

The Jabin Tablet

Because Jabin, the king of Hazor, has been named in two different periods of the Bible, there have been questions as to how this exact name and title developed in this fashion.

With the belief that Joshua was composed after Judges, skeptics assumed that the detailed account of Judges (Judg 4:1-23) provided the name Jabin for the author of Joshua when he reported the conquest of Hazor (Josh 11:1).

When classifying the literary genre of those accounts involving Jabin, they are all historical narratives which record events with detail and plausibility.

Jabin, the king of Hazor, leader of Canaan was defeated by Joshua during the Conquest.

Then it came about, when **Jabin king of Hazor** heard of it, that he sent to Jobab king of Madon and to the king of Shimron and to the king of Achshaph, and to the kings who were of the north in the hill country, and in the Arabah—south of Chinneroth and in the lowland and on the heights of Dor on the west—to the Canaanite on the east and on the west, and the Amorite and the Hittite and the Perizzite and the Jebusite in the hill country, and the Hivite at the foot of Hermon in the land of Mizpeh. They came out, they and all their armies with them, as many people as the sand that is on the seashore, with very many horses and chariots. So all of these kings having agreed to meet, came and encamped together at the waters of Merom, to fight against Israel. Then the Lord said to Joshua, “Do not be afraid because of them, for tomorrow at this time I will deliver all of them slain before Israel; you shall hamstring their horses and burn their chariots with fire.” So Joshua and all the people of war with him came upon them suddenly by the waters of Merom, and attacked them. The Lord delivered them into the hand of Israel, so that they defeated them, and pursued them as far as Great Sidon and Misrephoth-maim and the valley of Mizpeh to the east; and they struck them until no survivor was left to them. Joshua did to them as the Lord had told him; he hamstrung their horses and burned their chariots with fire. Then Joshua turned back at that time, and captured Hazor and struck its king with the sword; for Hazor formerly was the head of all these kingdoms. They struck every person who was in it with the edge of the sword, utterly destroying them; there was no one left who breathed. And he burned Hazor with fire. (Josh 11:1-11)

Approximately some 200 hundred years later, Jabin, the king of Hazor, king of Canaan was defeated by Barak during the time of Judges.

Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord, after Ehud died. And the Lord sold them into the hand of **Jabin king of Canaan**, who reigned in Hazor; and the commander of his army was Sisera, who lived in Harosheth-hagoyim. The sons of Israel cried to the Lord; for he had nine hundred iron chariots, and he oppressed the sons of Israel severely for twenty years. Now Deborah, a prophetess, the wife of Lappidoth, was judging Israel at that time. She used to sit under the palm tree of Deborah between Ramah and Bethel in the hill country of Ephraim; and the sons of Israel came up to her for judgment. Now she sent and summoned Barak the son of Abinoam from Kedesh-naphtali, and said to him, “Behold, the Lord, the God of Israel, has commanded, ‘Go and march to Mount Tabor, and take with you ten thousand men from the sons of Naphtali and from the sons of Zebulun. I will draw out to you Sisera, the commander of **Jabin’s** army, with his chariots and his many troops to the river Kishon, and I will give him into your hand.’” Then Barak said to her, “If you will go with me, then I will go; but if you will not go with me, I will not go.” She said, “I will surely go with you; nevertheless, the honor shall not be yours on the journey that you are about to take, for the Lord will sell Sisera into the hands of a woman.” Then Deborah arose and went with Barak to Kedesh. Barak called Zebulun and Naphtali together to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him. Now Heber the Kenite had separated himself

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from the Kenites, from the sons of Hobab the father-in-law of Moses, and had pitched his tent as far away as the oak in Zaanannim, which is near Kedesh. Then they told Sisera that Barak the son of Abinoam had gone up to Mount Tabor. Sisera called together all his chariots, nine hundred iron chariots, and all the people who were with him, from Harosheth-hagoyim to the river Kishon. Deborah said to Barak, "Arise! For this is the day in which the Lord has given Sisera into your hands; behold, the Lord has gone out before you." So Barak went down from Mount Tabor with ten thousand men following him. The Lord routed Sisera and all his chariots and all his army with the edge of the sword before Barak; and Sisera alighted from his chariot and fled away on foot. But Barak pursued the chariots and the army as far as Harosheth-hagoyim, and all the army of Sisera fell by the edge of the sword; not even one was left. Now Sisera fled away on foot to the tent of Jael the wife of Heber the Kenite, for there was peace between **Jabin the king of Hazor** and the house of Heber the Kenite. Jael went out to meet Sisera, and said to him, "Turn aside, my master, turn aside to me! Do not be afraid." And he turned aside to her into the tent, and she covered him with a rug. He said to her, "Please give me a little water to drink, for I am thirsty." So she opened a bottle of milk and gave him a drink; then she covered him. He said to her, "Stand in the doorway of the tent, and it shall be if anyone comes and inquires of you, and says, 'Is there anyone here?' that you shall say, 'No.'" But Jael, Heber's wife, took a tent peg and seized a hammer in her hand, and went secretly to him and drove the peg into his temple, and it went through into the ground; for he was sound asleep and exhausted. So he died. And behold, as Barak pursued Sisera, Jael came out to meet him and said to him, "Come, and I will show you the man whom you are seeking." And he entered with her, and behold Sisera was lying dead with the tent peg in his temple. So God subdued on that day **Jabin the king of Canaan** before the sons of Israel. The hand of the sons of Israel pressed heavier and heavier upon **Jabin the king of Canaan**, until they had destroyed **Jabin the king of Canaan**. (Jud 4:1-23)

From an archaeological perspective, there were two significant burn layers discovered in the excavation of Hazor. The lowest layer indicated that Hazor was burned down around the time of the Conquest, and this evidence was consistent with the biblical account of the Conquest; Hazor was burned down by Joshua. Furthermore, statues of Canaanite and Egyptian gods were destroyed, which followed God's directive for the Conquest (Deut 12:1-3). The topmost burn layer corresponded to the time that Pharaoh Seti I destroyed and burned down Hazor, which was recorded by Egyptian inscriptions attesting to the Pharaoh's conquest.

While the account of Judges (Jud 4:1-23) indicates that Barak destroyed Jabin and his army, there is little archeological evidence that indicates if Hazor was definitely destroyed.

Significant to the inquiry into Jabin is the inscription evidence.

The Mari Letters (1796 B.C.)

Excavated in Mari (Tel Hariri, an ancient Semitic city in Syria) between 1933-39 and 1951-56, the Mari Letters is the name used for the more than 20 thousand tablets and fragments recovered most of which date from the reign of Yasmakh-Adad (1796-1780 B.C.). The cuneiform artifacts were housed and published by the Louvre for academic study in *Archives Royales de Mari* (ARM).

One Akkadian tablet (ARM VI, 236, dated to the 18th century B.C.) recorded a shipment of tin to "Ibni-Addad king of Hazor." Translated from Akkadian into its West Semitic form "Ibni-Addad" becomes "Yabni-Haddad," and "Yabni" linguistically evolves into "Yabin / Jabin" in ancient Hebrew.



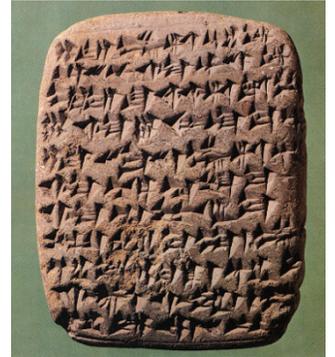
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Amarna Letters

When looters discovered cuneiform artifacts in Amarna, formal archaeological excavations began (1888-92). Amarna was once the ancient Egyptian capital of Akhetaten that was built by the Pharaoh Akhenaten (Amenhotep IV, the Eighteenth dynasty of Egypt, 14th century B.C.). 382 tablets and fragments were recovered, and because of plundering, these Akkadian cuneiform tablets / fragments are scattered among several museum locations principally Berlin, London and Cairo.

The cuneiform tablets / fragments were dated to the reigns of Amenhotep III and IV and were some thirty years of diplomatic correspondence between the Egyptian court and surrounding states / vassal states which is significant for its Akkadian cuneiform instead of Ancient Egyptian.

One of these letters (EA 227) mentions a vassal state, ruled by the “king of Hazor,” breaking away to form a northern alliance with other Canaanite states. What is significant is that no other vassal ruler is attributed with the title of “king” throughout the Amarna Letters. While the name of Jabin was not mentioned, the Amarna Letters inferred that there was a powerful leader of Hazor and of a northern Canaanite federation.



The Topographical List of Ramesses II (1303-1273 B.C.)

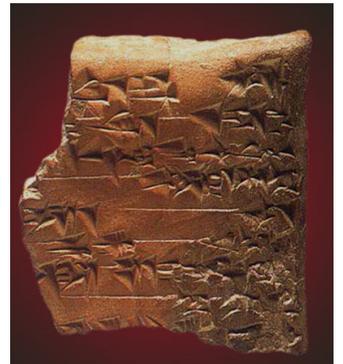
Ramesses thought it important to mention the route through the Jezreel Valley and had it inscribed at the Precinct of Amun-Re in Karnak. One location mentioned is “Qerumin.” This ancient Egyptian word transliterates via Hebrew (Qedumim) to English as the “River Kishon” (Judg 5:21).

The next topographical location listed after “Qerumin” is “Qishon of Ybn.” It is not clear what area “Qishon” referred to; but, “Ybn” transliterates into English as “Jabin,” and it was understood that the area north of the River Kishon was controlled by the city of Hazor.

The Jabin Cuneiform Fragment of Hazor (found 1992)

Archaeologist excavating the ancient city of Hazor found a cuneiform fragment written in Akkadian addressed “to Ibni Addi,” which transliterates to “Jabin Addu.” Dated to the 18th – 17th century B.C., this fragment was consistent with correspondence of the royal court, and involved the transfer of a woman.

Whereas previous inscription evidence attested to the use of the name Jabin over time, the cuneiform fragment of Hazor confirms its use as a royal appellative much like that of Pharaoh. Just as Egyptian kings were known as Pharaoh, Canaanite kings were known as Jabin; thus, “Jabin Addu” is to be understood in the same context as Pharaoh Ramesses II.



Recognizing Jabin as a Canaanite royal appellative means that the biblical accounts of Jabin are accurate and contemporary with the period of their composition.

References:

1. Krahmalkov CR, “Exodus Itinerary Confirmed by Egyptian Evidence,” *Biblical Archaeology Review*, 20:05, Sep/Oct 1994.
2. Wood BG, “Jabin, King of Hazor,” *Bible and Spade*, 8:3, Summer 1995.