

[Bible chronology main page](#)

[Español](#)

Bible Characters Mentioned Outside the Bible in Contemporary Sources

[Rick Aschmann](#)

Last updated:
6-Mar-2019 at 17:50
(See [History](#).)
© Richard P.
Aschmann

Contents

1. Lists of Identified Individuals
2. Why are none found earlier than the kings?
 - 2.1. The Pharaohs
 - 2.1.1. Couldn't we identify unnamed pharaohs based on the Egyptian king lists?
 - 2.1.2. Can we identify the later named pharaohs?
 - 2.2. The Four Kings of the East
 - 2.3. Other Theories

1. Lists of Identified Individuals

Many individuals mentioned in the Bible are also mentioned outside the Bible in contemporary (or fairly contemporary) archaeological sources. The following two links give a fairly complete list of these.

[List of biblical figures identified in extra-biblical sources
50 people in the bible confirmed archaeologically](#)

The interesting thing is that both of these sites evidently have the perspective that the Bible is *not* the [inerrant, inspired Word of God](#), whereas I believe it is.¹ So it might seem like such lists are not useful for the Bible-believer. On the contrary, they are quite useful: these are names that everyone can agree have been confirmed from extra-biblical sources, so they serve to confirm the reliability of the Bible in spite of having been compiled by unbelievers!

If you look at the chart near the top of the first site, you can sort it from earliest to latest by clicking twice in the title of the **Date (BCE)** column. This chart shows that the earliest attested name (according to the compiler of this list) is Omri the father of Ahab, whose reign (and dynasty) started in 880 B.C. However, if we look at the other site, it becomes clear that three different archaeological finds confirm that David was the founder of the long-running dynasty of the kings of Judah, so this makes David, whose reign probably started in 1010 B.C., the earliest attested name.

A few other kings can with some certainty be confirmed prior to Omri. The second site mentions various Egyptian pharaohs who are mentioned in the Bible by name, starting with [Sheshonq I](#) (Shishak in the Bible), whose reign started in 945 B.C. And the kings mentioned on the Melqart Stele probably reigned earlier than Omri, though their reign dates are quite uncertain (see my [Aram-Damascus](#) article).

Another source which is not contemporary but which may have relied on contemporary sources is [Josephus](#), and if we assume that his sources were reliable, then the kings of Tyre and Sidon can be established as far back as the reign of David (see the Early Kings of Tyre and Sidon chart starting at around 1000 B.C. on my [Bible chronology main page](#), and the link shown there).

But there's no one earlier! The only earlier figure attested is Balaam son of Beor in the [Deir Alla inscription](#). However, this dates from no earlier than 840 B.C., some 600 years after the time Balaam appears in the Bible starting in Numbers 22 in 1445 B.C., so this cannot be considered contemporary, though it can still probably be considered a confirmation of Balaam's existence.

From the period of the Israelite kings through the end of the New Testament there are dozens of individuals who can be identified, confirming their existence and time period, often to the year, and affirming the truth of the Bible.

2. Why are none found earlier than the kings?

But before the reign of King David not a single person mentioned in the Bible appears to be attested in any contemporary archaeological source. How can that be? If Abraham and his family existed, or Moses or any of the other major figures in Bible before the time of the kings, or even the various rulers with whom they interacted, wouldn't at least some of them show up in the archaeological record? Doesn't the fact that they do not cast doubt on the reliability of the Bible? Not at all. There are many reasons why they wouldn't show up in the archaeological record:

1. **Abraham and his family were fairly insignificant**, nomadic herders, and there would be no reason for any king to mention them in any royal inscription. The one exception might be Joseph, who was the second in command of Egypt, and though attempts have been made to connect him with names in Egyptian annals, no certain identification has been made.
2. Similarly, **most of the many kings mentioned are local rulers, kings of small city-states**, from Genesis through Judges, and it is not surprising that none of these are mentioned in any archaeological record.

Perhaps the best chance for one to be mentioned might seem to be in the [Amarna letters](#), since many [Canaanite rulers](#) are mentioned in them, but none have been identified. However, all of these letters were apparently written between 1358 and 1332 B.C., which would have been toward the beginning of the period of the Judges, during the judgeship of the first judge, Othniel. No rulers are mentioned in the Bible during this period.

3. **Rulers always preferred to record events that made them look good, and did not record those that did not**. For example, one might think that such dramatic events as the plagues or the crossing of the Red Sea in the account of Moses and the Exodus from Egypt could not have gone unnoticed, and obviously they did not. But for this reason it would be unlikely that either the current pharaoh or any subsequent ones would have wanted to record them. This same principle would apply to Abraham's defeat of the eastern kings (see [below](#)), Joshua's conquest of Canaan, and many other events.
4. Perhaps the most important reason for the lack of early evidence is that **the archaeological record is extremely limited**, and is mostly hit and miss. The records that have been found are necessarily only those that were recorded on non-perishable materials, mainly stone and clay tablets. And even in this case, clay tablets are very fragile and would seldom be preserved, except in exceptional cases like the Amarna letters mentioned above, which [were apparently abandoned when the capital was moved](#), and would subsequently have been buried in shifting sands. What we end up with is just the things that didn't get destroyed for one reason or another, and the farther back we go, the less information is available.
5. **Often rulers' names are not provided in the Bible record**, so even if their name appears in the archaeological record we would not know it. And sometimes there are particular reasons why rulers' names are not mentioned, as in the pharaohs in the next section.

2.1. The Pharaohs

What about the pharaohs? They were some of the most important rulers in the ancient Middle East. Many of them are mentioned by Moses in the Pentateuch, but not a single one is named, all are simply called Pharaoh. Why did Moses not name them? The simple answer is that this was the standard practice at the time Moses wrote, as stated in this article: biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/02/04/Amenhotep-II-and-the-Historicity-of-the-Exodus-Pharaoh.aspx:

As Hoffmeier states, "From its inception until the tenth century [BC], the term 'Pharaoh' stood alone, without juxtaposed personal name. In subsequent periods, the name of the monarch was generally added on." Therefore, Moses' practice of omitting pharaoh's throne-name next to the dynastic title, "pharaoh," followed the standard practice of the day in ancient Egypt, not coincidentally the site of his literary training.

Thus it is not until the time of Sheshonq I (Shishak) that we are given the actual name of the pharaoh in the text. From the point of view of creating an accurate Bible chronology this seems unfortunate, but Moses simply followed proper literary practice in doing so.

2.1.1. Couldn't we identify unnamed pharaohs based on the Egyptian king lists?

Well, yes, in theory we could, and in some cases we can. However, there are complications. The Egyptian King Lists are incomplete for many time periods, and even for those periods for which they are more complete, the dates are not always clear, as I explain in Aschmann.net/BibleChronology/index.html#SecularChronologies. Looking specifically at the mentions of various pharaohs in Genesis and Exodus (no additional pharaohs are mentioned again until 1 Kings):

• The pharaoh that Abraham visits in Genesis 12 cannot be identified, mainly because this occurs during the [First Intermediate Period of Egypt](#), a time of disorder when Egypt is divided into two kingdoms, Lower Egypt in the north and Upper Egypt in the south, and our knowledge of the pharaohs during this time is limited. We have more information about those of Upper Egypt than Lower Egypt, and Abraham would almost certainly have visited Lower Egypt, since it was much closer to Canaan.

• The pharaohs during Joseph’s enslavement and subsequent rule are much easier to identify, and in fact I have identified them on my [Bible chronology main page](#) as two pharaohs of the [twelfth dynasty](#), since both secular Egyptologists and the very detailed articles I cite by Charles Aling agree about which pharaohs were probably ruling at this time, following the High Chronology. Even so, we cannot be absolutely certain, since there are three competing chronologies among Egyptologists for this time period, as I explain at the link in the first paragraph of this section.

• The pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites is impossible to identify. In Exodus 1:8 the ESV says “Now there arose a new king over Egypt, who did not know Joseph”, which is the literal meaning of the Hebrew. However, the 1984 NIV says “Then a new king, who did not know *about* Joseph, came to power in Egypt”, and the 2011 NIV says “Then a new king, to whom Joseph *meant nothing*, came to power in Egypt”. The twelfth dynasty ended in 1782, according to the High Chronology provided by [BC Resources](#), but [this web page](#) gives an astonishing 6 different opinions about the dates of Amenemhat IV, the last male pharaoh of the dynasty, from 6 different sources, so apparently the dating for this period is even more uncertain than for the period discussed in the next paragraph, and none of these dates seem to match the BC Resources figures, so it is all very confusing. Assuming the BC Resources High Chronology figure of 1782, this turns out to be shortly after the death of Joseph in 1805, actually at the death of Levi. So it seems safe to assume that this pharaoh was not a twelfth dynasty pharaoh, but in a later dynasty. However, after the twelfth dynasty Egypt enters into the [Second Intermediate Period](#), and the pharaohs of this period are very hard to identify or date, at least until the Hyksos fifteenth dynasty some 120 years later. [BC Resources](#)’ chart suggests 1730 for the accession date of this pharaoh, but gives no name or dynasty or any reason for choosing this date. If this pharaoh ruled soon after the end of the twelfth dynasty, then this would make the period of slavery at most some 336 years long, from 1782 to 1446, far less than the 400 years given in Genesis 15:13. The 1730 figure would give even less, 284 years. And assumptions that this pharaoh was a Hyksos ruler (see chart below) would give even less, some 220 years. However, as I state in my comments on the [Bible chronology main chart](#) around 1730, it is possible that the Genesis 15:13 figure might be a round number referring to the entire time in Egypt, not just the time of actual slavery, in which case it is no help in identifying this pharaoh. So what can we say about this pharaoh? Not much!

• The pharaohs during the life of Moses are also complicated. Even so, various Christian authors have provided some good arguments that we should follow the High Chronology for this time period, even though the consensus among secular Egyptologists seems to prefer the Low Chronology for this period. In the following chart the columns outlined in red indicate five authors who seem to generally agree in their identifications of the pharaohs of this period, even though as far as I can tell they are independent of each other, though two of them do seem to rely on works by Eugene H. Merrill. Interestingly, all of them also identify **Hatshepsut** as pharaoh’s daughter who adopted Moses. **Hatshepsut** is famous as one of the few women who ever ruled as pharaoh, suggesting that she had a strong personality which would fit such an unusual action. (However, she would have been fairly young, so this casts some doubt on this possibility.) The grayed-out boxes represent Low Chronology dates, and the other boxes contain High Chronology dates. The odd thing about this is that no one’s dates exactly match the dates of anyone else (with one exception²), not even the different Wikipedia articles, which makes me think that dating this period depends on so many factors that all dates must be considered approximate. Because of this and sufficient uncertainty in general I have chosen not to show these pharaohs on my [Bible chronology main page](#), even though I think the evidence is fairly good. Descriptions in **gray** would be pharaohs not mentioned in the Bible.

Exodus text			Petrovich (also here)	Hansen	Bruce ←	Cross Examined	Know the Bible	Wikipedia High	BC High	BC Low	Wikipedia summary	Wikipedia Low max	Wikipedia Low min
1:8-14		pharaoh who enslaved the Israelites (father of Thutmose I)					Hyksos		1730	1730			
Aaron born 1529 (7:7)		(daughter of Thutmose I)	Hatshepsut born well <1529	1533/2	1535			1546-1526	1546-1524	1525-1504	1525-1504	1526-1506	
1:15-22		pharaoh who had Hebrew children killed	Thutmose I ³	1529-1516	1530-1517	1524-1518	1528-1508	1524-1518	1526-1513	1524-1518	1504-1492	1504-1492	1506-1493
Moses born 1526	2:1-2												
	2:3-10	pharaoh during Moses’ youth	Thutmose II	1516-1506	1517-1504	1518-1504		1518-1504	1513-1499	1518-1504	1492-1479	1492-1479	1493-1479
		pharaoh’s daughter who adopted Moses and later ruled as pharaoh/regent	Hatshepsut	1504-1484	1504-1483	1516-1482		1498-1483	1498-1478	?	1479-1457	1479-1458	1478-1458
Moses flees 1486	2:11-21	pharaoh from whom Moses fled	Thutmose III	1506-1452	1504-1450	1504-		1504-1450	1504-1450	1479-1425	1479-1425	1479-1425	
The Exodus conquest 1446	2:23-15:21	pharaoh of the Exodus	Amenhotep II	1455-1418	1452-1417		1450-1425	1453-1419	1454-1419	1450-1419	1425-1401	1427-1401	1427-1401
		pharaoh of the conquest	Thutmose IV	1418-1408	1417-1390			1419-1386		1419-1386	1401-1391	1401-1391	1401-1391
		pharaoh of start of Judges	Amenhotep III	1408-1369	1390-1352				1386-1349	1391-1353	1391-1353	1391-1353	1388-1351

Follows Merrill Follows Merrill

There are no pharaohs mentioned in the Bible after the pharaoh of the Exodus until 1 Kings (except doubtfully in 1 Chronicles 4:18 as mentioned below), which is interesting, since Egypt continued to be a great empire and even controlled Canaan for much of the intervening time. Perhaps the reputation of the plagues and the Exodus made them leave the Israelites alone for centuries

afterwards! In the following list and in the next section I am mostly following the *New Bible Dictionary*, even though I do not agree with their earlier chronology at all, since they follow the late Exodus theory.

- “The father of Bithiah, wife of Mered of the tribe of Judah (1 Ch. 4:18). The date of Bithiah and so of her royal father is uncertain, and therefore he has not yet been identified.” (*New Bible Dictionary*) Jewish tradition says that she is the same as pharaoh’s daughter in Exodus 2, but given her age at the Exodus (probably at least 90, since she was old enough to adopt Moses 80 years before), this is extremely improbable, and the possibility that she would have been permitted to marry an Israelite before the Exodus seems equally improbable. It is much more probable that she was a daughter of the pharaoh of the Exodus, but we simply do not know.

- “The pharaoh who received the young prince Hadad of Edom as a refugee from David and Joab’s devastation of the Edomites (1 Ki. 11:18-22), and married him off to his sister-in-law. The pharaoh in question would be late in the 21st Dynasty, i.e. Amenemope or Siamūn. The obscurities of 21st Dynasty chronology forbid any closer dating.” (*New Bible Dictionary*) This pharaoh is clearly different from Shishak mentioned later in 1 Kings 11, since he ruled during David’s reign. Also, Shishak is always given his own name and is never called pharaoh. If the pharaoh of 1 Kings 11:18 (who ruled in the latter part of David’s reign) is assumed to be the same as the pharaoh in verses 21 and 22 (who ruled at the beginning of Solomon’s sole reign in 970), then it was probably Siamūn, whose daughter married Solomon (see the following).

- The pharaoh whose daughter marries Solomon in 1 Kings 3 sometime between 971 when his rule began and 967 when he began building the temple is probably [Siamūn](#), though dates for 21st Dynasty pharaohs are uncertain according to the *New Bible Dictionary* and [BC Resources](#).

2.1.2. Can we identify the later named pharaohs?

And even though the pharaohs receive names in the Bible text starting with Shishak (Sheshonq I), identifying some of the later ones is still not easy. I have only shown two of these on my [Bible chronology main page](#), Shishak and Neco, since identifying the others or their reign dates proves problematic (and in any case their role is quite minor).

- Shishak is the first pharaoh whose name is given in the Bible, and he is never called pharaoh! Instead he is simply called “Shishak king of Egypt”. He is clearly [Sheshonq I](#). His dating is solid, covering the end of Solomon’s reign (when Jeroboam fled to him in 1 Kings 11:40, year uncertain) and the beginning of Rehoboam’s reign (when in 525 B.C., Rehoboam’s fifth year, he attacked Israel and carried off the temple and palace treasures, 1 Kings 14:25-26 and 2 Chronicles 12:2-9). I have given him his traditional dates, rather than the innovative Wikipedia ones, though this doesn’t affect the Bible’s dates.

- “So, king of Egypt” in 2 Kings 17:4 might be an abbreviation of [Osorkon IV](#), contemporary of king Hoshea.

- It is unclear which pharaoh was referred to in 2 Kings 18:21, whom the Assyrian general said that Hezekiah was trusting in, since there is apparently doubt as to who was pharaoh at this time (701 B.C.), though it was **the** same year as the following paragraph. (The *New Bible Dictionary* does not mention this pharaoh.)

- “Tirhakah. The pharaoh [Taharqa](#) of Egypt’s 25th (‘Ethiopian’) Dynasty; he reigned 26 years, c. 690-664 B.C. 2 Kings 19:9 (= Is. 37:9) appears to indicate that Tirhakah led those Egyptian forces which *Sennacherib had to defeat at *Eltekeh in 701 B.C. while attacking Hezekiah of Judah. If so, Tirhakah was then only the army-commander, as he was not king until 11 years later.” (*New Bible Dictionary*) In the Bible he is not called pharaoh but “king of Cush”, possibly in reference to his future role as pharaoh, of a Cushite dynasty.

- Pharaoh [Neco II](#), 610-595 B.C.:

“In 609 B.C. ... Neco II marched into Syria to assist Aššur-uballit II, last king of Assyria, against Babylon. But Josiah of Judah forced a battle with Neco at Megiddo; this delay of Egyptian help for the Assyrians sealed their fate at the cost of Josiah’s own life (2 Ki. 23:29; 2 Ch. 35:20-24). On his return south, Neco deposed and deported Josiah’s son Jehoahaz and appointed instead another son, Jehoiakim, as vassal-king in Jerusalem, which was obliged to pay tribute to Egypt (2 Ki. 23:31-35; 2 Ch. 36:1-4). Egypt claimed Palestine as her share of the former Assyrian empire, but in the battle of Carchemish, in May/June 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar stormed that Egyptian outpost and pursued the remnants of the Egyptian forces through Syria as they scurried home to Egypt; Judah thus exchanged an Egyptian for a Bab. master (2 Ki. 24:1,7).” (*New Bible Dictionary*) This battle is also mentioned in Jer. 46:2ff.

“Neco wisely desisted from any further Palestinian adventures. But *the Bab. Chronicle* shows that in 601 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar marched against Egypt; Neco met him in open battle, and both sides suffered heavy losses. Nebuchadnezzar therefore had to spend the next year at home in Babylon to refit his army. This Egyptian rebuff for the Babylonians perhaps tempted Jehoiakim to revolt against Babylon as recorded in 2 Ki. 24:1, but no help came from neutral Egypt.” (*New Bible Dictionary*)

2.2. The Four Kings of the East

In Genesis 14:1-5 we meet an alliance of four kings:

¹ In the days of **Amraphel** king of **Shinar**, **Arioch** king of **Ellasar**, **Chedorlaomer** king of **Elam**, and **Tidal** king of **Goim**, ² these kings made war with Bera king of Sodom, Birsha king of Gomorrah, Shinab king of Admah, Shemeber king of Zeboim, and the king of Bela (that is, Zoar). ³ And all these joined forces in the Valley of Siddim (that is, the Salt Sea). ⁴ Twelve years they had served Chedorlaomer, but in the thirteenth year they rebelled. ⁵ In the fourteenth year Chedorlaomer and the kings who were with him came...

These look like fairly important kings, and it might seem surprising if none of them could be identified in archaeological finds.

Verse 5 suggests that Chedorlaomer is the leader of the group. Elam was an important kingdom at this point, and we actually have a long list of Elamite kings in the archaeological record. So is he on the list? No. But read on.

The name is unquestionably Elamite, as the *New Bible Dictionary* entry makes clear:

Chedorlaomer (Heb. *kedōrlā'ōmer*; Gk. *Chodolla(o)gomor*). The king of Elam, leader of a coalition with *Amraphel, *Arioch and *Tidal, who marched against Sodom and Gomorrah, which had rebelled against him after 12 years as his vassals (Gn. 14:1-17). He was pursued by Abraham who slew him near Damascus (v. 15).

This ruler has not been certainly identified, but the name is unquestionably Elamite *kutir/kudur*, 'servant', usually followed by a divine name, e.g. *Lagamar* (used in Old Bab. names from Mari). Albright identifies Chedorlaomer with King *Kitir-Nahhunti I*, c. 1625 B.C. (BASOR 88, 1942, pp. 33ff.) but the equation of *Nahhundi* with *La'omer* is unproven as is the complex view, based on the so-called 'Chedorlaomer' tablets in the British Museum (17th century B.C.) in which Astour identifies KU.KU. KU.MAL as a king of Elam and representing the 'East', taking Gn. 14 as a late Midrash (in *Biblical Motifs*, 1966, pp. 65-112 (ed. A. Altmann)). The *Ebla texts, however, imply a possibility of early contact between Syria and Elam. D. J. Wiseman.

So why can't we find the name on the Elamite king list? According to my [Bible chronology](#), the events in Genesis 14 would have occurred between 2091 and 2081 B.C. If we go to the king list at [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rulers_of_Elam#Elamite_Empire, c. 2700 – 650 BC](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_rulers_of_Elam#Elamite_Empire,_c._2700_-_650_BC), and look at this time period, what do we find? We find "The unnamed king of Simashki" at precisely this time period (around 2100), who apparently ruled all of Elam. So this could be Chedorlaomer, though we cannot prove that he is, since as I have said with all other king lists, dating is not absolute, as is shown by the large number of question marks in place of dates on the list, as well as the dates given for contemporaries of certain kings that are not even close to the dates given for the latter.

The other kings have not been identified either, and for them there isn't even a king list to consult. Further info is available at en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Siddim#Identifying_the_kings.

2.3. Other Theories

Even so, many find this situation very frustrating, and some feel like we are missing something. A few have even gone to the lengths of making some kind of major adjustment to the accepted timeline of the ancient Middle East ([such as it is](#)) or to the figures in the Bible in order to fit in individuals who they think fit the descriptions of Biblical figures. Frankly, I don't think they accomplish their goal, since they still don't find names that actually match. The most famous of these is David Rohl, whose [New Chronology](#) has made a lot of noise, though it hasn't gained much acceptance anywhere. His strategy has been to adjust the secular timeline, rather than the Bible's. Others adjust the Bible timeline (generally suggesting errors in the Bible text, which undermines inerrancy). Either way, I find none of them reliable or even helpful, and some are frankly crackpots, so I won't provide any links to them.

¹ This biblicalarchaeology.org site should not be confused with biblearchaeology.org. The latter is a site that *does* believe in the inerrancy and reliability of Scripture, whereas the former, though styled as a popular site providing archaeological information about the Bible, does not.

² BC Resources' Low Chronology dates do match the Wikipedia Summary dates. The Wikipedia High dates and the Low maximum and Low minimum dates are taken from the individual articles about the pharaohs.

³ The name Thutmose has the variants Thutmosis and Tuthmosis.