

Lesson 9: Jeremiah and the Last Days of Judah



PROFILE-EASTON ILLUSTRATED DICTIONARY

Jeremiah - One of the "greater prophets" of the Old Testament, son of Hilkiah (q.v.), a priest of Anathoth (Jer 1:1; Jer 32:6). He was called to the prophetic office when still young (Jer 1:6), in the thirteenth year of Josiah (B.C. 628). He greatly assisted Josiah in his work of reformation (2Ki 23:1-25). The death of this pious king was bewailed by the prophet as a national calamity (2Ch 35:25). In the fourth year of Jehoiakim he was commanded to write the predictions given to him, and to read them to the people on the fast-day. This was done by Baruch his servant in his stead and produced much public excitement. The roll was read to the king. In his recklessness he seized the roll, and cut it to pieces, and cast it into the fire, and ordered both Baruch and Jeremiah to be apprehended. Jeremiah procured another roll and wrote in it the words of the roll the king had destroyed, and "many like words" besides (Jer 36:32).

He remained in Jerusalem, uttering from time to time his words of warning, but without effect. He received a message from God announcing that the Chaldeans would come again and take the city and burn it with fire (Jer 37:7, 8). He was confined till the city was taken (B.C. 588). The Chaldeans released him, and showed him great kindness, allowing him to choose the place of his residence. He accordingly went to Mizpah with Gedaliah, who had been made governor of Judea.

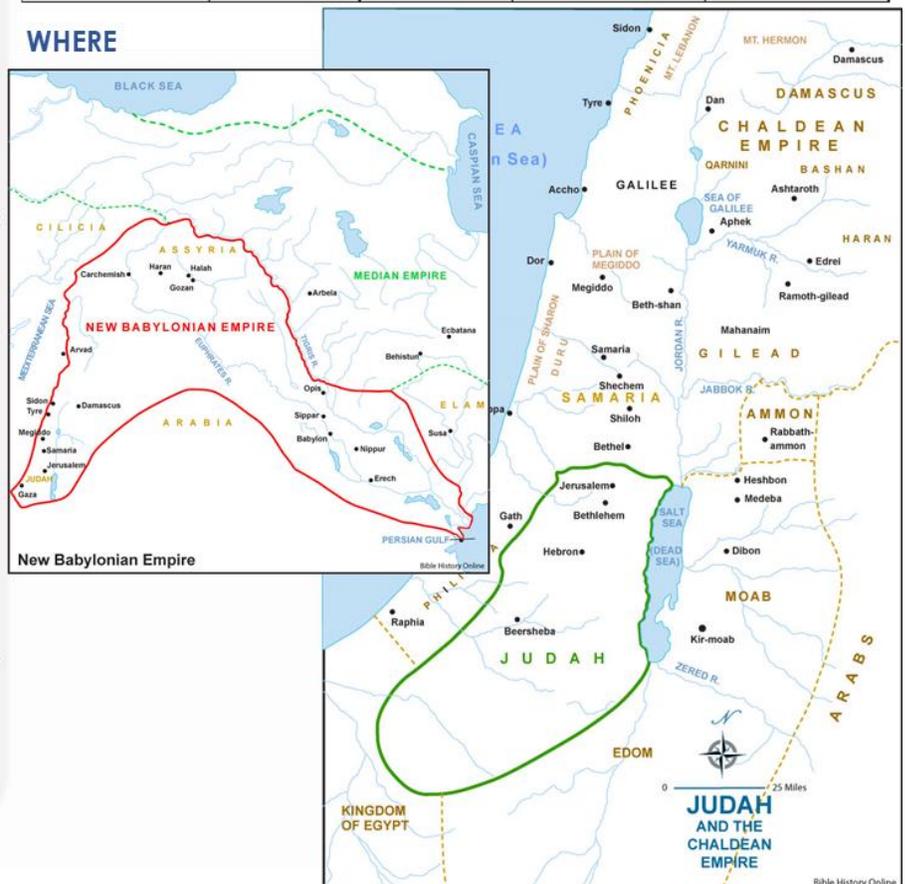
Zedekiah - The last king of Judah and third son of Josiah. The kingdom was a tributary to Nebuchadnezzar; but, despite the strong remonstrances of Jeremiah and others, as well as the example of Jehoiachin, he threw off the yoke of Babylon, and entered into an alliance with Hophra, king of Egypt. This brought up Nebuchadnezzar, "with all his host" (2Ki 25:1), against Jerusalem. During this siege, which lasted about eighteen months, "every worst woe befell the devoted city, which drank the cup of God's fury to the dregs" (2Ki 25:3; Lam 4:4, 5, 10).

JEREMIAH AND THE LAST DAYS OF JUDAH

WHEN IN TIME

Archaeological Periods Levant	Chronological Date	Historical Events	Biblical Historical Event	Bible Periods
Late Bronze Age III	1300-1200 BC			Judges
Iron Age IA	1200-1150 BC	Philistine Invasion of Egypt 1177 BC		Judges
Iron Age IB	1150-1000 BC			Judges/United Kingdom
Iron Age IIA	1000-925 BC	Syrian Threat	Shishak Invasion ~925 BC	United Kingdom
Iron Age IIB	925-722 BC	Assyrian Empire		Divided Kingdom
Iron Age IIC	722-586 BC	Assyrian Empire	Fall of Northern Israel 722 BC	Judah Alone
Babylonian Period	586-538 BC	Babylonian Empire	Fall of Jerusalem 586 BC 1 st Return to Judah 538 BC	Exile/Captivity

WHERE



Josiah's Reforms and Tragic Death 2 Kings 23:1-30

Josiah (640-609 B.C.) began to reign at age eight after the assassination of his father. In his eighteenth year of reign (621 B.C.) Josiah initiated repairs on the temple, the book of the law found among temple rubble (22:1-10). Josiah renewed the covenant and celebrated the Passover in an unprecedented way. Josiah tore down the shrine at Bethel, which Jeroboam had erected three centuries earlier. Josiah is given the highest commendation of all the kings: "Neither before nor after Josiah was there a king like him who turned to the Lord as he did" (23:25). Josiah attempted to block Pharaoh Neco's efforts to aid the faltering Assyrians in their last stand against Babylonian armies and was killed..

Mark what you expected to be added to Bible by archaeology?

Archaeology can add to Bible Event:	
Build confidence in general trustworthiness, historical nature and reliability of Bible	
Confirm events described in Bible	
Clarify/Correct/Provide Understanding about our assumptions and conclusions about the past	
Complement or Enhance our knowledge of events, customs and people	
Prove a given event or people mentioned in the Bible	

Jehoiachin and Zedekiah of Judah 2 Kings 24:1-20

The balance of power turned to the Babylonians in 605 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar defeated armies of Egypt and Assyria at Carchemish in North Syria (24:7). After three years of vassalage to Nebuchadnezzar (605-602 B.C.), Jehoiakim attempted an insurrection that failed. Jehoiachin, Jehoiakim's son, was eighteen when he ascended the throne at his father's death (598 B.C.). He too rebelled, and Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem. Nebuchadnezzar installed Mattaniah, Jehoiachin's uncle, as king and renamed him "Zedekiah"

Mark what you expected to be added to Bible by archaeology?

Archaeology can add to Bible Event:	
Build confidence in general trustworthiness, historical nature and reliability of Bible	
Confirm events described in Bible	
Clarify/Correct/Provide Understanding about our assumptions and conclusions about the past	
Complement or Enhance our knowledge of events, customs and people	
Prove a given event or people mentioned in the Bible	

The Destruction of Jerusalem 2 Kings 25:1-30

Zedekiah (597-586 B.C.), in spite of Jeremiah's warnings (compare Jer 37-39; 52), led a final rebellion against the Babylonians in 588 B.C. After a lengthy siege and resulting famine, the city fell July 586 B.C.

Mark what you expected to be added to Bible by archaeology?

Archaeology can add to Bible Event:	
Build confidence in general trustworthiness, historical nature and reliability of Bible	
Confirm events described in Bible	
Clarify/Correct/Provide Understanding about our assumptions and conclusions about the past	
Complement or Enhance our knowledge of events, customs and people	
Prove a given event or people mentioned in the Bible	

A Broken Jar and a Disillusioned Prophet (Jeremiah 19:1-20:18).

The Lord instructed Jeremiah to buy a jar from a potter and then take some of the civil leaders and priests out to the Valley of Ben Hinnom (compare 7:31). Once there the prophet was to pronounce scathing judgment against Jerusalem because of the idolatry and child sacrifice its residents carried on in the valley. He was then to break the jar, illustrating what God would do to the city. This idolatrous valley would become a burial ground for the slaughtered idolaters. From the bible passage what archaeology remains might give us further insight into the passage?



Digging Deeper into Bible and Archaeology – The following material is provided as reference material or as a deeper discussion and is optional for preparation for the class.

Rarely do Biblical texts and extra-Biblical materials supplement one another so well as those that describe the last two decades before the Babylonian destruction of Jerusalem, which marked the end of the Judahite state in 586 B.C. We can trace the historical process in time units much more minute than is generally feasible for the Israelite period—in terms of a specific year, month and, sometimes, day. The small state of Judah was caught in the middle, located at the particularly sensitive crossroads linking Asia (first Assyria Empire then the Neo-Babylonian Empire) and Egypt. Depending on both internal and external decisions, its very existence was at stake. Jeremiah expresses the idea metaphorically: “And now what do you gain by going to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? Or what do you gain by going to Assyria, to drink the waters of the Euphrates?” (Jeremiah 2:18).

In 609 B.C. the newly enthroned, Pharaoh Necho II of the 26th Dynasty was rushing north in support of his former rival, the Assyrians, in their deteriorating struggle against the newly rising Babylonians. Necho’s army had to march through Judah if it was to engage the Babylonians. Judah’s King Josiah (640–609 B.C.) decided to block this—to attack the mighty Egyptian army after it passed through his land. According to 2 Chronicles 35:21, Necho sent a message to Josiah saying he only wanted to pass through the land, that he did not intend to attack Judah. In the summer of 605 B.C., Egypt was utterly defeated by King Nebuchadnezzar, the rising star of Babylon, in the Battle of Carchemish on the Euphrates, near the present Turkish-Syrian border. This renowned battle was a superb demonstration of sheer Babylonian military superiority. It determined the outcome of the power struggle between Babylonia and Egypt for years to come.

In Ezekiel’s words, Egypt resembled “a staff of reed to the house of Israel ... When they leaned upon you, you broke” (Ezekiel 29:6–7). In her threats against Babylonia, Egypt was but a paper tiger: “Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will be of no avail in battle” (Ezekiel 17:17). Jeremiah preached that Nebuchadnezzar was “God’s chosen rod” (of chastisement): Now only voluntary submission to Babylonia could save Judah; it was a choice between “the way of life and the way of death” (Jeremiah 21:8–9). Even though Judah had submitted to Babylonia in 603 B.C.E., it nevertheless lost no opportunity to throw off the yoke when it saw the chance. That chance came in the winter of 601/600 B.C.E. when Babylonia attacked Egypt proper, a major historical event revealed only relatively recently through publication of the Babylonian Chronicle. This official historical record conceals neither the Babylonian shortcomings during this campaign, which led to heavy losses on both sides, nor the subsequent empty-handed Babylonian retreat. This Babylonian defeat apparently encouraged the Judahite leadership to rebel and defect to the Egyptian camp.

For the next two years, the Babylonians were unable to retaliate against Judah as they re-equipped their forces. In the winter of 598/7 B.C. the Babylonian monarch Nebuchadnezzar struck at Judah, in a show of strength that no doubt served as a warning to Egypt and her other allies as well. The first Babylonian siege of Jerusalem is well documented in the Bible (2 Kings 24:10ff.) and in the Babylonian Chronicle, which even specifies the precise day of Jerusalem’s surrender—2 Adar, or March 16, 597 B.C. In 594/3 B.C. the last monarch of Judah, Zedekiah (597–586 B.C.), hosted in Jerusalem a mini-summit of petty states—Edom, Moab and Ammon and the cities of the Phoenician coast (Jeremiah 27:3). Judah was apparently attempting to set up a league against Babylonia. When revolt came Nebuchadnezzar employed his finest military commanders and the most advanced siegecraft of the day: dikes and ramps, upon which were stationed weapons such as battering rams. It was, however, that veteran of siege warfare, famine, that ultimately turned the tide. With the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. and the total destruction of the palace and the holy Temple, the Davidic physical dynasty of kingship came to an end.

Having witnessed the horrors of the siege and subsequent destruction of the city, Jeremiah gives a graphic description illustrating the exact outworking of the doom both he and Ezekiel had previously pronounced:

"Look, O LORD, and consider: whom have you ever treated like this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have cared for? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the LORD? Young and old lie together in the dust of the streets; my young men and maidens have fallen by the sword" (Lam. 2:20,21, NIV);

"The tongue of the sucking child cleaveth to the roof of his mouth for thirst: the young children ask bread and no man breaketh it unto them... they that were brought up in scarlet embrace dunghills [ash heaps, NKJV]" (Lam 4:4,5);

"now [the princes] are blacker than soot... Their skin has shrivelled on their bones; it has become as dry as a stick. Those killed by the sword are better off than those who die of famine; racked with hunger, they waste away" (Lam 4:8,9, NIV).

The Lachish Ostraca

An ostraca is a piece of broken pottery used as a writing surface. These ostraca are named for the city of Lachish, where they were found. They seem to have been written just before the Babylonian captivity, in the days before Nebuchadnezzar's troops conquered Lachish and the rest of Judah.



The third Lachish ostraca mentions an unnamed prophet and his message of warning. While the prophet's identity cannot be determined with certainty, the reference may be to Jeremiah.

GRAPHIC BY KARBEL MULTIMEDIA, COPYRIGHT 2011 LOGOS BIBLE SOFTWARE

The ostraca (inscribed potsherd) provides poignant testimony to the last days of Lachish. Excavator Ussishkin believes the sherds are copies of letters sent from Lachish to Jerusalem. The letters date to the reign of Judah's last king, Zedekiah, and record Judah's increasingly desperate situation in the face of the Babylonian army led by Nebuchadnezzar. In Lachish Letter IV, a soldier writes to his commander, "*We are watching for the beacons of Lachish ... we cannot see [the beacons from] Azekah.*" Jeremiah 34:7 records that Lachish and Azekah were the last Judahite strongholds to fall to the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar razed Lachish and Jerusalem in 586 B.C.E. Judah's second most important city never regained its former importance.

Eliashib son of Eshiyahu. Three of his seals were found on the floor of a room on the south side of the fort in stratum VII (c. 620–597 B.C.) gives us insight into Nebuchadnezzar's march on Jerusalem. He was also in command for the 586 B.C. event and while it is not certain some of the letters to seem to refer to Jeremiah. One of the letters in the Eliashib archive refers to "*the Temple of Yahweh.*" *It is a cryptic reference addressed to Eliashib from one of his subordinates: "To my lord Eliashib, May Yahweh seek your welfare. And now: ... as to the matter which you commanded me—it is well; he is in the Temple of Yahweh."* The reference must be to the Temple of Jerusalem. Apparently, Eliashib sent one of his subordinates on a mission to Jerusalem and this is his report.

From the script, we could tell that it had come from the stratum VI fortress. It was an order to rush troops from Arad and from neighboring Kinah to strengthen the defenses of Ramat-Negeb (probably Tel 'Ira, southwest of Arad on a hill overlooking the entire Beer-Sheba Valley): "*To Eliashib ... king ... troop ... from Arad 50 and from Kin[ah] ... and you shall send them to Ramat-Negeb. ...*" *The message is stringent—not to say hard-boiled: "The word of the king is incumbent on you for your very life! Behold I have sent to warn you today."* Ramat-Negeb had to be defended, "*lest Edom should come there.*"