

# **Archaeological Evidence for the Historicity of King David of Israel**

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Chapter 19 of James K. Hoffmeier's *The Archaeology of the Bible* provides a summary of the evidence for the historicity of King David of Israel and his dynasty of kings who followed him. Some scholars have questioned whether David and his son Solomon even existed, largely because no tenth century B.C. texts (i.e., around the time of their alleged reigns) had been discovered.<sup>1</sup> Joseph M. Holden and Norman Geisler, however, identify a plethora of archaeological evidence that provides either direct or indirect evidence for the accuracy of the Bible's description of their kingdoms.

In response to the minimalist claim that David, if he existed at all, ruled over at most a "loosely organized group of tribes," the authors point to a number of cities within Israel at the time that demonstrated fortification and urbanization far beyond that of an undeveloped tribal society.<sup>2</sup> Even more specifically, a clear reference to the "House of David" appears on the Tell Dan Stele found in 1993 and 1994.<sup>3</sup> The Stele itself dates to the ninth or eighth century B.C. and is considered to be "the first extrabiblical mention of King David found anywhere."<sup>4</sup>

André Lemaire, however, disputes that claim, believing that archaeologists had already discovered a reference to the "House of David" all the way back in 1868 that is as old, if not older than the Tell Dan Stele.<sup>5</sup> Specifically, he is referring to the Mesha Stele (also known as the

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<sup>1</sup> James K. Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible* (Oxford: Lion, 2008), 87.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph M. Holden and Norman Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2013), 252-55.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 255-57.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> André Lemaire, "'House of David' Restored in Moabite Inscription," *Biblical Archaeology Review*, vol. 20 no. 3 (1994).

Moabite Stone).<sup>6</sup> This stele dates to circa 830 B.C. and tells of military engagements between the king of Moab and Israel (among other things).<sup>7</sup> Line 31 of the inscription reads, “And as for Hauronen, there dwelt in it...”<sup>8</sup> followed by “b[-]wd.”<sup>9</sup> Holden and Geisler observe that several scholars have found traces of a “t” immediately following the “b,” leading to “bt[-]wd,” with space for one more letter in the middle.<sup>10</sup> Lemaire concluded that the most likely reading was “btdwd,” which would translate to “House of David.”<sup>11</sup> According to James K. Hoffmeier, Lemaire was able to discern this not merely by examining the stele itself (which unfortunately had been broken), but also by studying “a nineteenth century papier-mâché cast of the stela that was made before the text was broken.”<sup>12</sup> Thus, the full reading would be, “And as for Hauronen, there dwelt in it the House of David.”

The combination of the Tell Dan Stele and the Mesha Stele provides strong evidence that the succession of kings in Israel was commonly referred to as the “House of David” only a short time after David and Solomon themselves would have reigned. This leaves very little time for legendary development and strongly suggests that David was, in fact, a historical figure who ruled over a strong nation of Israel.

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<sup>6</sup> Holden and Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 258.

<sup>7</sup> Donald J. Wiseman and Edwin Yamauchi, *Archaeology and the Bible: An Introductory Study* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1979), 37.

<sup>8</sup> James B. Pritchard, ed., *The Ancient Near East Volume 1: An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1958), 210.

<sup>9</sup> Holden and Geisler, *The Popular Handbook of Archaeology and the Bible*, 258.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hoffmeier, *The Archaeology of the Bible*, 88.