

The Tel Dan Inscription

Known for his military prowess as well as his gift in music (1 Sam 16:17-18; Amos 6:5) and poetry (2 Sam 1:17-27), David is seen as one of Israel's greatest kings. Attributed as the author of 78 psalms, David is mentioned some 1135 times in the Bible.

Completing the conquest of Canaan initiated by Joshua and securing the borders of Israel (1 Sam 30:17; 2 Sam 5:17-25; 8:1-14; 10:6-19; 12:19-31), David established Jerusalem as the capital (2 Sam 5:1-12; 1 Chron 4:1-9) of his monarchy (1000-962 B.C.).

Of significance is the establishment of the Ark of the Covenant in Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:17-20; 1 Chron 15:1-29; 16:1-3; 2 Chron 1:4), because for the first time, Israel's political and religious life is centered in one place. David makes Jerusalem become an important capital, not only for government, but as the place to worship God. And God establishes His covenant with David (2 Sam 8:8-17; 1 Chron 17:8-15) including the promise that He would make David's name great (2 Sam 8:9).

Recognizing Jesus as a descendant of David (Matt 1:1-18; Luke 3:23-38), people called Him the "son of David" (Matt 9:27; 15:22; 20:30-31; 21:9, 15; 22:42; Mark 10:47-48; Luke 18:38-39).

Against this biblical backdrop, as late as 1993, there was no archeological evidence confirming (or denying) the existence of king David, and there was considerable skepticism whether he really existed.

At an excavation of Tel Dan led by Israeli archeologist Avraham Biran in northern Israel, a small broken stone slab was discovered. Believed to be part of a victory stela, this ninth century B.C. fragment mentioned the reign of king David and became known as the Tel Dan Inscription which provided the first historical evidence of David's existence.

The broken inscription commemorates the victory of an Aramean king over the "king of Israel" and the "king of the House of David." While the kings are not named, scholars believe that the fragment refers to the military victory of Hazael of Damascus over Jehoram of Israel and Ahaziah of Judah (2 Kings 8:7-15, 28-29; 13:3; 2 Chron 22:5-6). Two more fragments of the stele were recovered, and the partially reconstructed text reads:

1. [... ...] and cut [...]
2. [...] my father went up [against him when] he fought at [...]
3. And my father lay down, he went to his [ancestors]. And the king of I[s-]
4. rael entered previously in my father's land. [And] Hadad made me king.
5. And Hadad went in front of me, [and] I departed from [the] seven [...-]
6. s of my kingdom, and I slew [seve]nty kin[gs], who harnessed thou[sands of cha-]
7. Riots and thousands of horsemen (or: horses). [I killed Jeho]ram son of [Ahab]
8. king of Israel, and [I] killed [Ahaz]iahu son of [Jehoram kin-]
9. g of the **House of David**. And I set [their towns into ruins and turned]
10. their land into [desolation ...]
11. other [... and Jehu ru-]
12. led over Is[rael ... and I laid]
13. siege upon [...]



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More than a century after his death, Israel's enemy still recognized David as the founder of the kingdom of Judah.

References:

1. Schoville KN, "Top Ten Archaeological Discoveries of the Twentieth Century Relating to the Biblical World" in *Stone Campbell Journal*, vol 4, no. 1, Cincinnati: Stone-Campbell International, (2001).