May/June 2025 Randall Price

Digging Up King Solomon (Part 1)

In 2001, prominent archaeologist Israel Finkelstein and author Neil Asher Silberman wrote a popular book titled *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*. Its subtitle seemingly promised a revelation of how archaeology substantiates Israel's biblical history. However, the authors claimed archaeology did not support the biblical record of early Israel from the time of Abraham through the united kingdom of Saul, David, and Solomon:

Despite the long-standing contention that the opulent Solomonic court was the scene of . . . religious thought, and history writing, evidence for widespread literacy is utterly lacking. . . . Not a single trace of supposed tenth century Judahite literary activity has been found. Indeed, monumental inscriptions and personal seals—essential signs of a fully developed state—appear in Judah only two hundred years after Solomon.[1]

This claim reduces King Solomon to a fictional character and strips him of his great achievements, such as building the First Temple, and his literary works of wisdom, such as Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. And if this account of one of Israel's most pivotal periods could not be trusted, what history in the Bible could?

Fortunately, archaeological excavation since the book's release has thoroughly disproven these statements.

The Bible says that Solomon ruled over all the kingdoms from the Euphrates River to the land of the Philistines, as far as the border of Egypt; and they brought Solomon tribute and served him (1 Ki. 4:21). Solomon also expanded his influence as far as the Gulf of Eilat, the northern Sinai, and the Negev (9:18, 26–28), probably to control the trade routes connecting the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean. An extensive network of strongholds from Solomon's time was discovered in the Negev highlands and the Wadi Arava, including the fortress of

En Haseva located halfway between the Gulf of Eilat and Jerusalem.[2] This resulted in international peace during his 40-year reign (5:4).

Both secular history and archaeology confirm that between 1100 and 900 BC, both Assyria and Egypt suffered political decline. Judah's expanding economic influence and political control through its many alliances with neighboring kingdoms (11:1) best explain this shift. Discovered in 2012, the Ophel Pithos Inscription provides evidence of Sheba's spice trade with Jerusalem and its queen's visit to Solomon (10:1–13).[3]

Solomon significantly increased his capital in Jerusalem by constructing the First Temple and other expansive royal structures.[4] In 2010, a city wall with a gatehouse dating to the late 10th century BC was discovered in the Ophel (the area between the City of David and the Temple Mount).[5] This wall probably connected with the City of David. It has been dated to Solomon's time based on pottery, bullae, and seal impressions and fits with the biblical description that Solomon built a fortification line around the Temple and his palace.[6]

Even though the Temple's remains cannot be recovered, since it was built and destroyed twice (Ezra 3:8–11; Hag. 1:2–4, 8–9, 14), the biblical details of its construction are verified by existing regional archaeological examples, including ceramic model shrines and 9th-century BC Near Eastern parallel structures. We will consider these in the next issue of *Israel My Glory*.

ENDNOTES

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            1. Israel Finkelstein and Neil Asher Silberman, *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2001), 235–238. See also for his later interpretation: Finkelstein, "Jerusalem in the Iron Age: Archaeology and Text; Reality and Myth" in *Unearthing Jerusalem: 150 Years of Archaeological Research in the Holy City, eds*. Katharina Galor and Gideon Avni (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 196.

2. John Drummond, “Searching for Solomon,” Biblical Archaeology Society, May 20, 2024 (tinyurl.com/SearchingForSolomon).
3. Daniel Vainstub, “Incense from Sheba for the Jerusalem Temple,” *Jerusalem Journal of Archaeology* 4 (2023): 42–68.
4. Dario Radley, “New study reveals Jerusalem was a major city under David and Solomon,” *Archaeology News Online Magazine*, May 5, 2024 (tinyurl.com/JerusalemGrowth).
5. “Archaeological Discoveries: Ancient City Wall of Jerusalem Uncovered,” Jewish Virtual Library, February 2010 (jewishvirtuallibrary.org/ancient-city-wall-of-jerusalem-uncovered).
6. Maayana Miskin, “Dig Supports Biblical Account of King Solomon’s Construction,” IsraelNationalNews.com, February 22, 2010 (tinyurl.com/SolomonConstruction).



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