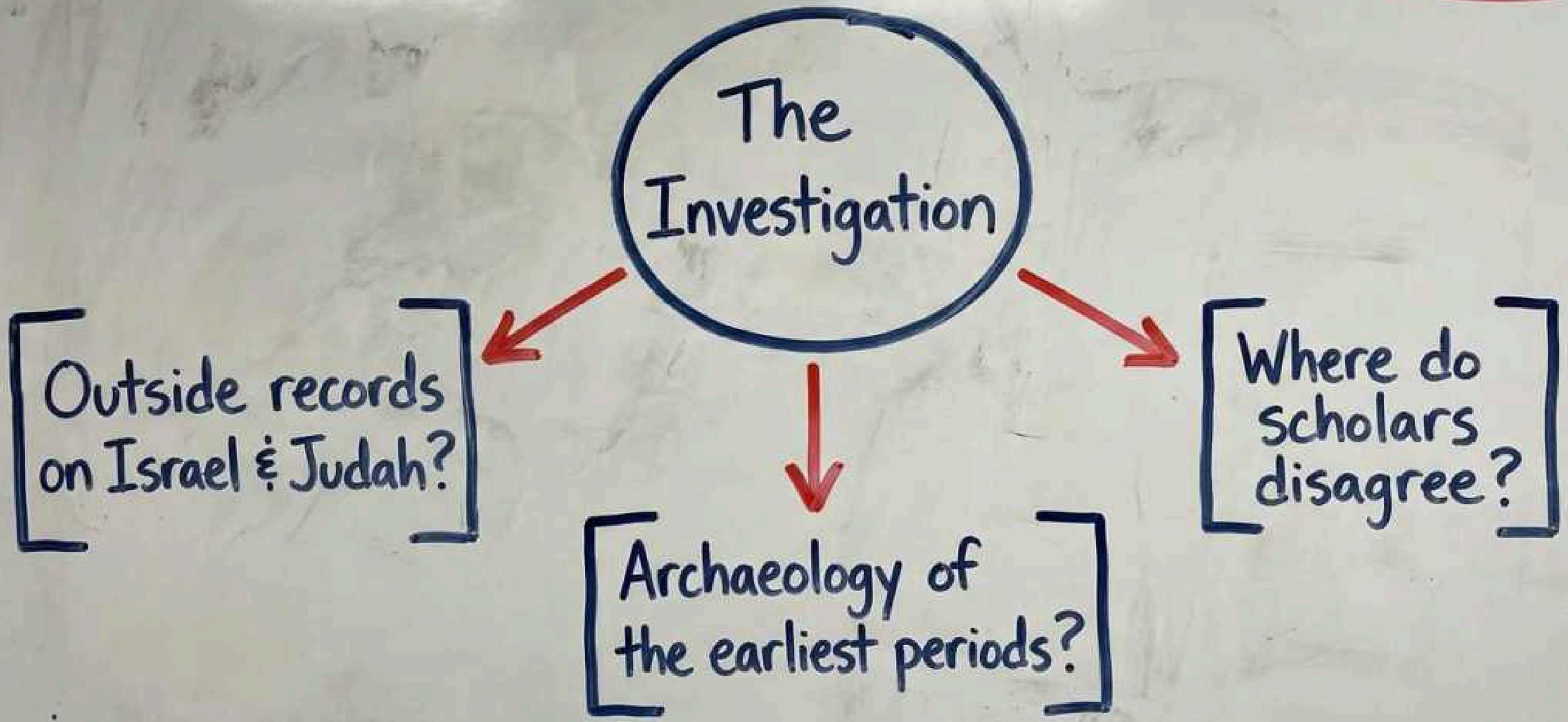
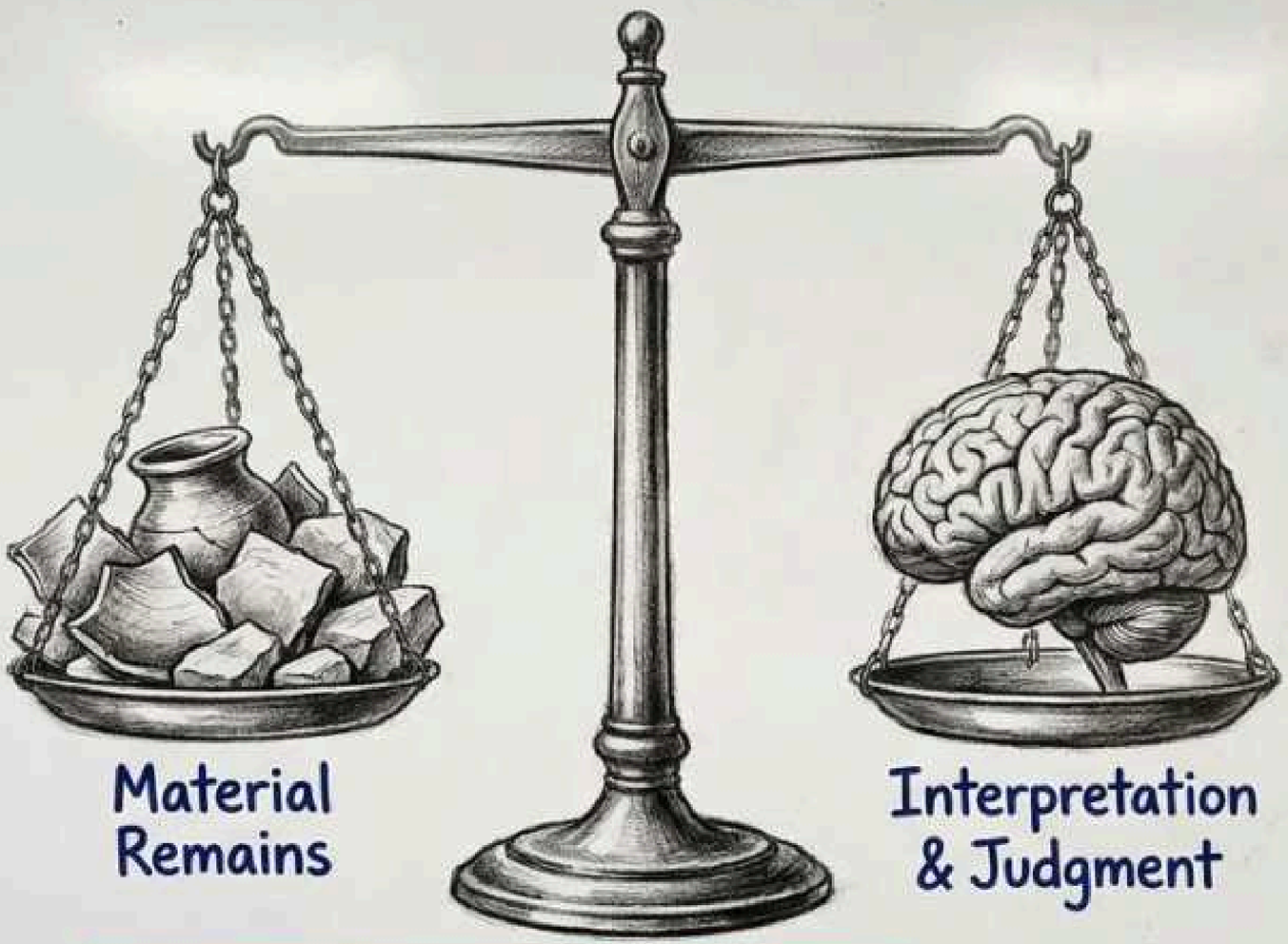
¶ 4.1


The Investigation
Outside records on Israel & Judah?
Archaeology of the earliest periods?
Where do scholars disagree?

¶4.2



Material Remains

Interpretation & Judgment



The Gold Standard: Inscriptions name independent people, allowing direct comparison with biblical accounts by neutral neighbors.

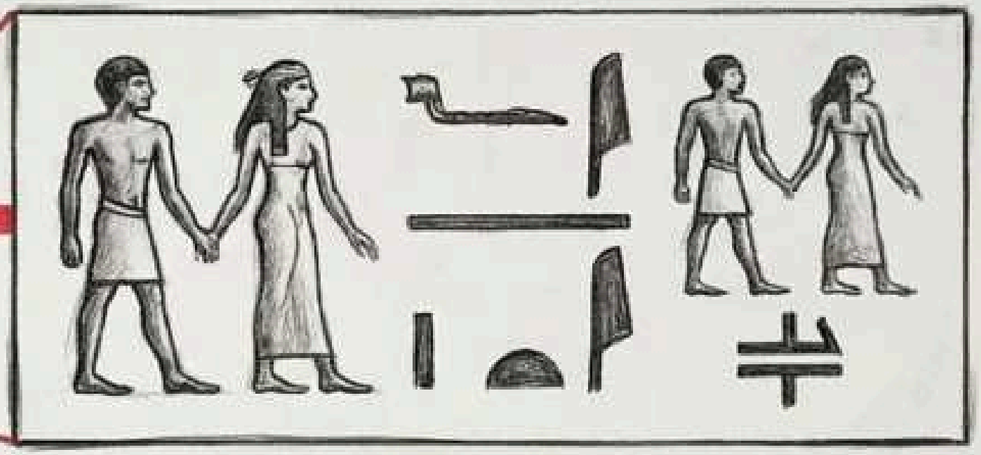
The Merneptah Stele

¶ 4.3

Date: ~1208 BCE

Earliest outside mention of Israel.

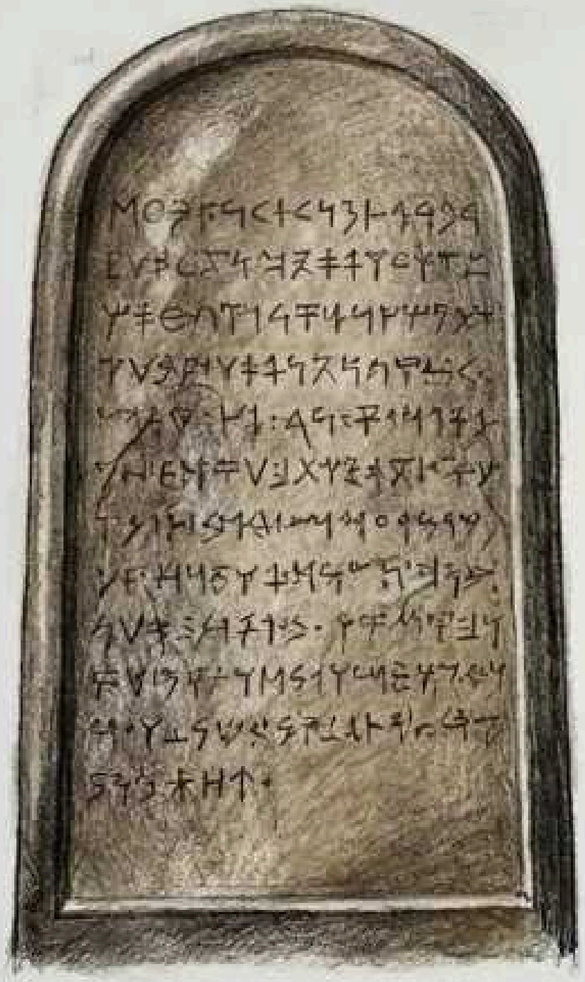




Hieroglyphic determinative marks
Israel as a People, not a City.

Conclusion: By the late 13th century BCE, a group called Israel lived in Canaan (broadly fitting biblical timelines, but offering few specific details).

¶ 4.4



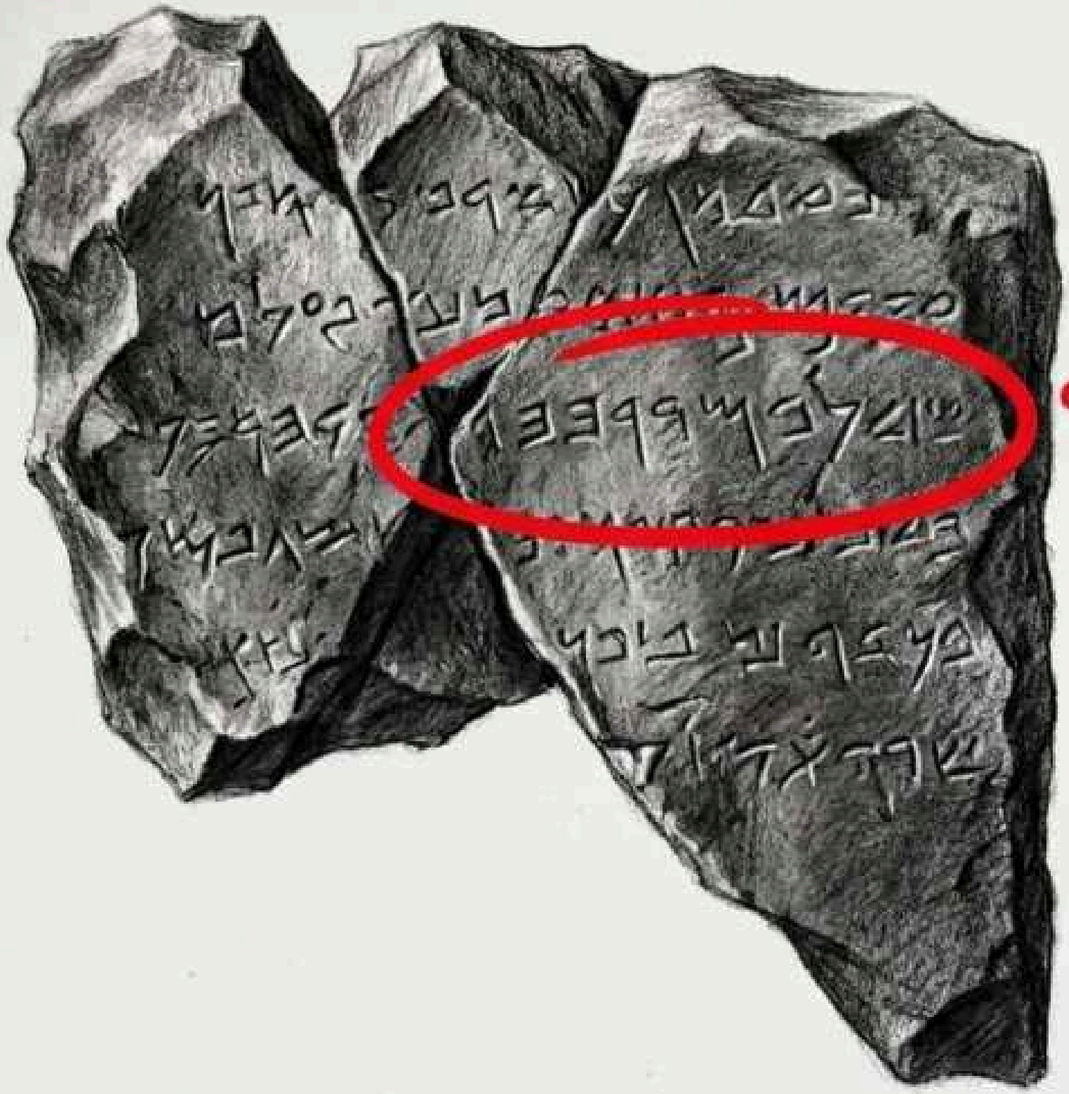
Date: ~840 BCE.
Mentions Omri (King of Israel) and the name of Israel's God.



Date: 841 BCE.
Depicts a king of Israel (Jehu) bowing.

Strong Evidence: Both Omri and Jehu are independently named in the Bible and these foreign monuments.

¶ 4.5



"House of David"
(9th Century BCE)

Found in 1993/1994 by excavators in northern Israel. Boasts of victory over the king of Israel and the house of David.

Proves ⟶ A ruling dynasty existed.

Does NOT Prove → The specific historical details of David's reign.

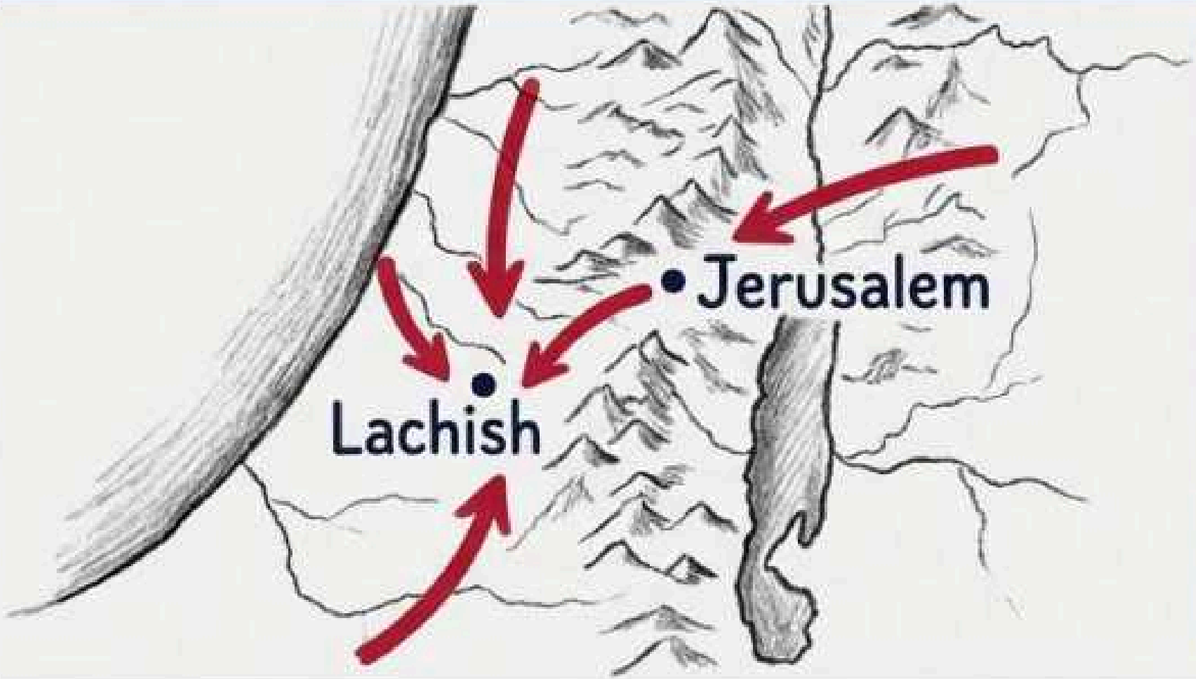
¶ 4.6



701 BCE Invasion
Sennacherib's Prism



Sennacherib's boast: shut up King Hezekiah in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage" (listing tribute paid).





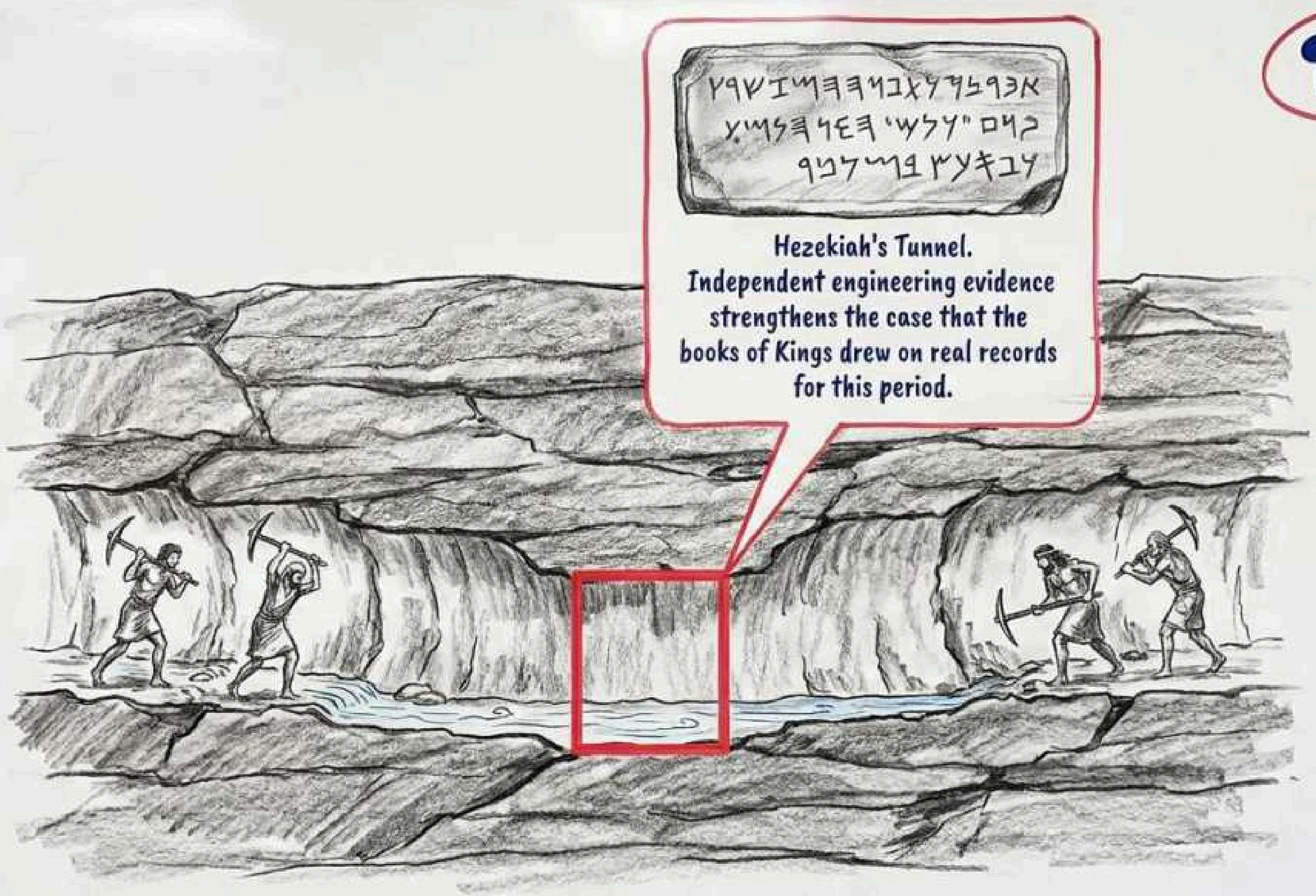
Lachish Relief (British Museum)

¶ 4.7

Biblical Account	Assyrian Account
Crisis in 2 Kings & Isaiah.	Sennacherib's records.
Ending: Assyrian army struck down and withdrew.	Ending: Hezekiah paid tribute; Sennacherib did not take the city.

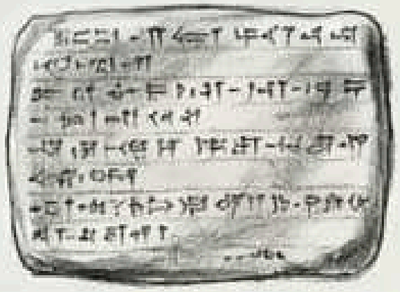


¶ 4.8


Hezekiah's Tunnel.
Independent engineering evidence strengthens the case that the books of Kings drew on real records for this period.

¶ 4.9

597 BCE



Babylonian Chronicle. Nebuchadnezzar captures Jerusalem, installs new kn king (in king!) (matches 2 Kings).

Mid-Exile



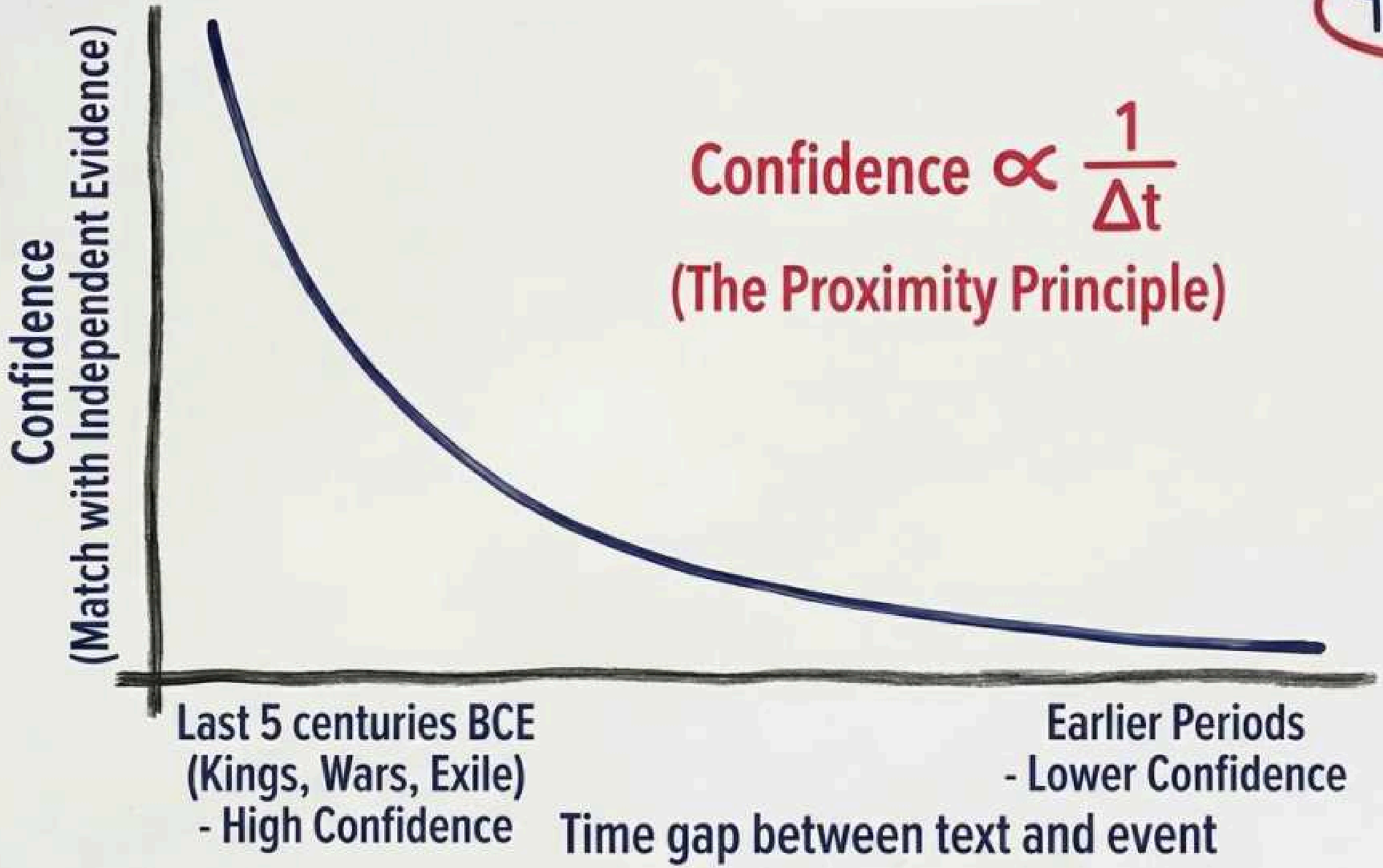
Lists King Jehoiachin of Judah among those fed in Babylon.

539 BCE



Persian policy allows exiled peoples to return and restore temples (fits Ezra, though Jews not explicitly named).

¶ 4.10



$$\text{Confidence} \propto \frac{1}{\Delta t}$$

(The Proximity Principle)

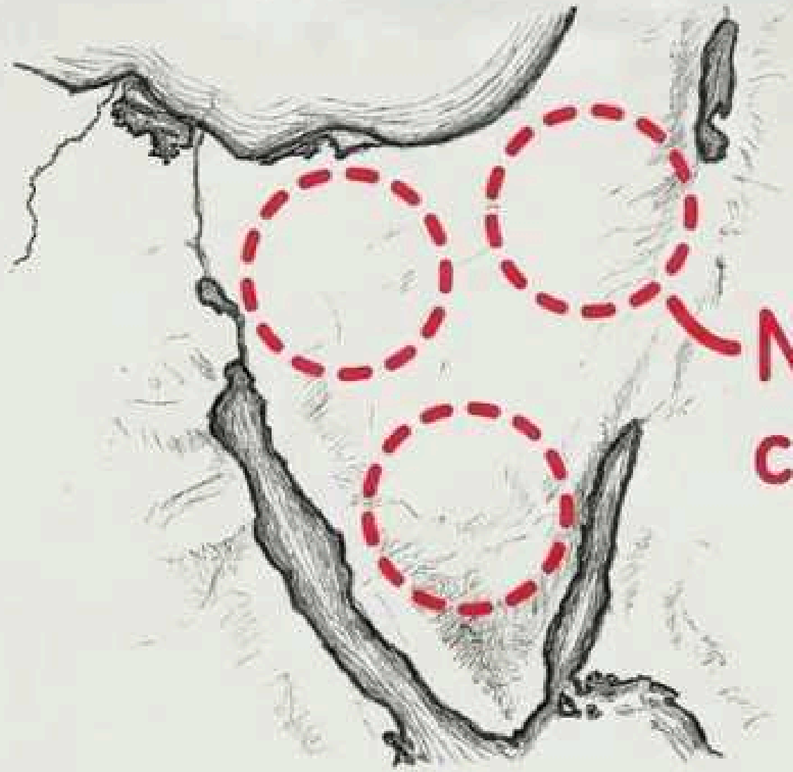
¶ 4.11



- Details like camels and Philistines fit later centuries.
- Zero inscriptions name Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob.

Most historians view these as traditions preserving early Canaan memory, not strict, confirmable history.

¶ 4.12



No large camps found.

Argument A	Argument B
Small group memory expanded into a national myth.	Egyptian customs and specific place names perfectly fit the narrative.

¶ 4.13



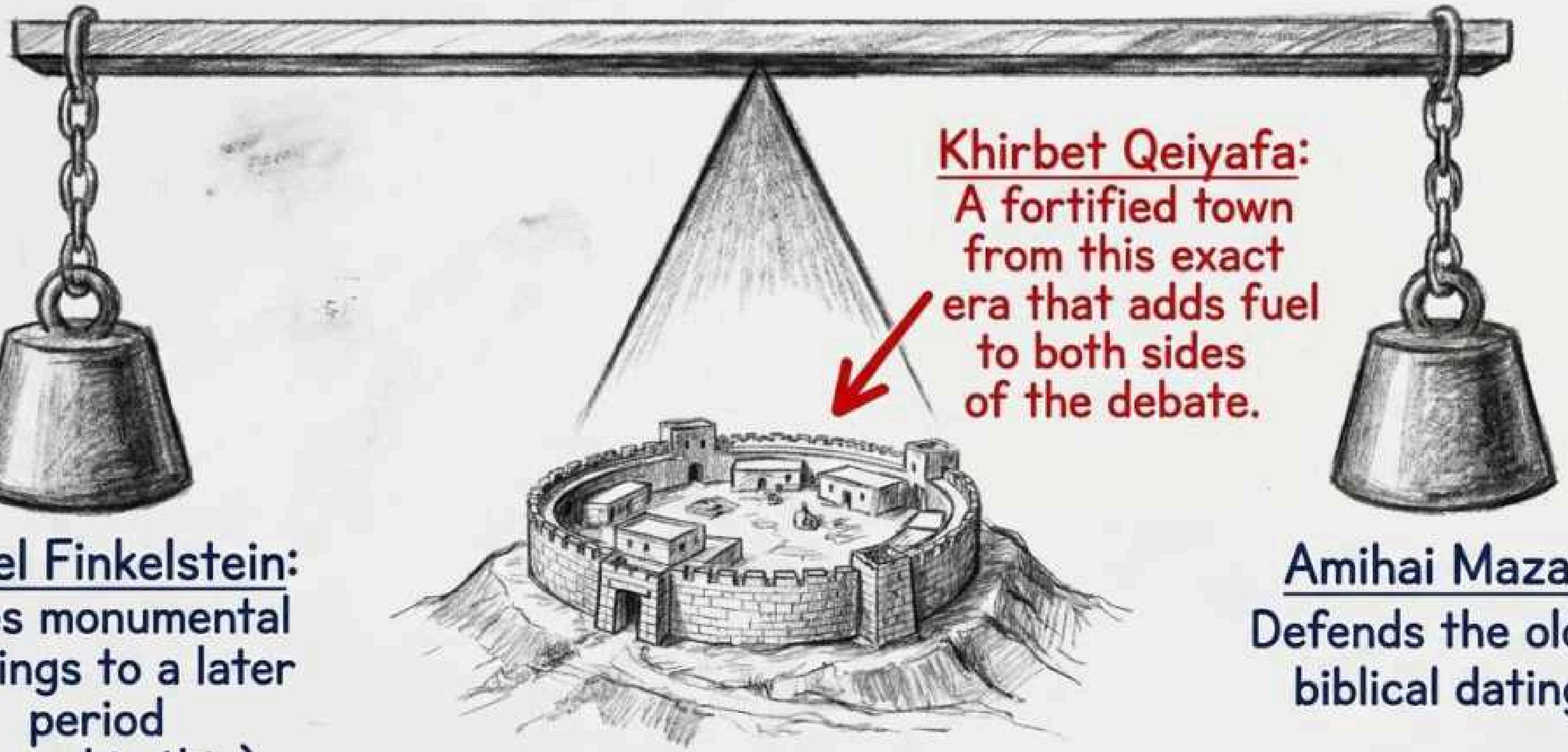
Kenyon's Excavation:
Walls fell ~1,000 years before the usual dates for Joshua.



Demographic Shift Model:
Israel emerged mostly from within Canaan as villages spread around 1200 BCE (can combine with traditions of newcomers).

Jerusalem ~ 1000 BCE (David & Solomon)

¶ 4.14



Khirbet Qeiyafa:
A fortified town from this exact era that adds fuel to both sides of the debate.

Israel Finkelstein:
Dates monumental buildings to a later period (Record is thin).

Amihai Mazar:
Defends the older, biblical dating.

¶ 4.15

Minimalists (Copenhagen School)

Bible tells us little about Israel before the 8th Century BCE.

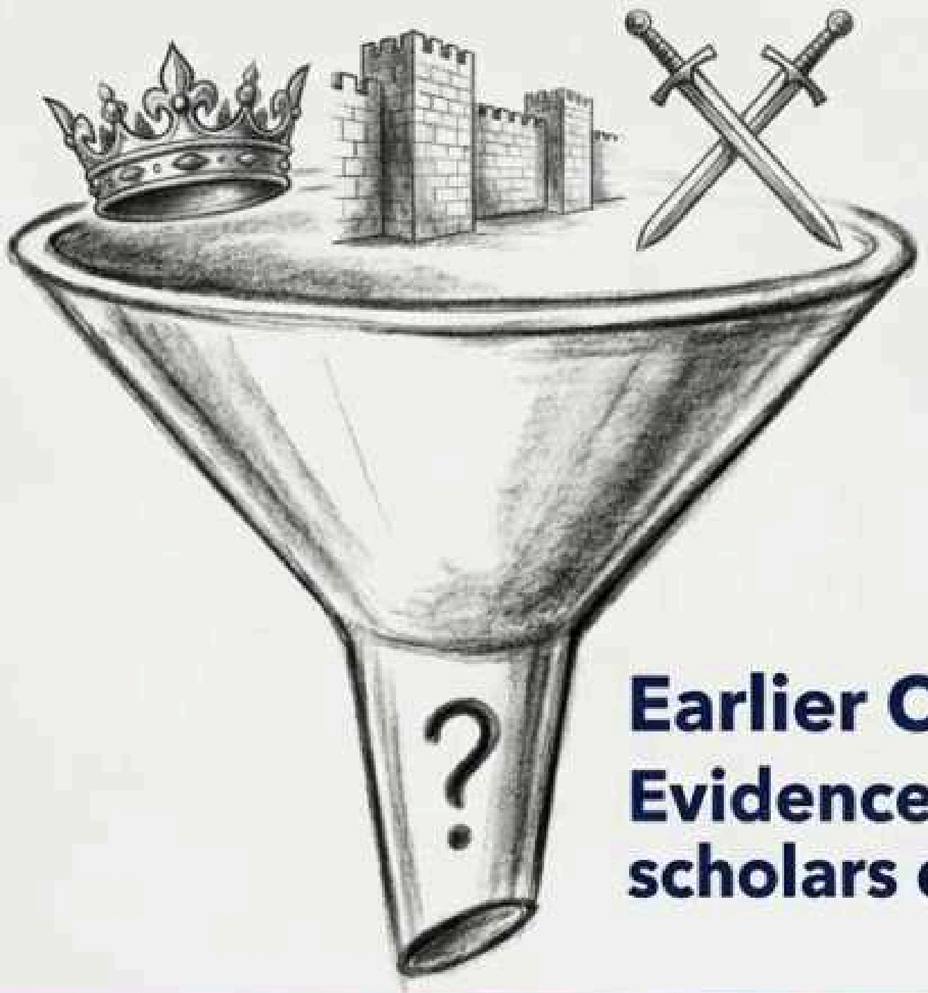
The Middle Ground

Accepts that real memories exist within texts that were shaped much later.

Maximalists (Kenneth Kitchen)

The biblical narrative is historically sound.

¶ 4.16



9th Century BCE Onward

Independent records often agree (real kings, cities, wars).

Earlier Centuries

Evidence is thin; honest scholars disagree.

A stronger or weaker conclusion needs more evidence than we now have.

¶ 4.17



Date: 586 BCE (Lachish Ostraca)

Ostracon Translation

"Watching for the fire signals of Lachish, because I can no longer see Azekah."

Biblical Record (Jeremiah)

Mentions Lachish and Azekah as the very last fortified cities standing.

Excavators confirm: Burned layers and arrowheads found in Jerusalem from this exact destruction.

¶ 4.18



The Amarna Letters

(14th Century BCE, predating Israel's kings. Found in Egypt, 1887.)

- **Canaanite rulers (including Jerusalem) writing to Pharaoh asking for help.**
- **Shows a land of small city-states under Egyptian control.**

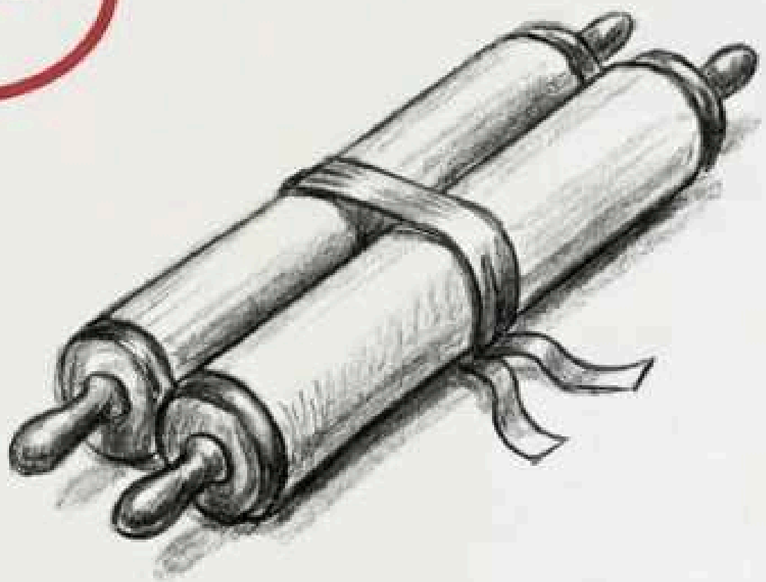
The Paradox: Zero mention of Israel. Proves that a period can be perfectly documented without telling us about the specific people we are looking for.

¶ 4.19

Filtered and Shaped to Teach Religious Lessons (Common ancient historian practice).



Lost Source Records
(e.g., 'Annals of the Kings')



Kings and Chronicles

Next: The New Testament
(Writings standing much closer to the events).