

The Black Obelisk

ARCHAEOLOGICAL finds often cast light on the world and events that we read about in the Bible, and they provide evidence that the Bible record is accurate.

Much of the action in the Old Testament takes place in the Israelite Kingdom, which lasted from around 1000 to 600 BC. There are many mentions of Israelite kings in the archaeological record – but as far as we know there’s a contemporary picture of only one of them. This is king Jehu, and his picture is on the Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser.

The Black Obelisk is a 2-metre high limestone block, which was found in northern Iraq in 1846. Its four faces are intricately carved with bas reliefs and captions commemorating the deeds of the Assyrian king Shalmaneser III (reigned 858-824 BC).

One of the reliefs shows king Jehu bowing with his face to the ground before Shalmaneser. The caption reads:

Tribute of Jehu, son of Omri: I received from him silver, gold, a golden bowl, a golden vase with pointed bottom, golden tumblers, golden buckets, tin, a staff for a king [and] spears.

The story of Jehu is in the Bible in 2 Kings 9–10. He was anointed king by God’s prophet and tasked with bringing the



corrupt and faithless nation of Israel back to God. He started his reign with enthusiasm for God, but the record says that his heart was not in it and his 28-year reign ended with disappointment.

The LORD began to cut off parts of Israel; and Hazael [king of Syria] conquered them in all the territory of Israel from the Jordan eastward...(2 Kings 10:32–33).

During this time Jehu did not turn to God for help. Instead it appears from the archaeological record that he tried to buy help from Shalmaneser the king of Assyria.

We can see how the Bible and archaeology agree.

The Black Obelisk is on display in the British Museum.

Chris Parkin