-Palestine, which included Hezekiah of Judah, as several vassal kingdoms rose up against Neo-Assyrian control. He sought to restore control and advance toward Egypt.
8. What is significant about the fact that Sennacherib chose to celebrate the destruction of Lachish rather than Jerusalem in his palace decorations? Sennacherib's emphasis on Lachish's destruction suggests an attempt to divert attention from his failure to conquer Jerusalem. He wanted to celebrate his success, even if it wasn't his ultimate goal.
9. How do the various biblical accounts of the events of 701 BCE differ, and how does the Taylor Prism add complexity? Biblical accounts in 2 Kings present conflicting narratives of Hezekiah's response, either capitulating and paying tribute or experiencing divine intervention. The Taylor Prism adds further complexity by detailing Sennacherib's perspective, which is that Hezekiah submitted to him.
10. What role does rhetoric play in both ancient historical texts and modern interpretation according to the lecture? Ancient historical writing, as the lecture suggests, uses rhetoric and perspective to emphasize certain points or outcomes. Modern interpretation needs to recognize and account for these rhetorical devices to accurately understand the historical context.

Answer Key

1. Narrow convergences are specific points where archaeological findings align with specific passages in the Old Testament. They differ from broad convergences by focusing on particular details, rather than general themes, allowing for more direct comparison and analysis.
2. The Tell Dan Stele was discovered at Tell Dan in 1993 and 1994 during dig seasons. Its significance lies in being the first extra-biblical mention of "House of David," which challenged the then-prevalent view that David was a mythical figure.
3. The main debates surrounding the stele include whether it is a forgery, the proper relationship of its fragments, who sanctioned the inscription (its benefactor), and the meaning of the phrase "House of David." While the consensus is that it is not a forgery, the other debates continue to be explored.

4. Some scholars, who had argued David was mythical, reacted poorly. They proposed alternate interpretations of the phrase to avoid admitting they were wrong about David's historicity, even proposing that the text said "Dode," a deity of love.
5. The primary disagreement concerns who was responsible for the destruction of the Omride dynasty. The Bible claims Jehu was divinely ordained to eradicate the Omrides, while the Tell Dan Stele seems to attribute it to an Aramean king.
6. The Taylor Prism is one of three copies of Sennacherib's official royal history and annals. Its purpose was to recount the exploits of Sennacherib, including his military campaigns and achievements as king of Assyria.
7. Sennacherib undertook his third military campaign in response to rebellions in Syria-Palestine, which included Hezekiah of Judah, as several vassal kingdoms rose up against Neo-Assyrian control. He sought to restore control and advance toward Egypt.
8. Sennacherib's emphasis on Lachish's destruction suggests an attempt to divert attention from his failure to conquer Jerusalem. He wanted to celebrate his success, even if it wasn't his ultimate goal.
9. Biblical accounts in 2 Kings present conflicting narratives of Hezekiah's response, either capitulating and paying tribute or experiencing divine intervention. The Taylor Prism adds further complexity by detailing Sennacherib's perspective, which is that Hezekiah submitted to him.
10. Ancient historical writing, as the lecture suggests, uses rhetoric and perspective to emphasize certain points or outcomes. Modern interpretation needs to recognize and account for these rhetorical devices to accurately understand the historical context.

Essay Questions

1. Analyze the historical and theological implications of the Tell Dan Stele's mention of the "House of David." How has this find shaped scholarly debates on biblical history and its relationship to other ancient Near Eastern sources?
2. Compare and contrast the accounts of the events of 701 BCE as presented in the Old Testament and the Taylor Prism. Discuss how these differing perspectives challenge or affirm the historicity and reliability of each source.

3. Discuss the role of rhetoric and perspective in both the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism. How does an awareness of the literary devices used in these texts help us understand the aims of their respective authors?
4. Evaluate the claim that the archaeological evidence from the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism contradicts the Old Testament. How can these apparent contradictions be reconciled, and what does this reveal about the nature of ancient historical writing?
5. To what extent does the discovery and analysis of the Tell Dan Stele and the Taylor Prism change or challenge our understanding of the Old Testament? How might an understanding of the nuances of the language affect interpretation?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Broad Convergence:** A general alignment or correspondence between archaeological findings and overarching themes in the Old Testament.
- **Narrow Convergence:** A specific alignment between archaeological discoveries and particular passages or details within the Old Testament.
- **Tell Dan Stele:** An inscribed basalt stone monument discovered at Tell Dan, notable for containing the first extra-biblical mention of "House of David."
- **House of David:** A phrase found on the Tell Dan Stele referring to the dynasty founded by King David, a figure in the Old Testament.
- **Forgery Question:** The debate surrounding the authenticity of an archaeological find, specifically whether it is a genuine artifact or a deliberately produced fake.
- **Secondary Usage:** When an artifact or structure is repurposed for a different use than its original intention, often indicating a change in context or culture.
- **Moabite Stone:** A stele from the 9th century BCE that was written by the Moabite King Mesha, which some scholars believe has the House of David mentioned on it.
- **Benefactor:** The person or entity that commissioned or sanctioned the creation of an inscription or artifact, such as the Tell Dan Stele.

- **Ben-Hadad:** A name shared by multiple Aramean kings mentioned in both the Old Testament and extra-biblical texts; the name means “son of Hadad” (Hadad being the Aramean deity).
- **Hazael:** An Aramean king contemporary with Jehu of Israel, who, according to some interpretations of the Tell Dan Stele, was responsible for the destruction of the Omride dynasty.
- **Omride Dynasty:** The royal family of the northern kingdom of Israel, founded by King Omri and including King Ahab, that was eventually overthrown.
- **Taylor Prism:** A clay prism containing a copy of Sennacherib’s annals, which is a royal history of his reign, discovered in Mesopotamia.
- **Sennacherib:** A Neo-Assyrian king, known for his military campaigns in Syria-Palestine, including his siege of Jerusalem.
- **Shalmaneser V:** A Neo-Assyrian king who was the predecessor of Sennacherib. Some scholars believe that he, and not Sargon II, conquered Samaria in 722 BC.
- **Sargon II:** A Neo-Assyrian king who is, in some sources, given credit for conquering Samaria in 722 BC.
- **Lachish:** A significant Judean city that was sieged and destroyed by Sennacherib during his third military campaign, as depicted in the wall decorations of Sennacherib's palace.
- **Hezekiah:** The king of Judah during Sennacherib's campaign and siege of Jerusalem.
- **Historiography:** The study of how history is written, and how that might affect the facts or perspectives included, or excluded, from the historical narratives.
- **Rhetoric:** The art of using language effectively and persuasively, often employed in ancient historical texts to emphasize certain perspectives or accomplishments.

5. FAQs on Schreiner, Pondering the Spade, Session 3, Tel Dan Stele and Taylor Prism, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Okay, here's an 8-question FAQ based on the provided source:

Frequently Asked Questions About the Tell Dan Stele and Taylor Prism

1. **What are "narrow convergences" in the context of this lecture, and how do they differ from "broad convergences"?**
 - Narrow convergences refer to specific points, passages, or details in the Old Testament where archaeological findings intersect, in contrast to broad convergences, which are thematic or more general parallels. The Tell Dan Stele and Taylor Prism are used to illustrate these narrow, more precise connections between text and artifact. Broad convergences were discussed previously with examples like the Gilgamesh epic and the story of Mari, while the narrow convergences are used as a foil to clarify differences.
1. **What is the significance of the Tell Dan Stele, and why did its discovery cause such a stir in scholarly circles?**
 - The Tell Dan Stele is significant because it contains the first known mention of the "House of David" outside of the Old Testament. This discovery was particularly contentious because it came shortly after some historians had suggested that King David was a mythical figure, lacking historical basis. The Stele challenged that view and sparked passionate debates about the historicity of David and his dynasty.
1. **What were some of the major debates and questions surrounding the Tell Dan Stele following its discovery?**
 - The major debates included: a) whether the inscription was a forgery (though scholarly consensus is that it's authentic), b) the proper arrangement of the fragmented pieces, and c) the identity of the benefactor who commissioned the inscription (with Hazael being the most likely candidate). The most significant debate, though, was the meaning of the phrase "House of David," which some initially tried to reinterpret in order to avoid the implications for the historicity of David.

1. How does the Tell Dan Stele challenge or complicate the biblical account in 2 Kings regarding the demise of the Omride dynasty?

- The Stele seems to attribute the defeat and destruction of the Omride dynasty to an Aramean king, while the Bible attributes it to Jehu. This discrepancy forces a re-evaluation of ancient historiography and whether these texts must be viewed as contradictions or if they can be reconciled by understanding the rhetorical goals and different perspectives present in these texts. It raises the question of whether multiple agencies, including Jehu and the Arameans, were involved in the same event.

1. What is the Taylor Prism, and why is it important for understanding the history of the ancient Near East and biblical narratives?

- The Taylor Prism is a clay prism containing one of three known copies of Sennacherib's royal historical annals. It recounts his military campaigns, notably his third campaign in Syria-Palestine, where he dealt with rebellions, including Hezekiah's Judah. It is important because it provides an outside, non-biblical account of events described in the Bible, allowing for comparisons and challenging some of the traditional interpretations of those biblical events, especially those surrounding the siege of Jerusalem in 701 BCE.

1. What are the main discrepancies between Sennacherib's account in the Taylor Prism and the biblical accounts in 2 Kings and Isaiah, especially concerning the events of 701 BCE?

- Sennacherib boasts about his conquest of Judean cities, receiving tribute from Hezekiah, and essentially placing him under siege in Jerusalem, yet he does not mention the capture or destruction of Jerusalem. The biblical accounts offer contrasting descriptions, with some suggesting Hezekiah's surrender and payment of tribute (2 Kings 18:13-16) and others attributing the salvation of Jerusalem to divine intervention (2 Kings 19:35). The Taylor Prism doesn't explicitly address the divine intervention, creating a more complex picture of what transpired.

1. How does the lecture propose to reconcile the contradictions between biblical accounts and archaeological evidence like the Tell Dan Stele and Taylor Prism?

- The lecture suggests moving away from the idea of an "either/or" dichotomy when looking at these texts. Instead, it argues for understanding the literary artistry and rhetorical devices of ancient history writing. It proposes that these seemingly contradictory accounts can be reconciled by recognizing that they emphasize different aspects of complex historical events, where multiple agencies and goals might be at play, all converging towards similar goals. It also encourages understanding the texts within their genre to avoid a modern, "black and white" interpretation of ancient historical writing.

1. What does the lecture mean by "living in the gray," and how does it apply to the study of biblical history and archaeology?

- "Living in the gray" refers to embracing the ambiguity and complexity that arise when comparing biblical narratives with archaeological findings. Rather than forcing a simple resolution that either favors the biblical text or the archaeological record, the lecture argues for recognizing the nuance of the data. This means that apparent contradictions are not necessarily reasons to discard either source but rather an opportunity to gain a more profound and nuanced perspective by acknowledging the different rhetorical goals, literary features, and viewpoints present in each source. This requires careful consideration and interpretation rather than a need for black and white answers.