

Old Testament Chronology

Reasonably Established Dates in the Old Testament

Building of Solomon's Temple	966 B.C.
Tribute paid by Ahab to Shalmaneser II	854 B.C.
Tribute paid by Jehu to Shalmaneser II	842 B.C.
Accession of Tiglath-Pileser III	745 B.C.
Fall of Samaria	721 B.C.
Josiah's Death	609 B.C.
Battle of Charchemish	705 B.C.
Jehoiachin's Death	598 B.C.
Fall of Jerusalem	587 B.C.

Key Verses

In the four hundred and eightieth year after the Israelites had come out of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel, in the month of Ziv, the second month, he began to build the temple of the LORD. (1 Ki 6:1)

For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time? (Jdg 11:26)

In the fourteenth year of King Hezekiah's reign, Sennacherib king of Assyria attacked all the fortified cities of Judah and captured them. So Hezekiah king of Judah sent this message to the king of Assyria at Lachish: "I have done wrong. Withdraw from me, and I will pay whatever you demand of me." The king of Assyria exacted from Hezekiah king of Judah three hundred talents of silver and thirty talents of gold. So Hezekiah gave him all the silver that was found in the temple of the LORD and in the treasuries of the royal palace. At this time Hezekiah king of Judah stripped off the gold with which he had covered the doors and doorposts of the temple of the LORD, and gave it to the king of Assyria. (2 Ki 18:13–16)

On the seventh day of the fifth month, in the nineteenth year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, Nebuzaradan commander of the imperial guard, an official of the king of Babylon, came to Jerusalem. (2 Ki 25:8)

Important Archaeological Discoveries

Limmu List of Assyrian Kings

Outside the OT an abundance of material provides evidence for a chronology of the period. By far the most important single source is a collection of Assyrian *limmu* lists. In Assyria, a record of each king's reign was kept on a particular kind of annal. Each year of reign was named after an individual of high rank in the court; the first year was named after the king himself, the second after the next highest-ranking official (though that name appears to have been selected by lot originally), and so on, down until the death of the king. The word *limmu* was used to introduce the name of the official after whom the current year was to be named, hence the designation "*limmu* lists."

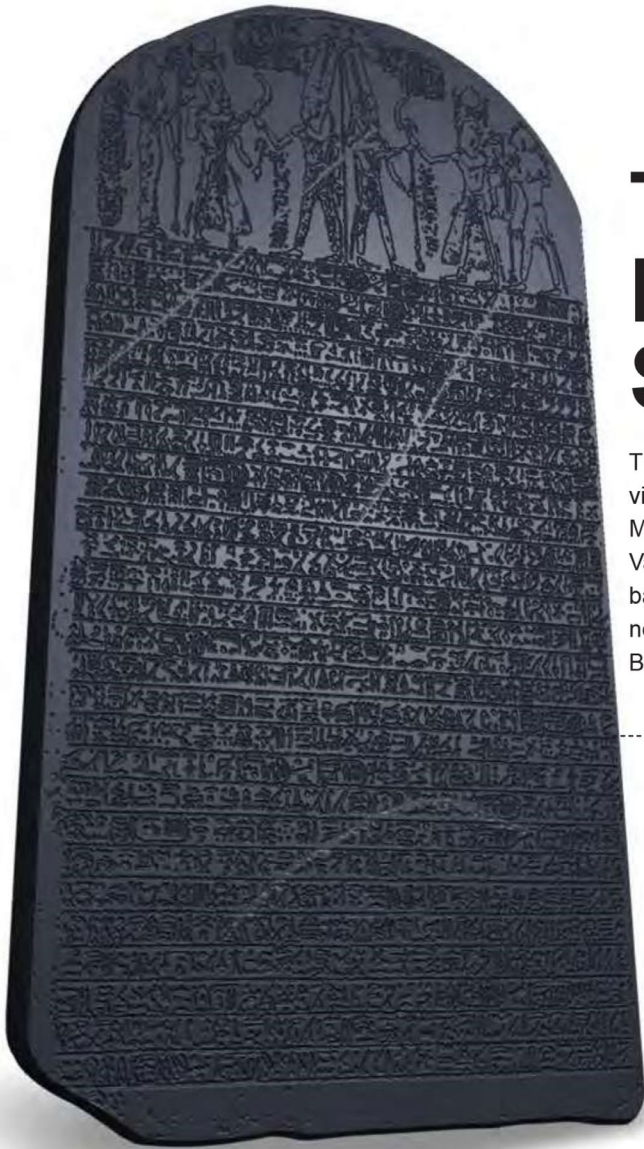
Assyrian *limmu* lists are tied precisely to the solar year, making the documents highly reliable. Further, in addition to many events in Assyrian history, notable natural phenomena were dated on the basis of the *limmu* in which they occurred. For example, a solar eclipse dated by the Assyrian scribes in the *limmu* year of Bur-Sagale has been computed astronomically as June 15, 763 bc Beginning with the year 763, then, and working both backward and forward, a complete list of Assyrian *limmu* officials has been obtained for the period between 891 and 648 bc.

With the accuracy of the Assyrian *limmu* lists corroborated by a number of sources, they can be used with confidence in reconstructing the chronology of the corresponding period of biblical history. That is especially true where a biblical writer related an Israelite or a Judahite event to a particular year in the reign of an Assyrian king whose *limmu* list indicates the precise years of his reign.

There are also records from Chaldean (Babylonian) king lists and from later Greek historians. Ptolemy, in the 2nd century ad, for example, gave dates for Babylonian kings from 747 bc and continued with dates for Persian, Greek, and Roman rulers down to ad 161. Finally, useful information is found in inscriptions from monuments, stelae, and other artifacts from Assyria and elsewhere.

The **Kurkh Monoliths** are two Assyrian stelae of c. 852 BC & 879 BC that contain a description of the reigns of Ashurnasirpal II and his son Shalmaneser III.

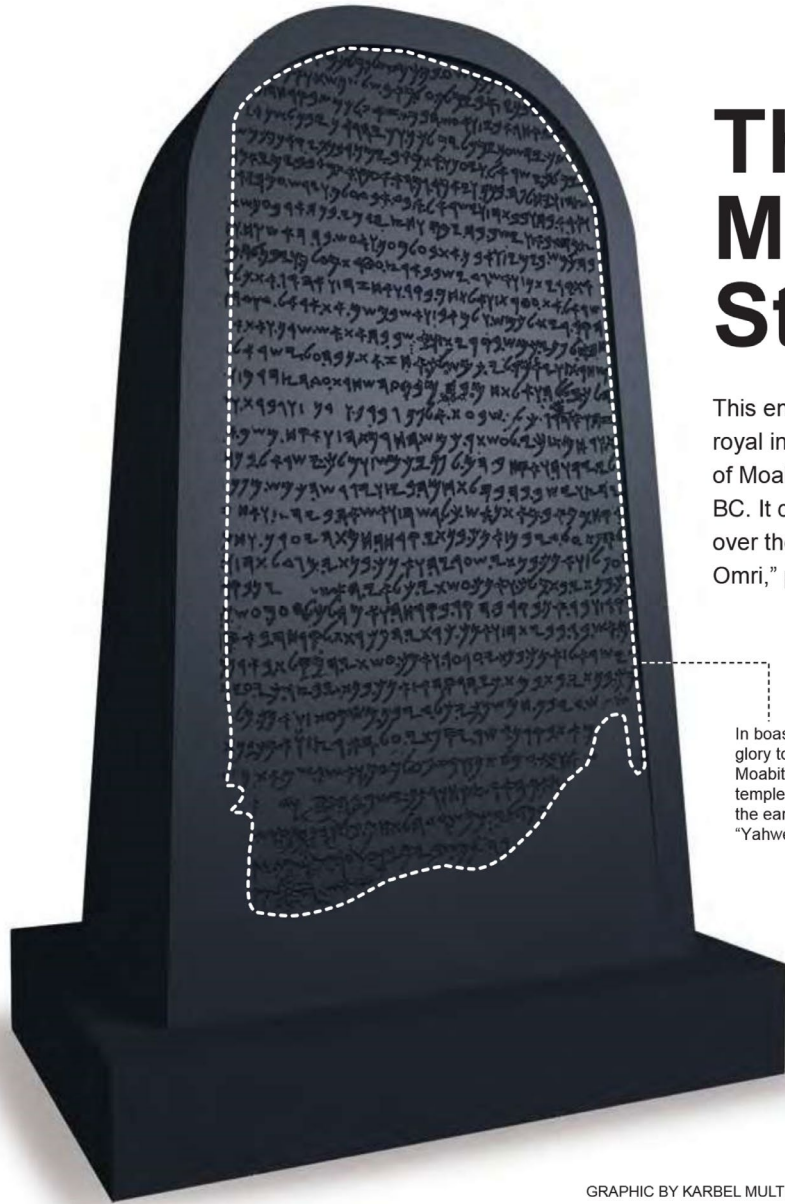
The Shalmaneser III monolith contains a description of the Battle of Qarqar at the end. This description contains the name "A-ha-ab-bu Sir-ila-a-a" which is generally accepted to be a reference to Ahab, king of Israel; although this is the only reference to the term "Israel" in Assyrian and Babylonian records, which usually refer to the Northern Kingdom as the "House of Omri" in reference to its ruling dynasty—a fact brought up by some scholars who dispute the proposed translation. It is also one of four known contemporary inscriptions containing the name of Israel, the others being the Merneptah Stele, the Tel Dan Stele, and the Mesha Stele. This description is also the oldest document that mentions the Arabs.



The Merneptah Stele

This engraved stone describes the victories of Egyptian Pharaoh Merneptah over Libyan invaders. Various outlying groups of raiders banded together to attack Egypt near the end of the 13th century BC, but Merneptah defeated them.

The stele also seems to mention a victory over Israel, saying, "Israel is a waste, without grain." If so, this indicates that an identifiable Israelite population already existed in the late 13th century BC.



The Mesha Stele

This engraved stone contains a royal inscription by Mesha, king of Moab during the ninth century BC. It celebrates Mesha's victory over the "son [or descendant] of Omri," probably Joram (Jehoram).

In boasting of his victories, Mesha gives glory to Chemosh—the chief god of the Moabites—and describes his looting of the temple vessels of Judah. The stele contains the earliest known reference to the name "Yahweh" outside of the Old Testament.

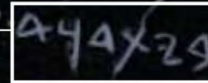
The stele supports the biblical account of events during Joram's reign of Israel. Second Kings 3:21–27 describes the king of Moab offering his son as a sacrifice, after which "great wrath came upon Israel." On the stele, Mesha credits his god, Chemosh, as conquering his enemies.

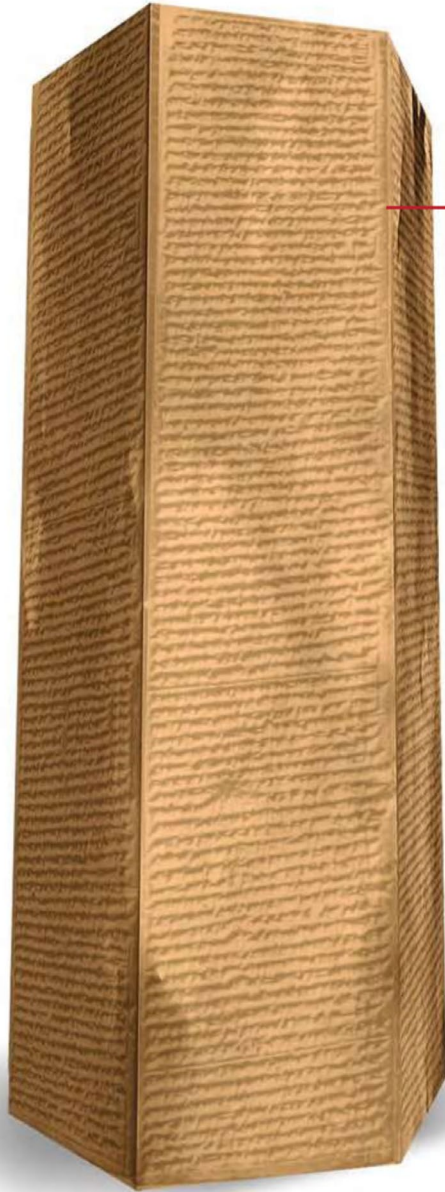
Inscribed in Aramaic, the stele depicts a king's victory over the local populace. Likely written by Hazael or his son Ben Hadad III, it celebrates Syrian victories over Israel (2 Kgs 10:32; 13:3, 22; 2 Chr 22:5).

The Tel Dan Stele

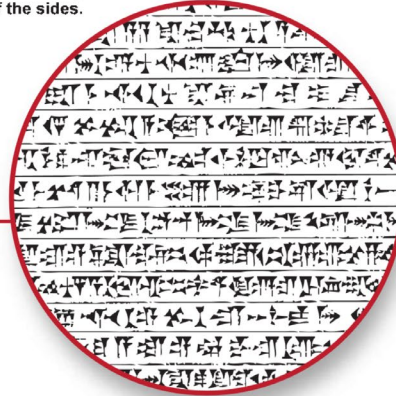
This engraved stone is the only archaeological evidence of King David to be discovered. It reads bytdwd, "House of David" (as in Isa 7:2). The stele dates to the mid-ninth century BC, and was found in Dan's city wall in 1993. The wall was likely reconstructed by Israelites during the early seventh century BC, after their recapture of Dan from the Assyrians.

"House of David"





This part of the cuneiform refers to Hezekiah, king of Judah. It begins in line 11 from the top of one of the sides.



Sennacherib's Prism

This prism contains six columns of text in which Assyrian king Sennacherib describes his triumphs. On column three (shown), he recounts his campaign against Judah, presenting a version of the events narrated in 2 Kgs 18–19. Like the Bible's account, he describes the victories that led to his siege of Jerusalem. He implies, however, that he left Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage" after Hezekiah sent him the spoils of the city. Conversely, the Bible describes Sennacherib's army departing after the Angel of Yahweh slew many of them.

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The Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

This black limestone obelisk depicts five kings conquered by Shalmaneser III, king of Assyria from 858-824 BC. Each side of the obelisk portrays the five kings in postures of submission to Shalmaneser, either in prostration to him or bringing tribute. The second is Jehu of the house of Omri, king of Israel. This account is found only here; it is not recorded in the Bible.

This obelisk does align with the biblical account of Jehu's later reign (2 Kgs 10:32-36) and provides the earliest known depiction of an Israelite. It also supplies evidence for the style of clothing worn in royal Israelite households. It depicts Jehu in a short-sleeved, fringed robe with a belt and slouched conical hat. Since he likely would not have been dressed in his finest robes when appearing as a captive, these represent simpler, everyday garments.

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The Cyrus Cylinder

This ancient clay cylinder dates from the sixth century BC and contains a declaration from Cyrus the Great. The first section describes Cyrus' greatness and mercy—common themes in such declarations. The second section, composed of Cyrus' own words, describes how he returned captive peoples and their gods to their native lands. It also records his hope that all the returned gods will intercede before Bel and Nabu (the chief Babylonian gods) on his behalf. The description of Cyrus' mercy and efforts to return captives supports the biblical account of Israel's restoration from exile (see Ezra 1).

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The Amarna Letters

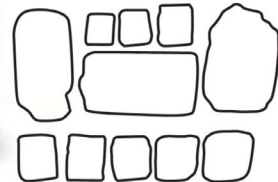
This collection of cuneiform tablets is named after the place they were discovered—modern Amarna, the ancient Egyptian city of Akhetaten. Written in the late 14th century BC, these letters record correspondence between Egypt (under Pharaohs Akhenaten and Tutankhamun) and its vassal states. They provide information about trade and government of the time.



The Amarna letters and the biblical text describe the land of Canaan similarly. Both indicate that Canaan had several territories, various kings, and chariots that served as the means of military control.

The Amarna letters describe the city of Shechem as a dangerous place full of political intrigue; the book of Judges does the same at a later date. The Amarna letters also show that the kingdoms of Canaan were under military pressure from nomadic tribes.

The Amarna letters are a collection of 388 tablets, with the largest measuring about 8 in. by 4 in.

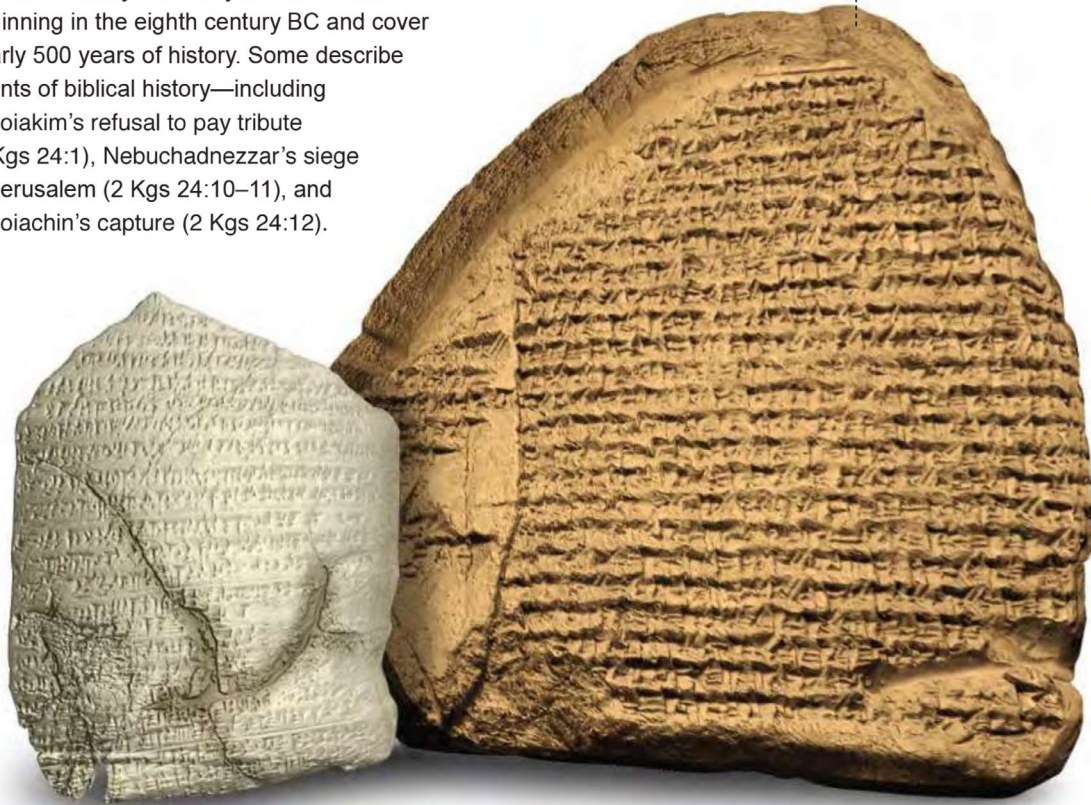


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The Babylonian Chronicles

The Babylonian Chronicles are a series of clay tablets inscribed with Babylonian history. They were written at different times, beginning around the sixth century BC. They narrate events beginning in the eighth century BC and cover nearly 500 years of history. Some describe events of biblical history—including Jehoiakim's refusal to pay tribute (2 Kgs 24:1), Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Jerusalem (2 Kgs 24:10–11), and Jehoiachin's capture (2 Kgs 24:12).

One of these—the Nabonidus Chronicle—describes the reign and downfall of the last king before Cyrus: Nabonidus. This tablet also mentions that Nabonidus had a regent, his son Bēl-šarra-ušur—the Belshazzar of the book of Daniel. The banquet described in Daniel presumably took place during Belshazzar's regency, when Nabonidus was away from Babylon (Dan 5:1–4).



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The discovery of Pharaoh Siamun's relief: Pharaoh Siamun, a contemporary of Israel's King Solomon, ordered a triumphal relief commemorating his campaign against the Philistines c. 970-960. The Bible records that a pharaoh conquered the Philistine city of Gezer and gave it as a dowry to his daughter, Solomon's wife in [1 Kings 9:16](#).

The discovery of Pharaoh Shoshenq's triumphal relief at Karnak and stela at Silsila: These artifacts commemorate Pharaoh Shoshenq's (Biblically identified as Shishak) campaign in Israel 925 and in Judah 924BC during King Rehoboam's reign recorded in [1 Kings 14:25-26](#); [2 Chronicles 12:1-9](#).

Kingdoms of the Old Testament

Assyria	740 – 612 B.C.
Babylonia	612 – 539 B.C.
Medo-Persian	539 – 331 B.C.
Greece	332 – 301 B.C.
Diadochi	301 – 63 B.C.
Rome	189 B.C. – A.D. 476

General Dates of Books of History

Genesis	Creation – 1876 B.C.
Exodus – Deuteronomy	1876 – 1406 B.C.
Joshua	1400 – 1389 B.C.
Judges	1389 – 1050 B.C.
1 Samuel	1050 – 1010 B.C.
2 Samuel	1010 – 970 B.C.
1 Kings	970 – 853 B.C.
2 Kings	853 – 587 B.C.
Ezra	538 – 457 B.C.
Nehemiah	445 – 430 B.C.