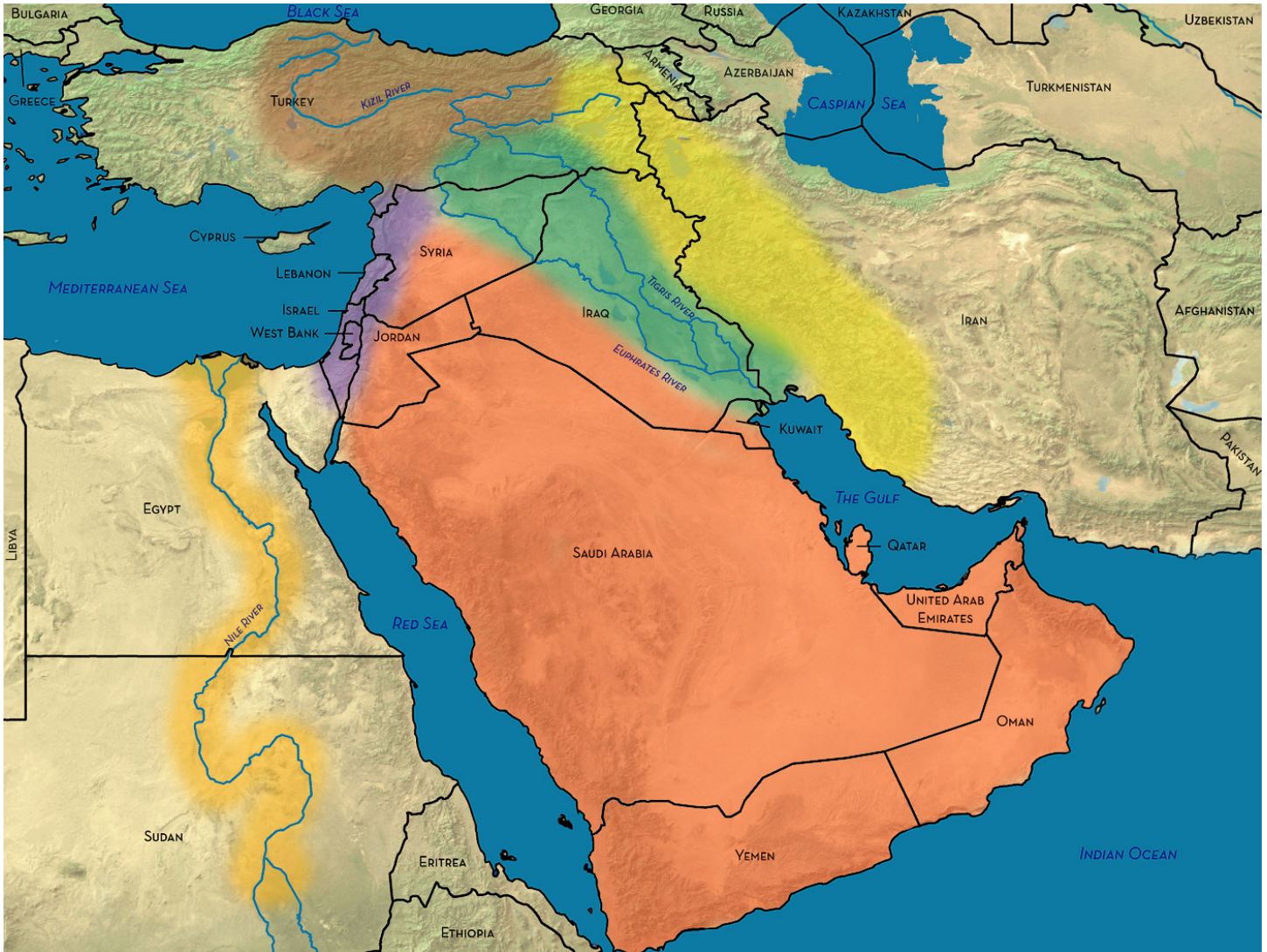


The Era of Jeremiah: Geography, Regional Politics and Archaeology In the Time of the Prophets

I. Geography and Political History during Prophecy of Jeremiah



A. Geography

(from <http://teachmiddleeast.lib.uchicago.edu/>)

From west to east:

Nile River (orange)

Eastern Mediterranean (purple)

Anatolian Plateau (brown)

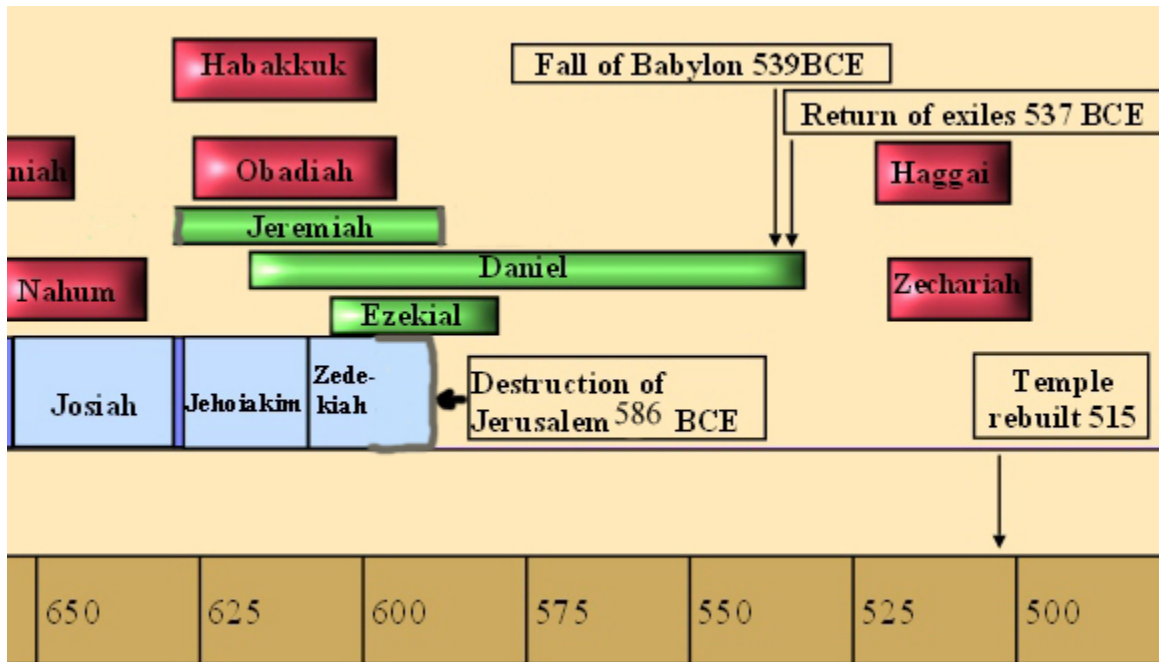
Arabian Peninsula (red)

Mesopotamia (green)

Zagros Mountains (yellow)

B. Political history during time of Jeremiah

1. Jeremiah's prophecy spanned about 40 years from
 - A. Begins prophecy in 13th year of King Josiah (abt 627 BCE)
 - B. Finishes in 11th year of King Zedekiah (586 BCE)
 - C. He knows of the destruction of the northern kingdom and predicts the destruction of Judah



II Assyria

A. **Assyria**, a major Mesopotamian East **Semitic** kingdom and empire of the Ancient Near East, existed as an independent state for a period of approximately nineteen centuries, from the 25th century BC to 605 (BC, spanning the mid to Early Bronze Age through to the late Iron Age.

(Interestingly, Assyria is mentioned only 3 times in Jeremiah, while Babylon is mentioned 169)

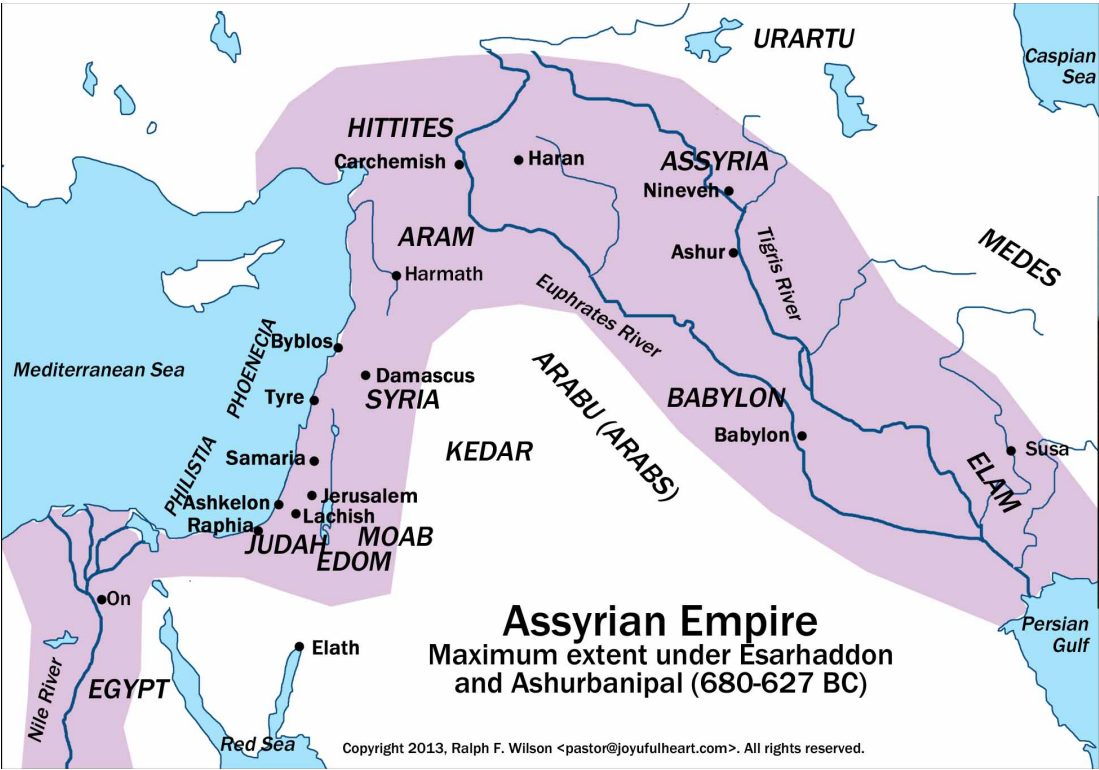
50:17-18 *Israel is a scattered sheep, the lions have driven him away; first the king of **Assyria** hath devoured him, and last this Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon hath broken his bones. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel: behold, I will punish the king of Babylon and his land, as I have punished the king of **Assyria**.)*

For a further thirteen centuries, from the end of the 7th century BC to the mid-7th century AD, it survived as a geo-political entity, for the most part ruled by foreign powers, although a number of small Neo-Assyrian states such as Assur, Adiabene, Osroene and Hatra arose at different times between the 1st century BC and late 3rd century CE.

Centered on the Upper Tigris river, in northern Mesopotamia (modern northern Iraq, northeastern Syria and southeastern Turkey), the Assyrians came to rule powerful empires at several times. Making up a substantial part of the greater Mesopotamian "cradle of civilization," which included Sumer, Akkad and much later Babylonia, Assyria was at the height of technological, scientific and cultural achievements for its time. At its peak, the Assyrian empire stretched from Cyprus in the Mediterranean Sea to Persia (Iran), and from what is now Armenia to the Arabian Peninsula and Egypt.

Assyria is named for its original capital, the ancient city of Aššur (a.k.a. Ashur), which dates to c. 2600 BC (located in what is now the Saladin Province of northern Iraq), originally one of a number of Akkadian city states in Mesopotamia. In the 25th and 24th centuries BC, Assyrian kings were pastoral leaders. From the late 24th century BC, this people became subject to **Sargon of Akkad**, who united all the Ak-

kadian Semites and Sumerian-speaking peoples of Mesopotamia under the Akkadian Empire, which lasted from c. 2334 BC to 2154 BC. Following the fall of the Akkadian Empire c. 2154 BC, and the short-lived succeeding Neo-Sumerian Empire that ruled southern Assyria but not the north, Assyria regained full independence.



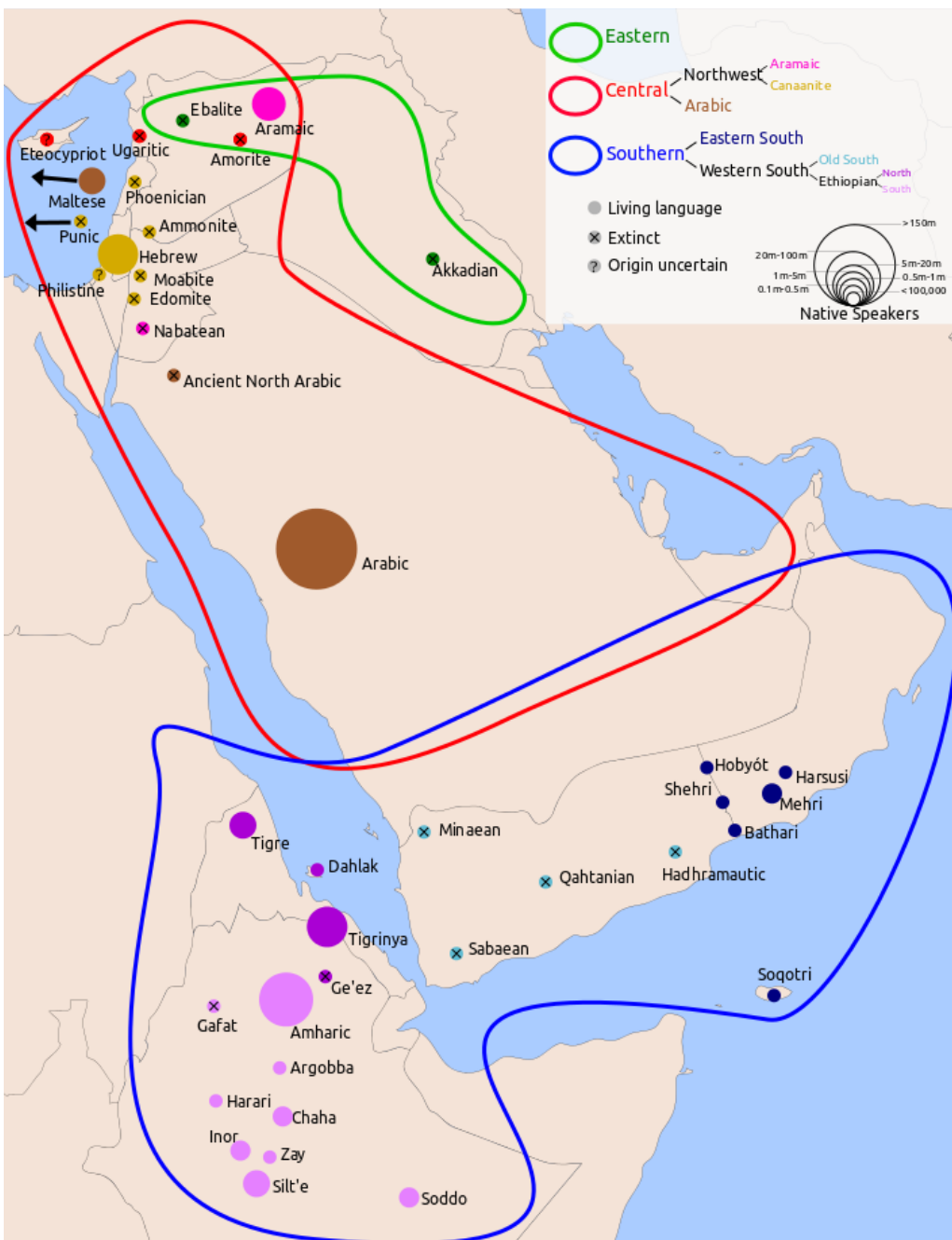
Sargon of Akkad (Sargon the Great)



B. Semites

1. A Semite is a member of any of various ancient and modern Semitic-speaking peoples, mostly originating in the Near East. It was proposed at first to refer to the languages related to Hebrew by Ludwig Schlözer. Through Eichhorn the name then came into general usage. The word "Semitic" is derived from Shem, one of the three sons of Noah in Genesis 5:32, Genesis 6:10, Genesis 10:21, or more precisely from the Greek derivative of that name, namely Σημ (Sēm); the noun form referring to a person is *Semite*.

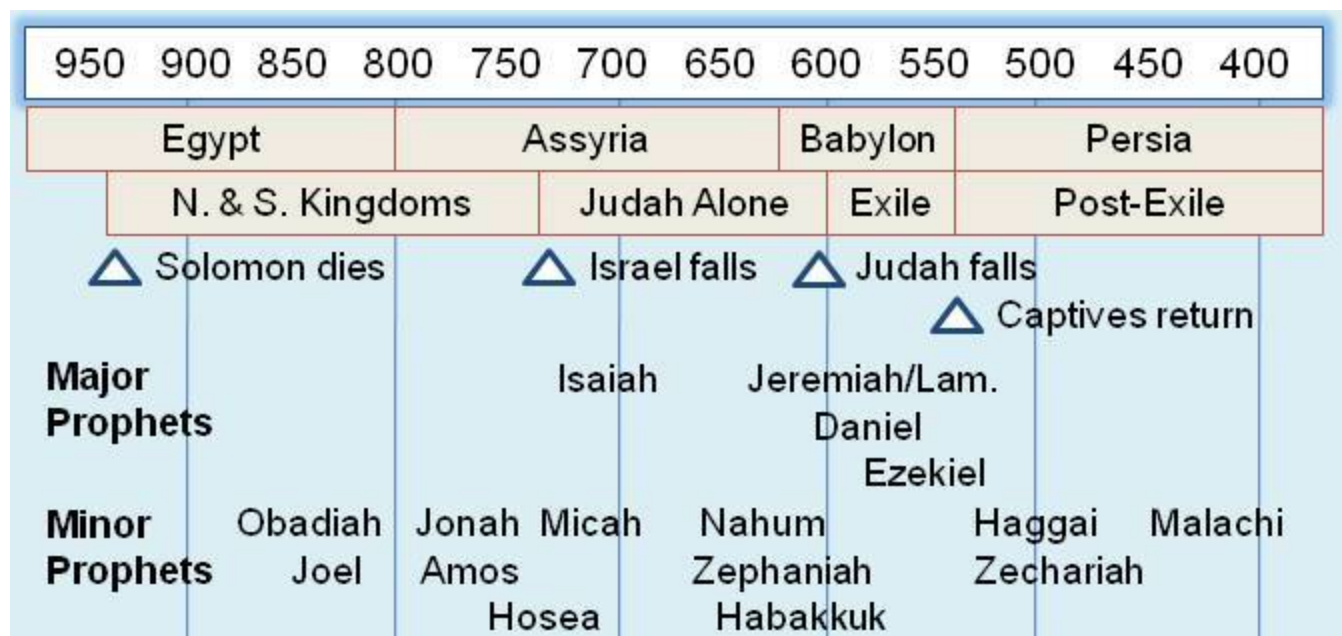
2. A large number of *Non-Semitic*-speaking peoples also inhabited the same general regions as the Semites; these included speakers of Language Isolates, *stand alone* languages not part of a greater language family, and unrelated to any other language, including to other isolates. These include Sumerians, Elamites, Hattians, Hurrians, Lullubi, Gutians, Urartians and Kassites. Indo-European language speakers included; Hittites, Greeks, Luwians, Mitanni, Kaskians, Phrygians, Lydians, Philistines, Persians, Medes, Scythians, Cimmerians, Parthians, Cilicians and Armenians, and Kartvelian speakers included Colchians, Tabalites and Georgians.



Family of
Semitic Languages

III. Chronology of the prophets

A. Exact dates of prophecies varies according to source.



IV. Archaeological Evidence for events around Jeremiah's prophecy

A. Setting the stage

Thomas L. Thompson, a leading minimalist scholar for example has written "There is no evidence of a United Monarchy, no evidence of a capital in Jerusalem or of any coherent, unified political force that dominated western Palestine, let alone an empire of the size the legends describe. We do not have evidence for the existence of kings named Saul, David or Solomon; nor do we have evidence for any temple at Jerusalem in this early period. What we do know of Israel and Judah of the tenth century does not allow us to interpret this lack of evidence as a gap in our knowledge and information about the past, a result merely of the accidental nature of archeology. There is neither room nor context, no artifact or archive that points to such historical realities in Palestine's tenth century. One cannot speak historically of a state without a population. Nor can one speak of a capital without a town. Stories are not enough."

These views are contentious with regard to modern evidence.

None of the conquests of David nor Solomon are mentioned in contemporary histories. Culturally, the Bronze Age collapse is otherwise a period of general cultural impoverishment of the whole Levantine region, making it difficult to consider the existence of any large territorial unit such as the Davidic kingdom, whose cultural features rather seem to resemble the later kingdom of Hezekiah or Josiah than the political and economic conditions of the 11th century. The biblical account makes no claim that Israel directly governed the areas included in their empires which are portrayed instead as tributaries. However, since the discovery of an inscription dating to the 9th or 8th century BCE on the Tel Dan Stele unearthed in the north of Israel, which may refer to the "house of David" as a monarchic dynast, [46] the debate has continued.[47] This is still disputed. There is a debate as to whether the united monarchy, the empire of King Solomon, and the rebellion of Jeroboam ever existed, or whether they are a late fabrication. The Mesha Stele, dated to c. 840 BCE, translated by most scholars as a reference to the House of David, and mentions events and names found in Kings.[48]

There is a problem with the sources for this period of history (the United Monarchy). **There are no contemporary independent documents other than the accounts of the Books of Samuel, which exhibits too many anachronisms to have been a contemporary account.** For example, there is men-

tion of later armor (1 Samuel 17:4–7, 38–39; 25:13), use of camels (1 Samuel 30:17), and cavalry (as distinct from chariotry) (1 Samuel 13:5, 2 Samuel 1:6), iron picks and axes (as though they were common, 2 Samuel 12:31), sophisticated siege techniques (2 Samuel 20:15). There is a gargantuan troop (2 Samuel 17:1), a battle with 20,000 casualties (2 Samuel 18:7), and a reference to Kushite paramilitary and servants, clearly giving evidence of a date in which Kushites were common, after the 26th Dynasty of Egypt, the period of the last quarter of the 8th century BCE.[49] The historicity of the Book of Samuel is dubious, and many scholars regard it as legendary in origin, particularly given the lack of evidence for the battles described involving the destruction of the Canaanite peoples (most scholars believe that the Israelites entered the land peacefully, as an offshoot from the Canaanites). The dramatization of real or legendary battles was common in the Ancient Near East, in this context it served to glorify Israel's national god.

B. Non-Biblical evidence for Solomon and first Temple

1. Historical evidence of King Solomon other than the biblical accounts is minimal. Josephus in *Against Apion*, citing Tyrian court records and Menander, gives a specific year during which King Hiram I of Tyre sent materials to Solomon for the construction of the temple.

[16] However, no material evidence indisputably of Solomon's reign has been found. Yigael Yadin's excavations at Hazor, Megiddo, Beit Shean and Gezer uncovered structures that he and others have argued date from his reign,[17] but others, such as Israel Finkelstein and Neil Silberman, argue that they should be dated to the Omride period, more than a century after Solomon.

2. According to Finkelstein and Silberman, authors of *The Bible Unearthed: Archaeology's New Vision of Ancient Israel and the Origin of Its Sacred Texts*,[19] at the time of the kingdoms of David and Solomon, Jerusalem was populated by only a few hundred residents or less, which is insufficient for an empire stretching from the Euphrates to Eilat. According to *The Bible Unearthed*, archaeological evidence suggests that the kingdom of Israel at the time of Solomon was little more than a small city state, and so it is implausible that Solomon received tribute as large as 666 talents of gold per year. Although both Finkelstein and Silberman accept that David and Solomon were real kings of Judah about the 10th century BC,[20] they claim that the earliest independent reference to the Kingdom of Israel is about 890 BC, and for Judah about 750 BC.

3. The archaeological remains that are considered to date from the time of Solomon are notable for the fact that Canaanite material culture appears to have continued unabated; there is a distinct lack of magnificent empire, or cultural development – indeed comparing pottery from areas traditionally assigned to Israel with that of the Philistines points to the Philistines having been significantly more sophisticated. However, there is a lack of physical evidence of its existence, despite some archaeological work in the area.[18] This is not unexpected because the area was devastated by the Babylonians, then rebuilt and destroyed several times.[25]

C. Nebuchadnezzar

1. The *Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle*, one of the series of *Babylonian Chronicles*, contains a description of the first decade of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar II. The tablet details Nebuchadnezzar's military campaigns in the west and has been interpreted to refer to both the Battle of Carchemish and the Siege of Jerusalem (597 BC).

2. The *Chronicle* does not refer to Jerusalem directly but mentions a "City of Iaahudu", interpreted to be "City of Judah". The *Chronicle* states:

In the seventh year (of Nebuchadnezzar-599 BC.) in the month Chislev (Nov/Dec) the king of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti (Syria/Palestine) he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar (16 March) he conquered the city and took the king (Jeconiah) prisoner. He installed in his place a king (Zedekiah) of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent forth to Babylon.
[6]

3. There are no extra-biblical sources for the Second Siege of Jerusalem, which has been dated to 587 BC.[1]The date was arrived at by comparing the evidence of the Chronicle to dates given in the Book of Ezekiel in connection to the year of captivity of Jeconiah (i.e. the first fall of Jerusalem).