

Solomon's World: Wisdom and History

Session 1: Historical Context

- As Pastor Brandon begins a Sunday morning series on the life of Solomon, I want to give you some historical context for the period in which he lived. This week, we are going to talk about the history of Solomon's period, from the time of the judges through the time of David, Solomon's father, including some details about the world in which Solomon ruled and the other kingdoms of his day.
- Next week we are going to look at some of the other wisdom literature of the Near East, with the goal of helping you see how Solomon's writings (especially Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) fit into the literature of his day.
- So, let's talk about some history!

The Judges Period

- After Moses led the people of Israel out of Egypt and through the desert for 40 years, Joshua led them into the Land of Israel, the land God had promised to give to the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
- After Joshua died, the people were led by "Judges."
- The Judges were the Jewish leaders who arose during this time, unified the people, convinced them to repent, dealt with the spiritual problems of the nation, and also dealt with the physical threats that came against the people.
- The Judges were sometimes military leaders who knew how to mobilize the nation for war against an enemy, but their real power laid in their Torah knowledge and ability to adjudicate Jewish law. That's why they are called "judges," because they brought the Jewish people back to the Torah and instituted obedience to God once again.
- **[SLIDE: Map - Extent of the Conquest]** The period of the Judges was a difficult time for the Children of Israel. They had entered the land and conquered much of the Hill Country and Northern part of the area promised to them, but there were still pockets of Canaanites in the plains by the Mediterranean Sea, and the Egyptians were the superpower in the area overall.
- [Note that "Canaanite" really just means "merchant" or "trader," and there were lots of Canaanite groups in the land (thus the long list you often see). These groups were essentially city states (just like Sparta and Athens in Greece 600 years later).]
- It is important to understand that while the book of Judges in the Bible talks a lot about the failure and oppression of the Jewish people in this period, the years of peace and tranquility actually outnumbered the years of failure and oppression. Rashi, a well-known rabbi in the Middle Ages, counts only 110 out of the 400 years of the Judges when the people were living unfaithfully. Regardless, God was faithful to His covenant despite the actions of His people.
- According to tradition, the Book of Judges was written by the last great personality in the period of the Judges: Samuel the Prophet.
- There were some pretty major sociopolitical events happening in this same time period, events that lend credence to the Biblical text and help us understand what is going on. Let's talk about them before getting into the story.

When Did the Exodus Happen?

- **[TIMELINE]** If you know me at all you know that one of my favorite resources is the Biblical history timeline I have been working on for the last 3-4 years. We'll be using that timeline today, but you can also access it on my website, joshuatallent.com/timeline.html.
- There are two main theories about the timeline for the Exodus and therefore for the Judges.
- The "Low Chronology" says that the Exodus happened in the middle of the 1200's BCE, during the time of Ramesses II. This theory leads to a compression of the timeline of the Judges and contests the timelines given in the Bible.
- The "High Chronology" places the Exodus around the year 1446 BCE, during the reign of Amenhotep II.
- 1 Kings 6:1 is one of the key passages that gives us a Biblical chronology of the Exodus. It connects the Exodus to the construction of Solomon's temple.
 - "And it came to pass in the four hundred and eightieth year after the children of Israel were come out of the land of Egypt, in the fourth year of Solomon's reign ... he began to build the house of the Lord."
- Solomon's reign is universally recognized to date to the middle of the 10th century BCE, with the beginning of the Temple in Jerusalem usually dated to the year 967 BCE.
- So, 480 years before 967 places the Exodus in 1446 BCE and Joshua's entrance into Canaan in 1406 BCE.
- The Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology says:
 - Other Biblical evidence includes Judges 11:26, which states that at the time of the judge Jephthah—around 1100 BCE—the Israelites had dwelt in the land of Canaan for about "three hundred years," along with the priestly Aaronic genealogical information documented in 1 Chronicles 5 that lists 19 generations from the Exodus to the construction of Solomon's temple. This is an impossibly large number to fit inside a 13th-century Ramesside reign, yet it fits neatly within the time frame of a 15th-century Exodus during the Thutmosid Dynasty.
- Some very interesting archaeological discoveries confirm this dating:
- **[SLIDE] The Soleb inscription:** Amenhotep III built a temple to honor the god Amun-Ra at Soleb in Nubia around 1400 BCE. In that temple, a column drum was found that lists different enemies, including one from the "the land of the Shasu (nomads) of HaShem" (it uses the Tetragrammaton, Y-H-V-H).
- **[SLIDE] The Amarna Letters:** Hundreds of clay tablets, found in the Egyptian city of Amarna, were written by Canaanite rulers complaining to the Pharaoh about their cities being attacked by the "Habiru."
- **[SLIDE] The Berlin Pedestal:** The Berlin Inscription might be the earliest reference to Israel in the Archaeological record. The inscription is now housed in the Egyptian Museum in Berlin. According to the Museum's records, the block, most likely part of a statue base, was acquired in 1913 by Ludwig Borchardt from an Egyptian merchant.
- The inscription is comprised of three name rings superimposed on carvings depicting prisoners, the rightmost of which is only partly preserved due to substantial damage, probably incurred when the block was removed from its original context. Above the heads of the prisoners is a partial band of hieroglyphs which reads '...one who is falling on his feet...'
- The first two names are easily read—Ashkelon and Canaan. Two German scholars point out that the names Ashkelon and Canaan largely were written consonantly and thus are closer to Eighteenth Dynasty

examples from the reigns of Thutmose III and Amenhotep II, than to those from the times of Ramesses II and Merenptah.

- The third name in the inscription presents difficulties because the right side of the inscription is broken off. A detailed examination of the relief, however, allowed scholars to reconstruct the name as *Y3-šr-il* ('Ishrael'), a name very close to Biblical *ysr'l* ('Israel'). Egyptian scribes were not consistent in their usage of the hieroglyphs for 'sh' and 's', and quite often interchanged them.
- So, these three archaeological finds, all from the late 15th/early 14th centuries BCE, help us date the time of the Judges and the conquests to that time period.

The Bronze Age Collapse

- **[TIMELINE]** One of the most important historical events around the time of the Judges is the Bronze Age Collapse.
- Again, for some context, Solomon's reign began around 971 BCE.
- The century between 1250 and 1150 BCE (and especially the latter half of that time period) saw the cultural collapse of the Mycenaean kingdoms in Greece (sending Greece into a Dark Age), the Kassites in Babylonia, the Hittite Empire in Turkey and Syria, and the New Kingdom of Egypt, as well as the destruction of the important city of Ugarit and the Amorite states in Israel, and more. This period is called the Bronze Age Collapse. (**Interesting video here:** <https://youtu.be/B965f8AcNbw>)
- Not a lot is really known about the cause of the Bronze Age Collapse except that it was likely a perfect storm of negative issues: famine, plague, and especially wars and attacks brought on by outside forces. These cities and empires were destroyed seemingly without warning, and many were never rebuilt.
- The Bronze Age Collapse had a massive impact on the Middle East at this time. The larger empires like Egypt and the Hittites contracted back in on themselves, and were not as interested in gaining territory in Israel and other places outside their own homelands. This power vacuum allowed the growth of the nation of Israel and eventually led to the golden age under David and Solomon. It was only after the split of the nation at Solomon's death that we see the power of the outside forces start to grow again.
- Again, not a lot is known about the cause of the Bronze Age Collapse except that it was likely a perfect storm of negative issues. These cities and states were destroyed seemingly without warning.
- One cause of the destruction seems to have been an amorphous group normally called The Sea Peoples.
 - This group of invaders, apparently originating in the Greek Islands, Western Anatolia, and Crete, moved toward the eastern Mediterranean, driven by famine, natural disasters, and other unknown causes. They arrived on ships, causing the inhabitants of the land to label them Sea Peoples. They did not appear to be made up of a single people group, but were many different groups all working together.
- While some of the city states in the Near East were prepared for invasion, others were not, and the Sea Peoples were out for destruction. They completely leveled many cities, including large metropolises like Ugarit. Ugarit was discovered by accident in 1928, along with a trove of texts that have tremendously helped us understand the culture and the language of the Semitic peoples of this part of the world.
- **[SLIDE]** The king of Ugarit, Ammurapi, wrote a letter (RS 18.147) to a neighboring king who was asking for assistance, saying essentially, "Sorry, I can't help you, I'm dealing with my own issues":

- My father, behold, the enemy's ships came (here); my cities were burned, and they did evil things in my country. Does not my father know that all my troops and chariots are in the Land of Hatti, and all my ships are in the Land of Lukka? ... Thus, the country is abandoned to itself. May my father know it: the seven ships of the enemy that came here inflicted much damage upon us.
- **[MAP]** Around the year 1280 BCE, during the time of the Israelite Judge Ehud, the Sea Peoples tried to invade Egypt. However, the pharaoh at that time, Ramesses II, had studied how the Sea Peoples fought, and he worked out a defensive strategy to protect the nation. After he won the battle, he apparently enlisted some of those defeated Sea Peoples as mercenaries in his army when he marched through the western part of Israel a few years later and defeated the Hittites in the Battle of Kadesh.
- If we go back to Deuteronomy 2, we find Moses telling the story of the Israelites wandering in the Wilderness. Deuteronomy 2:20-23 are a parenthetical thought added to the text, describing various regions in Canaan. Many commentaries suggest that it was likely added by later editors of the text to provide clarity for people of their day who were unclear on the area being described by Moses.
- Deuteronomy 2:23 says, "And as for the Avvim, who lived in villages as far as Gaza, the Caphtorim, who came from Caphtor, destroyed them and lived in their place."
- So, the Avvim (which literally means "fathers"), the original Philistine Canaanites, were later supplanted by migratory waves of foreigners from the Greek isles—specifically from Crete—during the Judges period.
- This migration of the Philistines seems to be connected to the Bronze Age Collapse. It appears that the Sea Peoples who were defeated by Ramesses II and used as mercenaries became the Philistines. They came from Crete, fought the Egyptians, were enlisted as mercenaries, **[SLIDE]** and were then settled by the Egyptians on the plains of Israel, taking over the cities of the local Avvim, gaining in strength and starting to win more land from the Canaanites and even the Israelites.
- These new "Philistines", so called because, again, they lived in the land with that name, grew in power during the late Judges period, and hit critical mass around the time of Samuel and David. They caused constant problems for the Israelites and surrounding nations (especially Egypt), but their influence rapidly deteriorated during the time of David and Solomon.
- I highly recommend an article from the Armstrong Institute of Archaeology that talks about the Philistines in depth. <https://armstronginstitute.org/663-are-philistines-during-abrahams-time-evidence-against-bible-historicity>
- Also these videos:
 - Bronze Age Collapse: <https://youtu.be/B965f8AcNbw>
 - The Sea Peoples: <https://youtu.be/xl9RaHE9Zpl>
- By the 10th century, recovery from the Bronze Age Collapse was not a quick return to the old order. Instead, it showed up in the rise of new political forms: Smaller, more flexible kingdoms and city-states replaced the Bronze Age "great king" system—especially in Turkey and the Eastern Mediterranean.
- As for the Philistines, David was eventually able to subdue them, so they were no longer a major thorn in the side of Israel during the time of Solomon.

Iron Age

- **[TIMELINE]** When we talk about the collapse of the "Bronze Age" and the transition into the "Iron Age" around 1200-1100 BCE, it is important to understand that these designations are generalizations that

historians use to help define major transitions and technological advances, not clear-cut changes in every location.

- The Bronze Age Collapse had a direct impact on trade in the Mediterranean, as the Sea Peoples invaded and cities fell. After the collapse, maritime and caravan trade routes were rebuilt around ports and merchant cities in places like Phoenicia, and new regional trade corridors developed as traders, not kings, began to take priority.
- The collapse also brought about some major shifts in technology and production.
- Bronze is made by mixing copper and tin. It is an easy alloy to make due to the relatively low melting point of both metals. Copper is broadly available, and does not require extensive mining to uncover. Ancient peoples created early metal implements out of copper because of this ease of use.
- **[SLIDE - Map - Tin mining]** Tin, however, is much less common. While very small pockets may be found around the Near East, the biggest deposits in the ancient world were found in Afghanistan and Western Europe. Tin mines in those locations date back many millennia.
 - This means that there were no readily available sources of tin in Turkey, Israel, or Egypt, so all of the tin used in bronze working in those areas had to be imported.
 - **[SLIDE - Tin Ingots]** In 2012, archaeologists discovered a 13th-century BCE shipwreck just south of Haifa Bay. Contained in the wreck was a collection of tin ingots that had been transported all the way from Cornwall, England. (<https://armstronginstitute.org/393-did-israel-source-tin-from-britain>)
- **[SLIDE - Iron Smelting]** With the collapse of trade routes, tin supplies were impacted, so people had to develop new technologies with what they had available. That's part of the reason for the shift to iron. Raw iron is more readily accessible than tin, but it requires much hotter fires in order for it to be smelted and worked.
- Before the end of the bronze age, iron was available but only in small quantities. Most of the iron in the time before the Iron Age transition actually came from meteorites that were recovered and worked into swords and daggers. Both Joshua and Judges call out the fact that the Canaanites who lived in the plains by the Mediterranean had iron chariots (likely iron fittings or wheels with an iron band around them), making them harder for the Israelites to defeat. Iron smelting was developed in southern Turkey, but it took a while for the practice to spread to other areas.
- Deuteronomy 8:9 explains how important these metals were in the ancient world, describing the land of Israel as:
 - a land where you will eat food without shortage, in which you will not lack anything; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills you can dig copper.
- 1 Chronicles 22:3 says that David collected “large quantities of iron to make the nails for the doors of the gates and for the clamps, and more bronze than could be weighed” in preparation for the construction of the Temple. It is a testament to the growing power and wealth of David that he was able to collect all of those resources.
- What about the other world powers?

Egypt

- **[MAP - ANE in the time of Solomon]** During the time of David and Solomon, Egypt was fractured and lacking in a single authority. Lower Egypt (the northern end closest to Israel) and Upper Egypt (the southern area closer to Ethiopia) were ruled by different groups.
- It was not until around 945 BCE that Shoshenq I, who is called Shishak in the Bible, began to restore some of Egypt's power.
- Solomon did not have to worry much about Shoshenq I, but in 925 BCE, only 5 years after Solomon's death, the Egyptian pharaoh invaded Judah, defeated Solomon's son Rehoboam, and looted the Temple.
 - 1 Kings 14:25-26 says, "Now it happened in the fifth year of King Rehoboam, that Shishak the king of Egypt marched against Jerusalem. And he took away the treasures of the house of the LORD and the treasures of the king's house, and he took everything; he even took all the shields of gold which Solomon had made."
- **[SLIDE]** Shoshenq I's campaign is famously associated with inscriptions at the Egyptian city of Karnak, which preserves a list of place-names tied to the expedition. It includes a reference that archaeologist Kenneth Kitchen translates as "Heights of David." If he's right, this would be the oldest reference to David in the archaeological record, only about 50 years after his death. We'll talk about another reference to David in a few minutes that is more solid than this one.

Assyria

- **[MAP - ANE in the time of Solomon]** Assyria remained a major state during this period, but Assyrian reach contracted toward the heartland and was not extended out to control places like Israel. Part of that was due to the rise in power of the Arameans (we'll talk about them in a moment).
- There were not many major imperial figures, and this was not the Neo-Assyrian empire of the 9th century that we see fighting with Babylon for power and that took the northern tribes into captivity in 722 BCE.

Babylonia

- Babylon struggled with the same kinds of political and social instability. Like the Assyrians, the Babylonians were heavily impacted by the rise of the Arameans and their control over trade routes in Syria.
- Babylonia's recovery from the Bronze Age Collapse was institutional and religious as much as military—rebuilding temples and city authority—while still operating in a landscape where central power struggled to control tribal/confederative forces in the countryside.

Elam

- Elam had been, and remained, a significant state east of Mesopotamia, sometimes taking advantage of Babylonian weakness. In the 10th century BCE, Elam was part of the strategic triangle (Assyria–Babylonia–Elam), but it was not a major actor shaping politics in Israel.

Phoenician City States

- As I mentioned before, the Bronze Age Collapse gave smaller city states and kingdoms the ability to rise and flourish, extending their control over neighboring regions and trade routes. A great example of this is Phoenicia.
- **[SLIDE - Map Phoenician Trade]** Phoenicia was not a unified empire; it was a network of wealthy coastal city-states, including Tyre, Sidon, and Byblos, that increasingly leveraged maritime trade for their own good.
- The Phoenicians had long been known as a seafaring and trading people. There is evidence of them reaching all the way to the western Mediterranean, and establishing multiple trading posts along the way. Both the Greek historian Herodotus and the Roman author Pliny the Elder recorded that the Phoenicians were such skilled sailors that they could circumnavigate Africa.
- Two of their major trade exports were Tyrian Purple and Cedar.
 - **[SLIDE - Tyrian Purple]** Tyrian Purple was a dye created from a sea snail called the *murex trunculus*.
 - This purple dye was extremely hard to extract from the snails and required a complex and secret process to be produced. As a result, it was prized by kings as a sign of wealth and power, and at certain times in history it was illegal to own it if you were not royalty.
 - In 2021, archeologists found some fabric dyed with this color in ancient Moab, dated to 1000 BCE, the time of David. <https://news.artnet.com/art-world/purple-dye-archaeology-israel-1940853>
 - The Cedars of Lebanon were widely prized for their size and strength. 1 Kings 5 tells us that Hiram, the king of Tyre and Sidon, visited Solomon soon after his coronation, and Solomon asked him to provide these cedars for the building of the Temple.
 - Solomon said, “for you yourself know that there is no one among us who knows how to cut timber like the Sidonians.”
 - **[SLIDE - wooden beams]** When the Al Aqsa Mosque was renovated in the 1930s, they discarded a bunch of old wooden beams. Some of these beams were later tested for their age, origin, and species. Many of them came from the time of the construction of the mosque around 1700 years ago. Others were dated to the Roman and Byzantine eras. However, two of the beams that were tested were found to be much older, from the First Temple period.
 - <https://www.timesofisrael.com/did-ancient-beams-discarded-in-old-city-come-from-first-and-second-temples/>
- The connections between Israel and Phoenicia go even deeper. 1 Kings 9:26-28 says that Solomon enlisted Hiram to help him build a navy, and that those ships reached as far as Ophir, which most scholars say is on the coast of India.
- <https://armstronginstitute.org/1016-israels-phoenician-friends>
- <https://armstronginstitute.org/933-the-secrets-of-tel-shikmona>
- <https://armstronginstitute.org/48-uncovering-the-bibles-buried-civilizations-the-phoenicians>

Philistines

- **[MAP - ANE in the time of Solomon]** The Philistines are practically a textbook “post-collapse new order” example of the rising influence of city states and regional powers, as we discussed earlier.

Aramean States

- The “Arameans” rose to power in the post-collapse period in the region of modern day Syria. They were not one state but many kingdoms and tribal polities that, over time, formed durable states across Syria and the Euphrates corridor.
- These kingdoms contested with Assyria and Babylon for control of trade routes in this area, effectively keeping both of those older empires from growing back as quickly or in the same form as before.
- This growing influence of Aramean kingdoms even had a large impact on language. Aramaic, a sister language to Hebrew, eventually became the primary language used by kings and traders in Assyria and Babylon, overtaking other languages like Akkadian.
- That’s the reason parts of some Old Testament books like Daniel are written in Aramaic, and eventually why Aramaic was the common language in the time of Jesus.

Solomon’s World

- Why is all this important?
- Well, part of the reason the kingdom of David and Solomon could grow was because the big empires were not actively policing or attempting to control Israel the way Egypt, Assyria, and Babylon would later. Those empires were dealing with their own internal issues that did not allow them to expand their influence very far.
- Israel’s growing ability to control trade routes and major cities helped them create a strategic presence and build a monarchy that in other times could not have been built.

Archaeology of David and Solomon

- Before we finish, I’d like to briefly show you a few archaeological finds that help us confirm David and Solomon’s reigns, and also picture them better.
- The book of 2 Samuel tells us that David built a palace in Jerusalem.
- **[SLIDE - Stepped Stone Structure]** The Stepped Stone Structure is a stepped structural wall that was built to cover a large hole in the bedrock and to help support the foundation of David’s palace. You can still see the structure today if you take a tour of the City of David in Jerusalem.
- **[SLIDE - Large Stone Structure]** In 2005, Archaeologist Eilat Mazar excavated the area at the top of the Stepped Stone Structure and uncovered some of the massive walls of David’s Palace, which most archaeologists call the Large Stone Structure. One of those walls was 6 meters (18 feet) wide. The walls interlocked with the Stepped Stone Structure, indicating that they were built at the same time, and that the Stepped Stone Structure was built to support the palace.
- **[SLIDE - proto-Aeolic]** Another excavation at the foot of the Stepped Stone Structure uncovered a proto-Aeolic capital, along with debris and carved stones that fell from a structure further up the hill. Proto-Aeolic

capitals are large, intricately carved stones that served as toppers for columns and were common elements in First Temple period buildings—so common, in fact, that they are depicted on the modern 5-shekel coin. The capital found here has been described as the most impressive proto-Aeolic capital ever discovered in Israel, and its position at the foot of this palace structure point to how beautiful David's palace must have been.

- **[SLIDE - David's Palace]** Here is an artist's rendering of how it might have looked. Other Proto-Aeolic column capitals have been found throughout Israel, again showing the prestige and power of David and Solomon's reigns.
- **[SLIDE - Moat]** Another recent archaeological dig in Jerusalem has revealed that there was a large moat cut into the bedrock along the northern side of the City of David. This moat may have been cut by the Jebusites as a protective defense against armies trying to invade the city from the north, but it also created a slight problem for Solomon when he started building the Temple, the Ophel, and the other parts of the northern city. Archaeologists have found evidence that suggests that this moat was at some point covered with a wooden bridge, which would have allowed the northern part of the city to be accessed from the older City of David.
- **[SLIDE]** Eventually the entire area was filled in with fill dirt and the city wall was extended to encompass the area.
- **[SLIDE]** Finally, I'd like to tell you about one of the most important archaeological discoveries ever found, the Tel Dan Stele.
- This is a triumphal inscription written by Hazael, king of Aram, erected in the city of Dan after a battle he had with King Jehoram of Judah and King Ahaziah of Israel. This lone surviving piece of the stele corroborates the events that occur in 2 Kings 9.
- The text reads:
 - And I killed two [power]ful kin[gs], who harnessed two thou[sand cha]riots and two thousand horsemen. [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab] king of Israel, and I killed [Ahaz]yahu son of [Joram kin]g of the house of David.
- **[SLIDE]** This is the earliest and most broadly accepted non-Biblical reference we have to King David.
- Before the Tel Dan Stele was found in 1993, just 30 years ago, most of the academic world was convinced that David never even existed. The only references to him here in the Bible, and it seemed like the stories were more "King Arthur" than "George Washington."
- The text here on this stele is undeniable, and even the most ardent anti-David experts have had to conclude that it is authentic.

Conclusion

- The time of the United Monarchy, the rule of David and Solomon, is one of the most interesting and important times in Biblical history, and it is one of my personal favorites.
- There's actually too much to cover in just this one session. If I have an opportunity to teach a class on Archaeology that supports the Bible, I'll be sure to cover some of the other interesting finds from this period, including the four gates that Solomon built, the real homeland of the Queen of Sheba, and the evidence we see for a strong, unified government in Israel at this time.
- Any questions?

