

Lesson 11: The Exile, Return, and Restoration

Just as the prophet Jeremiah had warned, the city of Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians in 586 BC.

- King Zedekiah tried to escape but was captured near Jericho and brought to Nebuchadnezzar's headquarters at Riblah where his sons were killed before his eyes, and then his own eyes put out.
- Jerusalem was destroyed under an officer of Nebuchadnezzar, Nebuzaradan, along with the complete destruction of the temple built by Solomon.
- According to the Lachish Letters, all of Judah was devastated.

The discovery of the Lachish Letters (fig. 1) in 1935 of 18 ostraca (clay tablets with writing in ink), written in Hebrew script, from the 7th century BC, reveal important information concerning the last days of Judah.

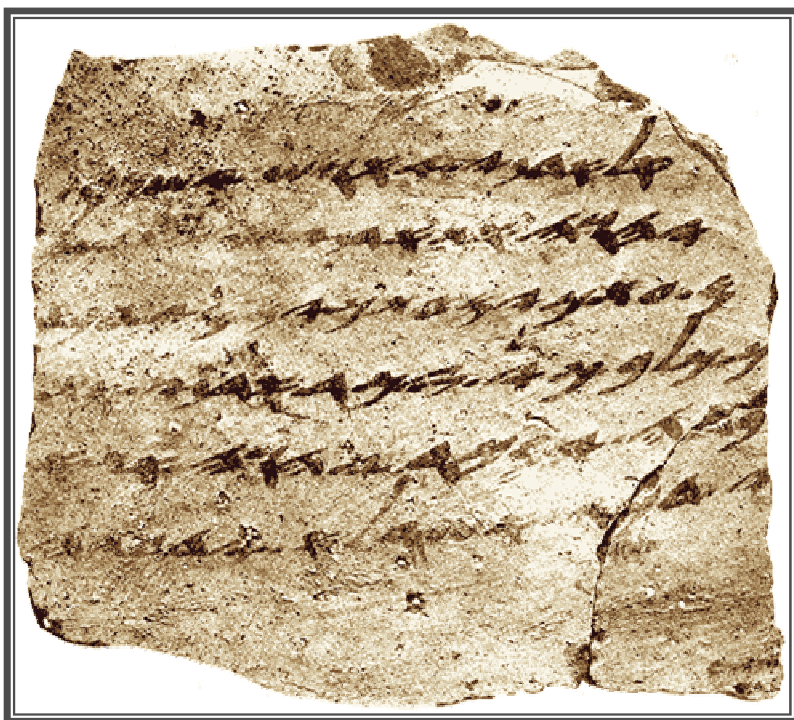


Fig. 1 Lachish Letter

- They were discovered at Lachish (Tell ed-Duweir) among the ruins of an ancient guardroom outside the Lachish city gate.
- Most of the letters were dispatches from a Jewish commander named Hoshai who was stationed at an outpost north of Lachish, who was responsible for interpreting the signals from Azekah and Lachish.
- These final communications confirm what the prophet Jeremiah writes in the Bible. In one of the Lachish Letters Hoshai writes that the signal of Azekah can no longer be seen, which suggests that this city had fallen to the Babylonian forces.
- Jeremiah indicates that Azekah and Lachish were two of the last cities to remain before being captured by the Babylonians (Jer. 34:7).

JER 34:7 when the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the remaining cities of Judah, that is, Lachish and Azekah, for they alone remained as fortified cities among the cities of Judah.
Jeremiah 34:7 (NASB)

THE EXILE

Like the Assyrians, the Babylonians took the influential people of conquered nations as prisoners.

- With the leaders, scholars, and promising youth in captivity the conquered nation was less likely to rebel later on.
- Another advantage was the opportunity to train the captive youth in the thought and culture of Babylon, assimilating them as valuable members of the empire.

Judah became a province of Babylon. There was no longer a king, but a governor appointed by Nebuchadnezzar.

- The first governor was Gedaliah.
- With Jerusalem destroyed, Gedaliah established a new capital at Mizpah.
- During excavations in the city of Lachish a clay seal (fig. 2) was found in a layer of ashes containing the following words:

"Belonging to Gedaliah who is over the house."



Fig. 2 Gedaliah Seal

- This seal is confirmation of the scriptural account in [2 Kings 25:22](#),
[2KI 25:22](#) Now as for the people who were left in the land of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had left, he appointed Gedaliah the son of Ahikam, the son of Shaphan over them.
[2 Kings 25:22 \(NASB\)](#)
- The people governed by Gedaliah were called *"the poorest people of the land"* and were left to cultivate the soil ([2 Kings 25:12](#)).
- Gedaliah had only been governor for two months when he was assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the royal family who had fled Judah when the Babylonians were approaching ([2 Kings 25:23-26](#); [Jeremiah 40:7-41:18](#)).

The fact that Nebuchadnezzar conquered lands, including Judah, during his first year as king is recorded on tablets known as the Babylonian Chronicles (fig. 3).

- They record that kings from the territory known as Hatti-land came before him and offered him tribute. Those cities, which did not submit to him, he came against and carried off its spoils back to Babylon.
- According to the Bible in [Daniel 1:3-4](#), during the invasion of Jerusalem in 605 BC, Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon instructed Ashpenaz the Master of his eunuchs, to bring back some of the children of Israel to serve in the king's palace and to teach them the language and literature of the Chaldeans. He picked Daniel along with his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.

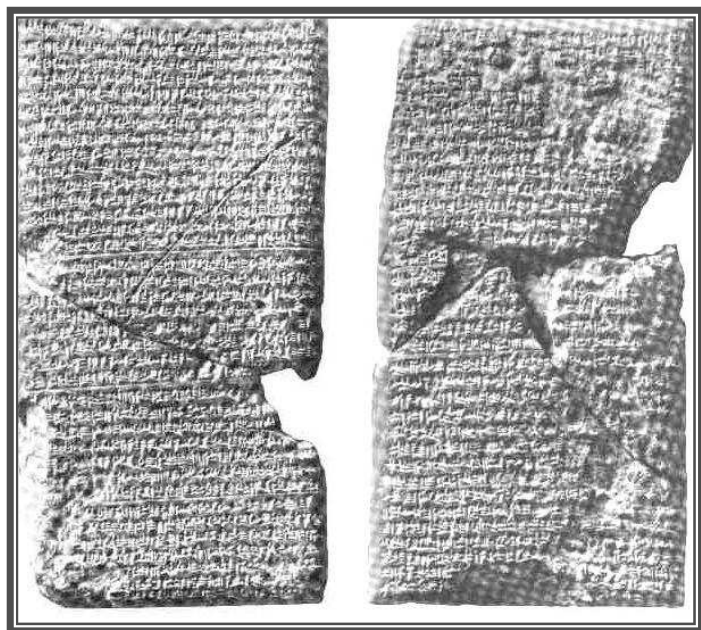


Fig. 3 Babylonian Chronicles

- The Babylonian office of Master of the Eunuchs has been confirmed by Archaeology. In the British Museum is a clay tablet with the words *"Rab-Saris"* inscribed on it. In Aramaic, the word Rab interpreted means Master and Saris means Eunuchs.

JEREMIAH (Jeremiah 40:1-6; 42:1-43:3)

Nebuzaradan, the Babylonian general, had given Jeremiah his choice of going to Babylon or remaining in the land, he had decided to stay. He took up residence in Mizpah, where he could be near Gedaliah.

- Upon the assassination of Gedaliah the people feared reprisal by Babylon.
- Jeremiah, with God's revelation, instructed the people to remain in the land and not to fear, for the Babylonians would not retaliate. Jeremiah warned particularly against seeking shelter in Egypt.
- The people refused to accept God's word and made plans to go to Egypt.

The number of Judeans who made the trip to Egypt was relatively large (Jer. 43:5-6).

- Jeremiah went to Egypt as well, probably against his will.
- The migrants came to Tahpanhes (identified as Tell Defenneh), in the eastern Delta of Egypt. Tell Defenneh is located 27 miles south southwest of Port Said.
- Here Jeremiah, at God's direction, hid stones in the pavement at the entry of a royal palace, and delivered God's prediction that Nebuchadnezzar would conquer that very place (Jer. 43:8-13).
 - o God's predication was fulfilled. One of Nebuchadnezzar's tablets tells of a successful campaign in his 37th year (568-567) against Pharaoh Amasis in this location.
 - o Petrie excavated Tell Defenneh in 1883 and discovered a foundation of a palace, possibly the one Jeremiah is referring to here.

From Jeremiah 44:1, 15, it appears that Judeans had taken up residence throughout Egypt. Another area of Jewish occupation outside Judah was located on the island of Elephantine (fig. 4) in the Nile River of Egypt. This island is situated at the lower end of the first cataract, about 500 miles south of the Mediterranean.

- Numerous papyri written in Aramaic have been found, most of them in 1903. They date from the fifth century BC and are referred to as the Elephantine Papyri.
- This group of Jews may have descended from those who took Jeremiah with them when they fled from Judah in fear of Babylon.
- The colony served as a southern military garrison for the Persians who were stationed in Egypt. It appears to have ceased existence shortly after the beginning of the fourth century.
- The contents of the papyri vary considerably in character. One papyrus gives a copy of the famous Behistun Inscription, placed by Darius I high on a mountainside near Ecbatana, Persia. Another is a marriage document.
- These Jews also had a temple to Yahweh. This means that, though far from Jerusalem, they had not forgotten the one true God. The worship of Yahweh was not pure, for the names of at least three other

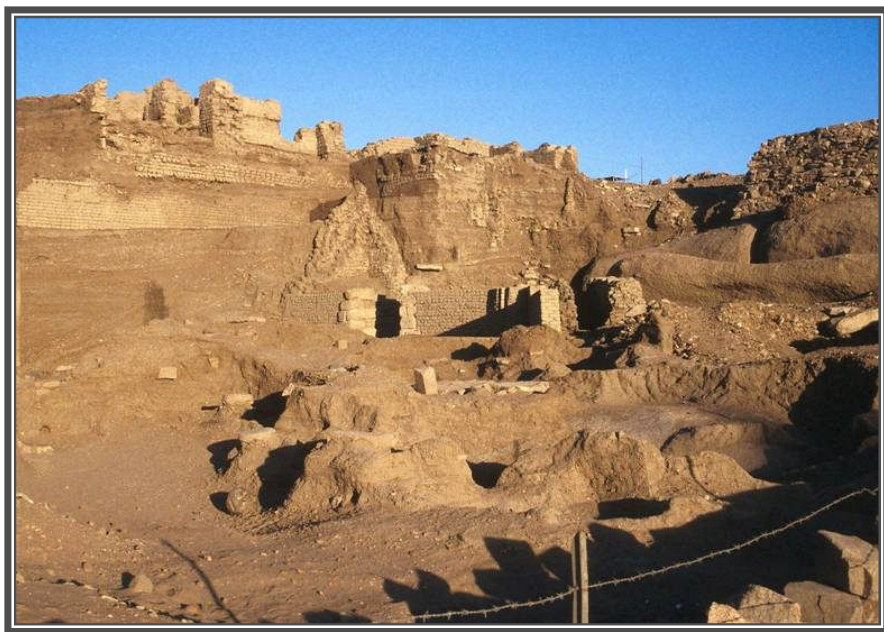


Fig. 4 Elephantine Excavations

deities, who were worshiped by some of the residents, have been found.

- Elephantine letters mention persons in the biblical record such as:
 - o Johanan, mentioned as high priest in Jerusalem, said in [Nehemiah 12:10-11, 22-23](#) to be grandson of Eliashib, who was high priest in Nehemiah's time ([Neh. 3:1](#)).
 - o Sanballat, governor of Samaria, spoken of as father of Delaiah and Shelemaiah, and no doubt the same as the opponent of Nehemiah.
 - o Rananiah who may be the same as the man Nehemiah made superintendent over Jerusalem along with Nehemiah's brother Ranani ([Neh. 7:2](#)).

THE BABYLONIAN PERIOD (605-539)

Nebuchadnezzar (605-562) ruled 43 years and maintained his country's empire as long as he lived. Those who succeeded him could not hold what he had conquered. Under their rule the country decayed only lasting another 23 years after Nebuchadnezzar.

- Nebuchadnezzar was proficient in warfare.
 - o The siege of Tyre, during the same campaign in which Jerusalem fell, continued for 13 years at which time it fell.
 - o Jeremiah states ([Jer. 52:30](#)) that Nebuchadnezzar forced another deportation from Judah in 582 BC. In the same year he campaigned successfully in Syria, Moab, and Ammon.
 - o In 568 he invaded Egypt shortly after Pharaoh Amasis had replaced Pharaoh Hophra. The time was one of weakness in Egypt, and the Babylonian ruler took advantage of it.
- Nebuchadnezzar was an active and successful builder.
 - o He constructed an intricate system of fortifications, including Babylon's own defenses and a chain of fortresses both north and south of the capital city.
 - o He built temples, palaces, canals, and streets. A processional avenue leading to the city's sacred area was lined with brightly colored, enameled brick, adorned with rows of bulls and dragons in bas-relief. The street led through the famous gate of Ishtar, similarly decorated.
 - The Ishtar Gate (fig. 5) was built by Nebuchadnezzar and dedicated to the goddess Ishtar around 575 BC. It was decorated with glazed brick reliefs of dragons and bulls. It is 47 feet high and 32 feet wide.
 - The Ishtar Gate was discovered in 1899 by Robert Koldewey, disassembled, and reconstructed in the Pergamon Museum, Berlin.
 - This is the very Gate, which the Jewish captives must have passed

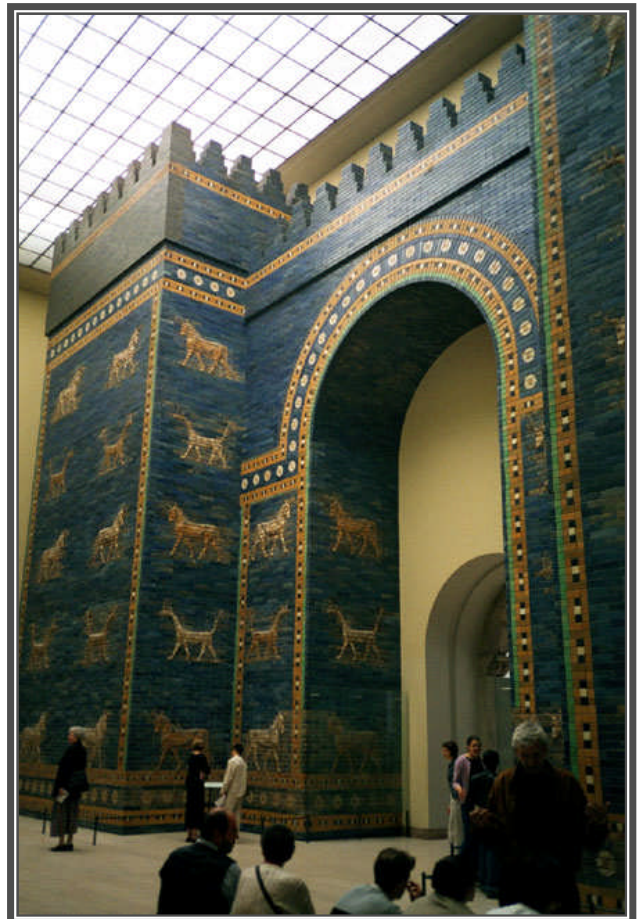


Fig. 5 Ishtar Gate in Berlin

through, including Daniel and Ezekiel.

None of Nebuchadnezzar's successors could maintain what he established, resulting in Babylon's decline.

- **Amel-marduk (562-560):** Nebuchadnezzar was succeeded by his son, Amel-marduk, who ruled only two years. The Bible refers to him as Evil-merodach, the one who released Jehoiachin from prison and gave a place of privilege at the Babylonian court ([2 Kings 25:27-30](#); [Jer. 52:31-34](#)).
- **Nergalshar-usur (560-556):** Amel-marduk was murdered by his brother-in-law, Nergalshar-usur, who took the throne in 560 BC. This man is identified with the Nergal-sharezer of [Jeremiah 39:3, 13](#), who, as the official under Nebuchadnezzar, played a part in releasing Jeremiah from prison in 586 BC. As king, he is known for a major military venture across the Taurus Mountains where he suffered defeat and withdrew back to Babylon in 556 BC, shortly before his death.
- **Labashi-Marduk (556):** Nergalshar-usur was succeeded by his son, Labashi-Marduk, who was assassinated only a few months later by Nabonidus, who seized the throne.
- **Nabonidus & Belshazzar (556-539):** The son of an Aramean nobleman from Haran, Nabonidus was probably the most capable ruler following Nebuchadnezzar. Nabonidus made two military campaigns: one against Cilicia (554 BC) and another against Syria (553 BC). An unusual act was his transfer of residence to Tema, southeast of Edam in the Arabian Desert. He remained in Tema for a period of 10 years, leaving the kingdom in the hands of his son, Belshazzar. Actual kingship was entrusted to the young man, which coincides with Belshazzar's portrayal in the Book of Daniel.
 - o Greek historian Herodotus states that Nabonidus had been the Babylonian representative in 585 BC when a peace treaty between the Medes and Lydians had been drawn.

Belshazzar

In Daniel chapter 5 a Babylonian king by the name of Belshazzar mocks God by throwing a party with articles taken from the Jewish temple. God passes judgment on Belshazzar by taking away his kingdom and dividing it between the Medes and Persians.

- Some critics of the Bible point out an apparent historical error in an attempt to disprove the accuracy of the bible by saying that the last king to rule Babylon before being destroyed by the Medes and Persians, was a man by the name of Nabonidus, not Belshazzar. Secondly, Belshazzar was never a king of Babylon. And third, the Bible refers to Nebuchadnezzar as the father of Belshazzar, which he was not.
- Is the Bible wrong? Belshazzar's name is found on the Nabonidus Cylinder (fig. 6) where he is mentioned as the son of King Nabonidus. Some translations of the bible state that Nebuchadnezzar was his father, the Hebrew word for father can also be translated into English as meaning grandfather or ancestor. Belshazzar was a bloodline descendent of Nebuchadnezzar. The same goes for the fact that the Bible calls Belshazzar a king. Even though historical



Fig. 6 Nabonidus Cylinder

records do not mention he was a king, the Hebrew word for king can also be interpreted as governor, or prince. History records that he was both.

- Nabonidus, who ruled Babylon from 556-539 BC, mentions his firstborn son Belshazzar on an inscription found in the city of Ur in 1853. The inscription reads:
"May it be that I, Nabonidus, king of Babylon, never fail you. And may my firstborn, Belshazzar, worship you with all his heart."
- Another piece of evidence for Belshazzar's reign in the city of Babylon comes from an inscription, where he is referred to as the son of Nabonidus and is given authority to rule.
"Putting the camp under the rule of his oldest son . . . His hands were now free; He entrusted the authority of the royal throne to him."
- Yet even another piece of evidence comes from a tablet dating back to the sixth century in Babylon, where Belshazzar is mentioned in the same light as his father:
"In regards to the bright star which has appeared, I will undertake to interpret its meaning for the glory of my lord Nabonidus, Babylon's king, and also for the crown prince, Belshazzar"

This archaeological evidence confirms the biblical account of Belshazzar. The evidence found confirms that Belshazzar had a co-reigning authority that was second only to his father. The Bible also supports this when Belshazzar is speaking to Daniel in chapter 5:16:

DA 5:16 "But I personally have heard about you, that you are able to give interpretations and solve difficult problems. Now if you are able to read the inscription and make its interpretation known to me, you will be clothed with purple and wear a necklace of gold around your neck, and you will have authority as the third ruler in the kingdom."

Daniel 5:16 (NASB)

We also know that at the time the Medes and Persians captured Babylon, Nabonidus was not living in the city of Babylon, but was staying in a place called Tema in Arabia, leaving his son back home in charge of governing the kingdom. King Cyrus of Persia also refers to Belshazzar when he conquered Babylon in his writings:

"A coward was put in charge as the king of this country...With evil intents he did away with the regular offerings to the gods...and desecrated the worship of the king of his gods, Marduk."

Darius the Mede

Daniel 5:30-31 states the following:

DA 5:30 That same night Belshazzar the Chaldean king was slain.

DA 5:31 So Darius the Mede received the kingdom at about the age of sixty-two.

Daniel 5:30-31 (NASB)

The Babylonian Chronicles (fig. 3) tell us the exact date, which Babylon fell, October 13, 539 BC.

- According to historical records a man named Gubaru, a Mede, was appointed by King Cyrus to be ruler in Babylon at this time. Gubaru was born in 601 BC, which would make him 62 years old when he invaded Babylon. Exactly the age found in **Daniel 5:31** of Darius the Mede.
- The Babylonian record of Darius the Mede's conquest of Babylon is given below:
"In the month of Tashritu, at the time when Cyrus battled the forces of Akkad in Opis on the Tigris River, the citizens of Akkad revolted against him, but Nabonidus scattered his opposition with a great slaughter. On the 14th day, Sippar was taken without a fight. Nabonidus then fled for his life. On the 16th day, Gubaru the leader of Gutium along with the army of Cyrus entered Babylon without any opposition. Later they arrested Nabonidus when he returned to Babylon. On the third day of the month of Arahshamnu, Cyrus marched into Babylon, and they laid down

green branches in front of him. The city was no longer at war, Peace being restored. Cyrus then sent his best wishes to the residents living there. His governor, Gubaru, then installed leaders to govern over all Babylon.”

- This account says that Darius the Mede installed sub-governors in Babylon. The Bible says the same thing, and the prophet Daniel was one of them:
DA 6:1 It seemed good to Darius to appoint 120 satraps over the kingdom, that they would be in charge of the whole kingdom,
DA 6:2 and over them three commissioners (of whom Daniel was one), that these satraps might be accountable to them, and that the king might not suffer loss.
DA 6:3 Then this Daniel began distinguishing himself among the commissioners and satraps because he possessed an extraordinary spirit, and the king planned to appoint him over the entire kingdom.
DA 6:4 Then the commissioners and satraps began trying to find a ground of accusation against Daniel in regard to government affairs; but they could find no ground of accusation or *evidence of corruption*, inasmuch as he was faithful, and no negligence or corruption was *to be found* in him.
Daniel 6:1-4 (NASB)
- As far as his name goes, historians believe that the name Darius was not a proper name at all, but a title of honor meaning “Holder of the Scepter.” In other words “The Scepter Holder (King) of the Medes.”
- The Jewish historian Josephus also recorded that: “*Darius the Mede, who along with his relative, Cyrus the King of Persia, brought an end to the Babylonian empire. Darius was the son of Astyages.*”

Daniel

Daniel, along with others of his age, were taken to Babylon in 605 BC to be educated ([Dan. 1:4](#)).

- Before three years had passed, Daniel, as a result of interpreting a dream for Nebuchadnezzar ([Dan. 2:1-45](#)), was elevated to the important position of chief of the “*wise men*,” upon whom the king depended for counsel. Daniel apparently retained this position for a long time, because years later Nebuchadnezzar still referred to him as “*chief of the magicians*” ([Dan. 4:9](#)).
- By the time of Belshazzar’s rule, this king needed to be reminded that Daniel was available to interpret the writing on the palace wall ([Dan. 5:10-12](#)).
- At the time of the Persian conquest of Babylon, when Daniel could not have been less than 80 years old, he was still retained by the new regime in a position of high responsibility. In fact, he was made one of the three presidents who superintended the respective governors of Persia’s 120 provinces ([Dan. 6:1-2](#)).

According to Professor William Shea from Andrews University a Babylonian inscription may record the actual names of Daniel’s three friends, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. [Daniel 1:6-7](#) states the following:

DA 1:6 Now among them from the sons of Judah were Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah.
DA 1:7 Then the commander of the officials assigned *new names* to them; and to Daniel he assigned *the name* Belteshazzar, to Hananiah Shadrach, to Mishael Meshach and to Azariah Abednego.
Daniel 1:6-7 (NASB)

- The *Istanbul Prism of Nebuchadnezzar* is a clay prism found in Babylon, housed in the Istanbul museum, which gives a list of men and their titles. Three men listed on the prism have pronunciations, which are very similar to the names of Daniel’s three friends. Whether or not they are the actual men mentioned in the bible is uncertain.
- Found on the list is the name Arbenebo, Official of the Royal Prince. This name is the equivalent to the Aramaic name Abednego and may in fact be the first mention of one of Daniel’s friends found outside of the Bible.

- Another name found on the list is Hannunu, Commander of the king's merchants. The name Hannunu may be the Babylonian equivalent for the Hebrew name Hananiah.
- Another name found on the list is Meshaku, Official to Nebuchadnezzar. Meshaku is very similar in pronunciation to Meshach.
- Each of these men held an administrative position in Babylon just as [Daniel 2:49](#) states.

Daniel chapter 4 states that Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, had a dream that troubled him. So he called in the prophet Daniel to interpret his dream. Daniel told him that the following would happen to the king because of his pride:

[DA 4:24](#) this is the interpretation, O king, and this is the decree of the Most High, which has come upon my lord the king:
[DA 4:25](#) that you be driven away from mankind and your dwelling place be with the beasts of the field, and you be given grass to eat like cattle and be drenched with the dew of heaven; and seven periods of time will pass over you, until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind and bestows it on whomever He wishes.
[DA 4:26](#) 'And in that it was commanded to leave the stump with the roots of the tree, your kingdom will be assured to you after you recognize that *it is Heaven that rules.*
Daniel 4:24-26 (NASB)

- One year latter the dream became reality. [Daniel 4:30](#) states that the king spoke with great pride saying: *"Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?"*
- While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: *"King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses."*
- A similar quote of Nebuchadnezzar has been found outside the bible that is almost identical to his statement in [Daniel 4:30](#). The inscription known as The East India House Inscription (fig. 7), records Nebuchadnezzar's building activities in Babylon and states the following:
"My name will be remembered throughout history for all time because I turned Babylon and Esagila into a mighty fortress."

God caused this mighty ruler to go insane for seven seasons to teach him a lesson that God reigns supreme.

- Actual Babylonian records from Nebuchadnezzar himself also record the seven season period of his insanity:
"For four years my kingdom gave me no joy. During this time, not one building of any importance did I issue to be



Fig. 7 The East India House Inscription

built. And in Babylon itself, no building was erected to pay tribute to my name or to give me glory. I did not sing praises to Merodach, my god, nor did I provide his sacrificial table with offerings, nor did I clean any of the waterways.”

- In Babylon only two seasons were counted, Summer and Winter. Thus 7 seasons equals 3 1/2 years. And Nebuchadnezzar stated he did not delight in his kingdom for 4 years.

Another amazing fact about the book of Daniel is that in 1947 the first of the Dead Sea scrolls were discovered. They contained fragments of all the books of the Old Testament except the book of Esther. Among them is a copy of Daniel.

- Chapters 2:4 through chapters 7:28 are written in the ancient Aramaic language known as Chaldee (the language of Babylon), the same language used in documents of the 7th century BC. This is another confirmation of the fact that the events spoken of in the book of Daniel were written down by Daniel during the time of his captivity in Babylon.

Life in Babylon

The Hebrew captives enjoyed freedom of movement in the land of Babylon.

- Ezekiel even had his own house ([Ezek. 8:1](#)). The elders were also at liberty to visit him there.
- The freedom accorded Jehoiachin, after liberation from prison by Amel-marduk, testifies similarly. He was given food and other provisions at the court for the remainder of his life and may even have been granted some authority to rule, for it is stated that he was given a “*seat of honor*” above that of other kings with him in Babylon ([2 Kings 25:28](#)).
 - o Cuneiform tablets (fig. 8) found by Weidner in Babylon agree with these biblical notations. They identify Jehoiachin as “*King of the land of Judah*,” and indicate that he and his five sons received liberal allowances of oil and food. They state further that the sons were in the care of an attendant, suggesting that servants were actually provided for the family.

The captives were also employed. Nebuchadnezzar had taken craftsmen and artisans, particularly in the captivity of 597 B.C. ([2 Kings 24:14-16](#)).

- According to the Bible, apparently Nebuchadnezzar planned to put them to work in skilled trades.
- Evidence of this is also found in the many business tablets (fig. 9) discovered at Nippur on the canal Kabari, which contain Jewish names in a context showing that they were active in business: renting, buying, and selling. The tablets date from the fifth century

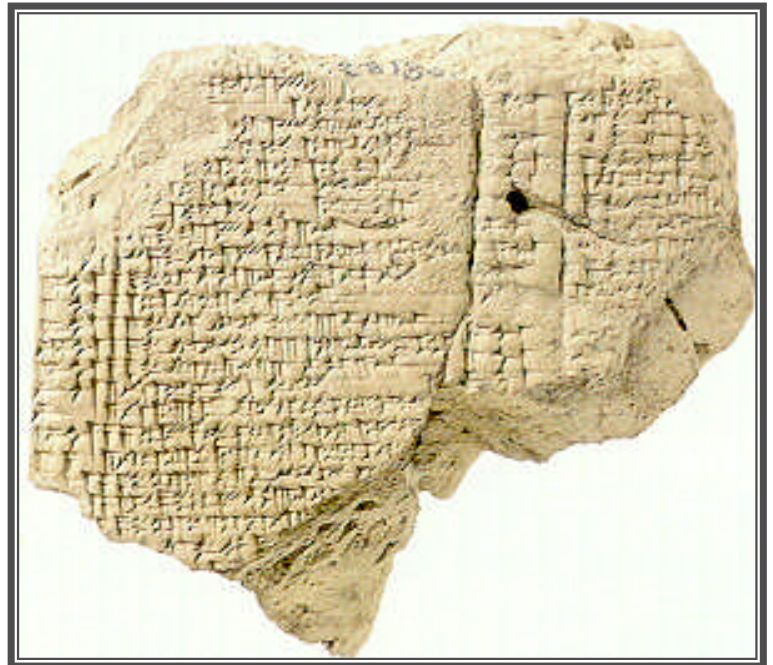


Fig. 8 Rations List for Jehoiachin

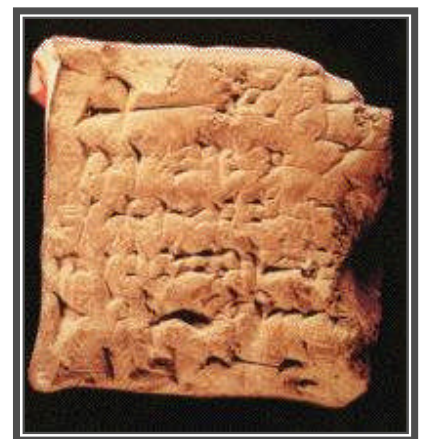


Fig. 9 Nippur Tablet

and so represent the Jewish situation after the exiles had been in Babylonia for more than a hundred years, but they imply that similar conditions had existed for some time.

THE PERSIAN PERIOD

Persia's rise to power under Cyrus the Great (559-530), was climaxed by the conquest of Babylonia.

- Cyrus's father was Cambyses I, a vassal king of Median King Astyages.
- When Cyrus took the throne after his father's death, he began to plot the overthrow of the Median king, who was also his grandfather.
- Nabonidus, last king of Babylon, had ambitions to rebuild the temple of the moon god Sin at Haran, and he entered into an alliance with Cyrus to take the city out of the control of the Medes. With the assistance of Babylon, Cyrus rebelled against Astyages and by 550 BC had added Media to his empire.
- Nabonidus now began to fear Cyrus and made alliances with both Amasis of Egypt (569-525) and Croesus of Lydia (560-546).
 - o To counter this threat Cyrus marched through northern Mesopotamia and into Cappadocia (eastern Asia Minor) and neutralized the Lydian threat. Cyrus had now extended his boundaries as far west as the Aegean Sea.
- Cyrus spent time enlarging his eastern boundary as far as India.
- In 539 BC Cyrus marched on Babylon. Defeat came easy.
 - o Accounts from both the Cyrus Cylinder (fig. 10) and Nabonidus Inscriptions both confirm this.
 - o The decisive engagement was not fought at Babylon but at Opis on the Tigris to the north, where Cyrus was victorious. His officer, Ugbaru, was then able to take Babylon itself without a fight. This was in 539 BC.
 - o The Persian monarch treated Babylon with consideration. The city was not looted, nor were the religious or civil institutions changed. The result was that a transfer of allegiance to him was brought about with a minimum of disturbance.



Fig. 10 Cyrus Cylinder

Nearly one 160 years before king Cyrus was even born, God declared to the prophet Isaiah that he would raise up this man, a shepherd, to rebuild his city. Even though at the time of Isaiah, Jerusalem was prospering and would not be destroyed for another 100 years by Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon. God's prophecy begins at [Isaiah 44:28](#):

[ISA 44:28](#) *"It is I who says of Cyrus, 'He is My shepherd! And he will perform all My desire.' And he declares of Jerusalem, 'She will be built,' And of the temple, 'Your foundation will be laid.' "*
[Isaiah 44:28 \(NASB\)](#)

The 5th century BC, Greek historian, Herodotus (fig. 11) records the story of how Cyrus escaped death at the time of his birth and how he was brought up by a shepherd who wasn't his father. Thus, fulfilling God's spoken word to the prophet Isaiah. Herodotus wrote,

"Astyages, the son of Cyaxares, became king. He had a fascinating dream concerning his daughter Mandane. In his dream he envisioned a stream of water flowing from her that flooded his capital as well as Asia. He told this vision to the Magi who had the gift of interpreting dreams, and who gave its meaning to him, whereas he became greatly terrified . . . Learning that she was now with child and her time for giving birth was near, he sent Mandane away to Persia. When she arrived there, he put a guard over her, with plans to kill the child after she gave birth (Isaiah 45:10-13); for when the Magi had interpreted the vision they told him that the son of his daughter would reign over Asia instead of him. To keep this from happening, immediately following the birth of Cyrus, Astyages sent for Harpagus, a man of his own house and a faithful Mede, to whom he trusted all his affairs, and addressed him saying . . . Harpagus, take the son born of my daughter Mandane, and steal him away to your house and slay him there. Then bury him as you see fit. When Harpagus had reluctantly agreed, the child was given into his hands, wrapped in the swaddling cloth of death, and he weeping went quickly to his home . . . speaking, My hands will not carry out his will, nor do I want any part of this murder . . . After he had said this, he sent a messenger to bring back a man named Mitrdates, one of the shepherds . . . Coming quickly at his request, the shepherd arrived and Harpagus said to him "Astyages commands you to take this child into the wildest part of the hills, and there abandon him, that he should die a sudden death. And he told me to tell you, that if you do not kill the boy, but allow him to escape, you will be put to the death by the most painful of methods. I myself have been given orders to make sure the child dies. At this command the herdsman took the child into his arms, and traveled back the way he had come till he reached his flocks . . . With this the shepherd uncovered the infant, and showed him to his wife, who, when she saw how fine and beautiful the child was, broke down into tears, and falling at her husbands knees, begged him not to kill the babe; . . . so the child, whom he was commanded to destroy, was handed over to his wife . . ."

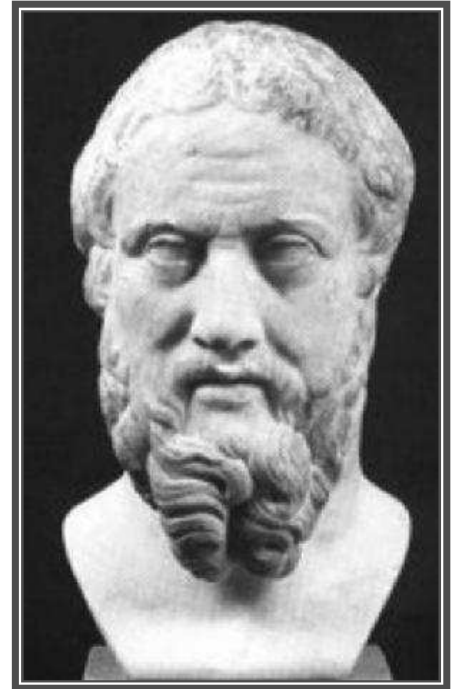


Fig. 11 Herodotus

- Thus, Cyrus was raised to be a shepherd, fulfilling God's word to Isaiah.
- The second part of Isaiah's prophecy states that Cyrus would declare Jerusalem and the temple to be rebuilt. According to the Bible, King Cyrus of Persia invaded the Empire of Babylon bringing its downfall.
- The following is an account from King Cyrus, which was found inscribed on a clay barrel now on display in the British Museum, called the Cyrus Cylinder (fig. 10). He mentions how he conquered Babylon, returned exiles to their former lands, returned the articles of worship to the sacred cities, and commanded that the temples where they worshiped be rebuilt. The inscription reads:
"The number of men in his army were so great, resembling that of water in a river, which could not be counted, marched forward, their weapons stashed away. Without engaging the enemy, he was able to enter Babylon without causing any damage to the city. Into my hands, Nabonidus was delivered, the king who did not worship him . . . "To the sacred cities located on the other side of the Tigris river, I sent back to the ruins of their holy places, the articles which were used

in their sanctuaries. I also allowed to return to their homes the former citizens of the land, . . . I also made an effort to repair their dwelling places.”

Cyrus ruled as king for nine years following his Babylonian victory. Finally, in 530 BC, while leading his army into the far north, he was fatally wounded. His body was returned to Pasargadae, the Persian capital, for burial.

- Cyrus was buried in a stone tomb (fig. 12) outside his capital of Pasargadae in modern Iran. According to the Greek historian Strabo (1st century AD), this inscription once graced the structure, “*Oh man, I am Cyrus, the son of Cambyses, who founded the empire of Persia, and was king of Asia. Grudge me not therefore this monument.*”



Fig. 12 Tomb of Cyrus

Cambyes II (530-522): Cyrus was succeeded by his son, Cambyes II.

- Cambyes's greatest accomplishment was his conquest of Egypt, which he added to his already huge territory in 525 BC.
- When en route home in 522 BC Cambyes received news that one Gaumata had seized the Persian throne, masquerading as Smerdis, the brother whom Cambyes had assassinated.
- Cambyes's sudden death at this point has given rise to numerous conflicting stories. It is frequently assumed that he committed suicide, although this is not certain.

Darius I (522 -486): One of Cambyes's officers, Darius I, son of the satrap, Hystaspes, and a descendant of a secondary branch of the royal line of Persia, now assumed command of the army and marched home to put down the insurrection and seize the throne.

- He was successful in both, putting the pretender to death and taking the throne for himself.
- There was some rebellion in the empire, but within two years, he had the empire back under control.
- He considered the overall triumph sufficiently important to have a record made of it high on a mountain cliff beside the road to Ecbatana. This inscription, which has come to be called the Behistun Inscription (fig. 13), was written in three languages and has proven invaluable in modern time for providing the key to reading Old Akkadian.
- While he did maintain his borders, Darius suffered a humiliating defeat at the hands of the Greeks in the famous battle of Marathon, 490



Fig. 13 Behistun Inscription

BC. He planned revenge, but a revolt in Egypt demanded his attention for a time, and his own death came in 486 B.C. before he was able to retaliate.

- Darius also gave permission to renew the rebuilding of the Hebrew Temple ([Ezra 6:1-12](#)), which had been discontinued for some 10 years.
- Darius is the first of three monumental tombs (fig. 14) cut into a cliff near the Persian capital of Persepolis, Iran. The inscription on his tomb reads:

"King, whoever you are, who may arise after me, protect yourself well from lies. Do not trust the man who lies. ... Believe what I did and tell the truth to the people. Do not conceal (it). If you do not conceal these matters, but you do tell the people, may Ahura Mayda protect you."

- There are three other tombs at this site, thought to be those of the Persian kings Xerxes (486-465 BC), Artaxerxes I (465-425 BC), and Darius II (423-405 BC).

Xerxes I (486-465): Xerxes I succeeded his father.

- His first two years were occupied in quelling revolutions, especially in Babylon.
- In his third year he planned his greatest military campaign, which he hoped would avenge his father's defeat by the Greeks. At first he was victorious, even capturing Athens and burning the Acropolis. But then his fleet of ships was routed at Salamis, and his army was defeated in 479 BC.
- Xerxes, who had returned to his capital following the defeat at Salamis, gave up on his attempt to annex Greece.

Artaxerxes I (465-424): The last Persian ruler of note is Artaxerxes I.

- He succeeded to the throne when the commander of the palace guard, one Artabanus, assassinated his father.
- In 460 BC he faced a revolt in Egypt, which was put down only after several years of fighting by his satrap of Abamahara (Syria and Palestine), Megabyzus.
- Difficulty with the Greeks led to further humiliation for the Persian monarch, as he signed a treaty (449 BC) permitting Greek cities in Asia Minor to be free to join in league with Athens.
- Neither Artaxerxes I nor Xerxes I attained the stature of their predecessor, Darius I.

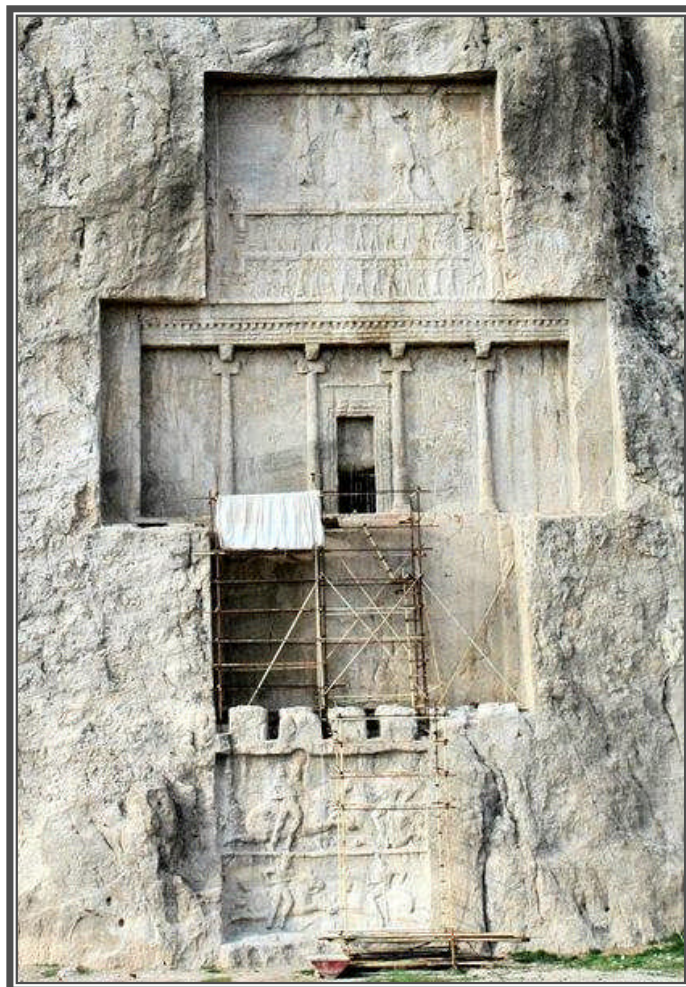


Fig. 14 Tomb of Darius

THE FIRST RETURN TO JUDAH (Ezra 1-6)

The first return to Judah for the Jews came shortly after the Persian conquest of Babylon, 538 BC (Ezra 1:1), led by Sheshbazzar. The second came 80 years later, in the seventh year of Artaxerxes I, 458 BC (Ezra 7:7), led by Ezra. And the third came 13 years after the second, in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, 444 BC (Neh. 2:1), led by Nehemiah.

Edict of Cyrus (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; Ezra 1:1-4; 6:3-5)

The tolerant attitude of Cyrus toward his subjects included permission for people, who had been deported by Babylon, to return to their homelands.

- Cyrus extended this permission to the people of Judah in the first year after the fall of Babylon.
- Cyrus' edict is recorded twice in Scripture: Ezra 1:2-4 and Ezra 6:3-5.
- They give orders that the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt, with the cost defrayed from Cyrus' own treasury; that certain specifications be met in this rebuilding; that all Jews who wished could return to their homeland, with those Jews who remained in Babylon being urged to assist with financial contribution; and that the gold and silver vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar be returned to Jerusalem.

Presumably the return occurred soon after the issuance of the decree, likely in 538 or 537 BC.

- It was led by Sheshbazzar, called a "*prince of Judah*" (Ezra 1:8).
- Those who made the journey are listed in Ezra 2, with their number indicated as 42,360, besides 7,337 servants (Ezra 2:64-65).
- This is a substantial number, but it did not include all the Jews who lived in the East.

Building the Temple (Ezra 3-6)

A prime order of business on arriving in the homeland was the rebuilding of the temple.

- Construction on the temple did begin soon after arrival in the land. Ezra 3:8 states that the people were led in by Zerubbabel and Joshua (Jeshua), the high priest, though apparently Sheshbazzar was in charge (Ezra 5:16).
- They first erected the altar and reinstated the prescribed sacrifices. Later, in the second month of the second year they commenced work on the temple. The first step was laying the foundation. When it was completed, the people celebrated. Many rejoiced, but others, who could remember the glory of the former Solomonic Temple, wept openly (Ezra 3:8-12). They could see that the new temple would be more modest than the former.
- At this point, opposition from Samaritans to the north began (Ezra 4:1-5). Besides this outside interference, the Jewish workers on the temple began to use more of their time for rebuilding their own houses and farming their own lands (Hag. 1:3-11). It was not long before all work ceased, with the result that the temple remained little more than a foundation until the second year of Darius I, 520 BC (Hag. 1:1), some 16 years later.
- In Darius' second year, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah urged that building operations be resumed. They addressed both the people in general and Zerubbabel and Joshua, who were still in command.
- Their prophetic efforts were fruitful and work did begin in the sixth month of the year (Hag. 1:15; Ezra 5:1-2).
- Four years later, in the sixth year of Darius I, 515 BC (Ezra 6:15), the temple was completed.

THE SECOND RETURN (Ezra 7-10)

Darius I ruled Persia until 486 BC, followed by Xerxes I, who ruled until 465 BC. It was during the rule of Xerxes that Esther was queen. Then came Artaxerxes I, during whose seventh year the second return occurred.

- The second return was led by Ezra (Ezra 7:6, 10).
- Ezra was known to Artaxerxes (fig. 15), for he had attained a position of some standing at the court.
- In some undisclosed manner he persuaded the king to permit him to travel to Judah for the purpose of effecting needed reforms.
- From the fact that Nehemiah found it necessary much later (444 BC) to come and build Jerusalem's walls, it is clear that little was done in reconstructing the capital city apart from erecting homes.
- From Ezra's confession of the people's sin in intermarriage with surrounding pagans (Ezra 9:1-15), we know of interaction with neighboring peoples, which raised the possibility of a return to the old idolatrous worship, which always seemed to accompany intermarriage.

Like Sheshbazzar 80 years before, Ezra received notable privileges from the Persian monarch in connection with his return.

- These privileges included authority to take as many of his countrymen with him as desired the opportunity; to receive from Jews in Persia, as well as from Artaxerxes himself and his court counselors, gold and silver for the Jerusalem temple; to draw upon the royal treasury of the satrapy of Abarnahara for needs that might arise; to purchase animals for sacrifice at the temple; to exempt temple personnel from Persian taxation; and to appoint civil magistrates in the land of Judah to enforce the laws of Yahweh, with power of life and death over the guilty.
- Ezra's interest and assigned task was thus not to build the country materially, as it had been with the first return and would be again with the third, but to build the people socially and spiritually. Reform was needed that the people might live more pleasingly in the sight of God.
- Ezra assembled those who wished to return at the river Ahava (unknown, but probably near Babylon). The size of the group is indicated by the number of men, approximately 1,500, a number much smaller than that of the first return.
- Final departure occurred the twelfth day of the first month (458 BC) and arrival in Jerusalem the first day of the fifth month (Ezra 7:9; 8:31), a journey of just over three and one-half months.
- Upon arrival Ezra began to address the issue of intermarriage of a number of Jews with surrounding peoples.

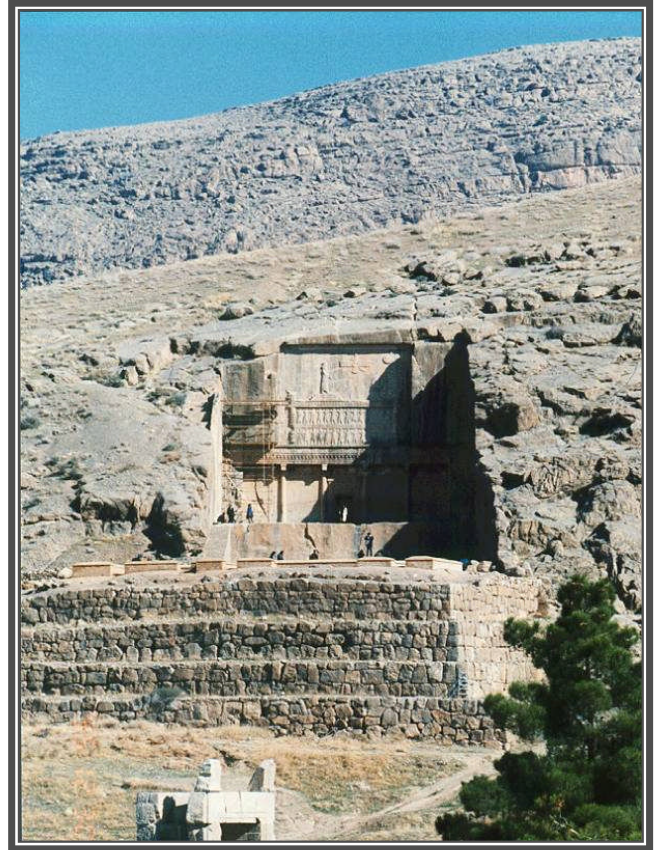


Fig. 15 Tomb of Artaxerxes

THE THIRD RETURN (Nehemiah 1-13)

The third return, that of Nehemiah, came in the 20th year of Artaxerxes I, 444 BC (Neh. 1:1). Nehemiah's purpose lay in the rebuilding of Jerusalem's walls.

- No indication is given regarding the number of Jews who went along in this return, but there were enough to warrant the Persian king providing "army officers and cavalry" (Neh. 2:9) to act as guards.
- Nehemiah held a responsible position at the Persian court, as cupbearer to King Artaxerxes. He had direct access to the king to speak intimately regarding a return to Jerusalem.
- Nehemiah was granted unusual privilege, like Sheshbazzar and Ezra before him, in connection with the return.
- In 444 BC the king noticed sadness on Nehemiah's face one day and asked the reason. Nehemiah told him of Jerusalem's plight, asked if he might journey there to help, and even requested letters to officials in Abarnahara to grant him safe passage and material aid for rebuilding. The Persian monarch responded with an affirmative answer and granted him all for which he asked, thus cheering and encouraging his faithful servant's heart. He further assigned army officers and cavalry to convey Nehemiah safely over the many miles of travel.

Nehemiah Builds the Wall (Nehemiah 2:11-6:19)

On arrival, Nehemiah set himself quickly to the task of rebuilding Jerusalem's walls.

- Workers were quickly recruited, both from Jerusalem and outlying cities; and all were assigned particular sections of the wall on which to labor.
- The work moved forward with opposition from the outside.
- The king had given Nehemiah full authority for the task, but enemies still did their best to hinder the work. Heading the opposition was the governor of Samaria, Sanballat the Horonite of Bethhoron; (Neh. 2:10).
 - o At first these adversaries were content merely to mock (Neh. 2:19-20; 4:1-3). Then plans were laid to attack Jerusalem (Neh. 4:7-8). News of this terrorized the Jews, but Nehemiah responded by dividing the builders into two groups, one to continue building and the other to bear arms. In this way the work progressed, though more slowly.
 - o A schedule was kept from dawn until dark to achieve as much speed as possible. During the night, a heavy guard was posted to protect what had been accomplished. All this was effective and resulted in the main attack being called off though smaller raids were conducted on outlying districts.
 - o The work of rebuilding was completed in only 52 days, amazing in view of the



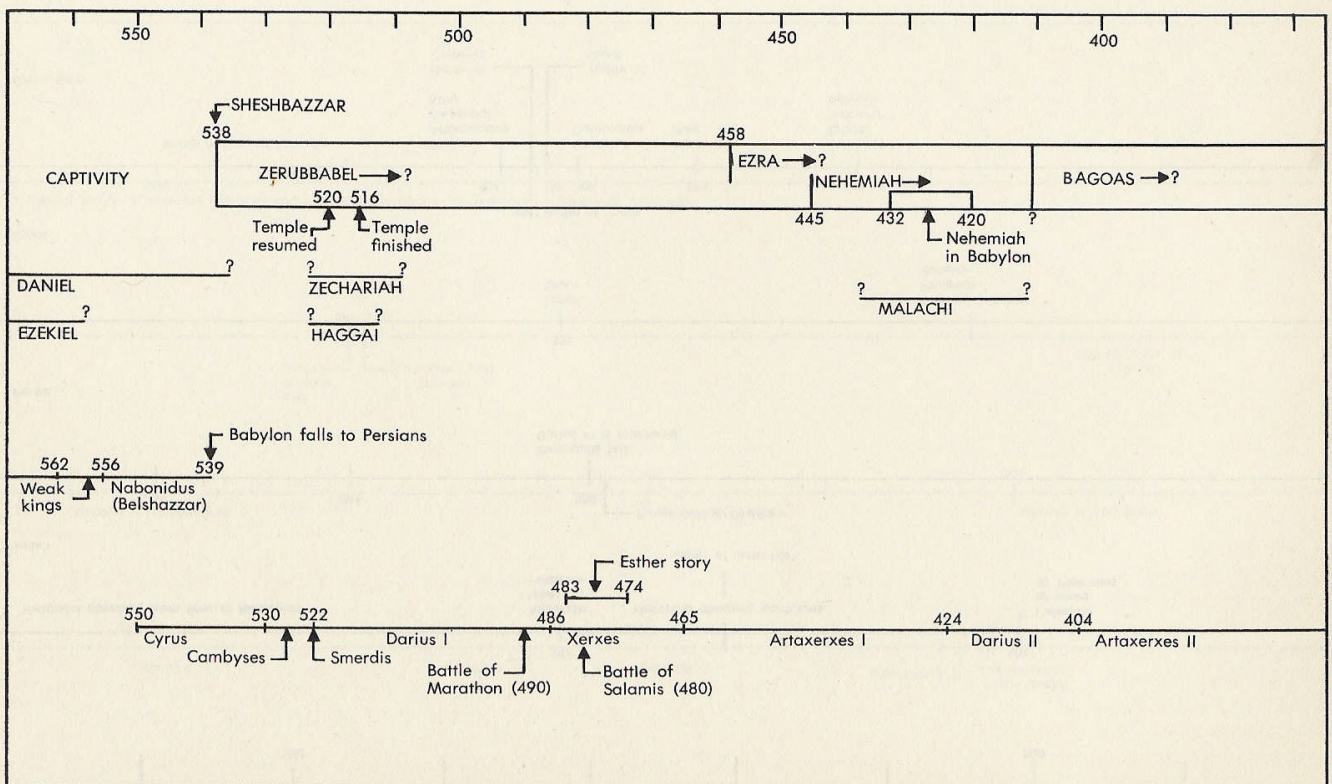
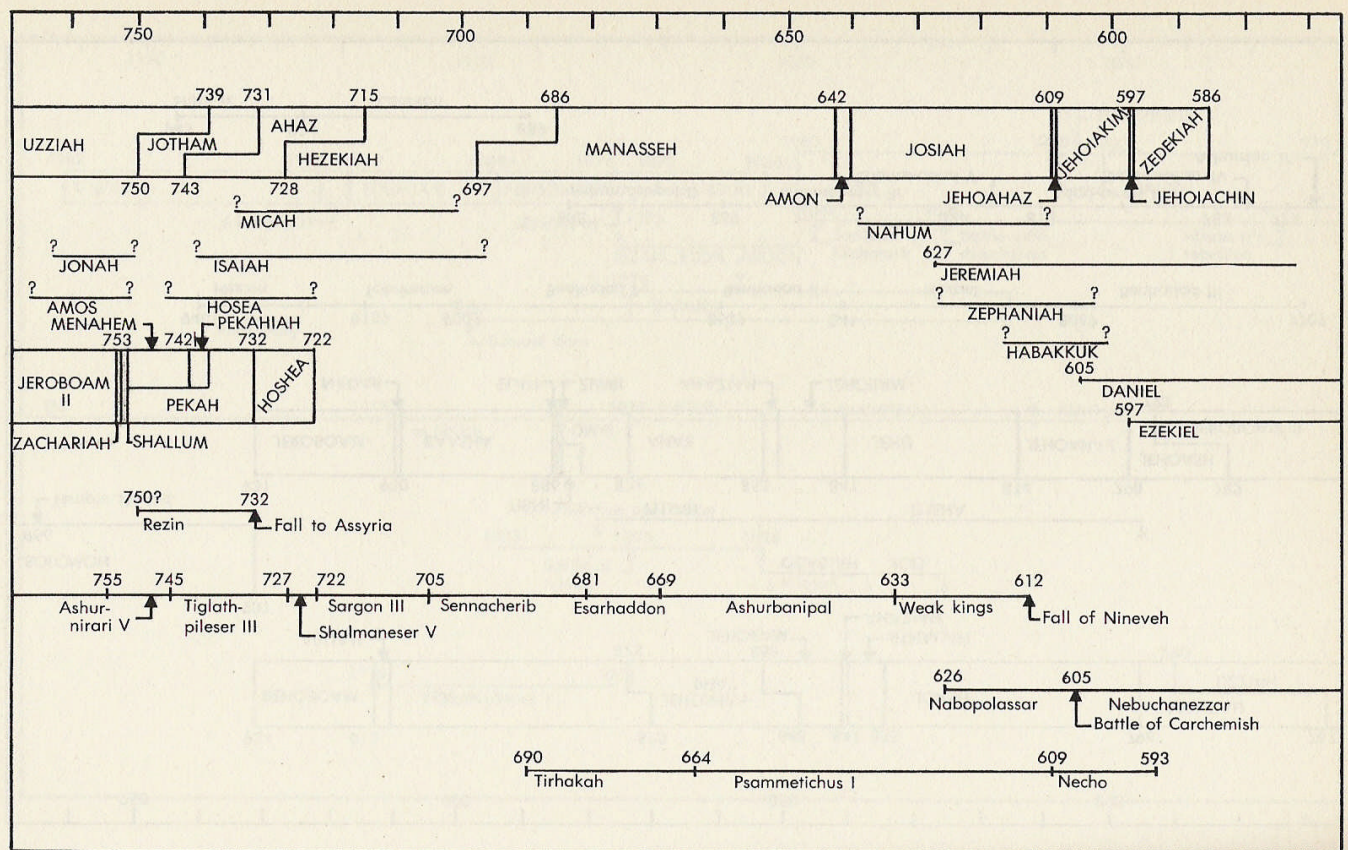
Fig. 16 Elephantine Papyrus

opposition, and much to the consternation and displeasure of the enemies.

An Elephantine Papyrus (fig. 16), which dates back to about 407 BC, actually makes mention of Sanballat. The letter was found in the ancient city of Elephantine and was written by the priests who lived there requesting authorization to rebuild a Jewish temple in the city. In the letter, they describe how the Jewish temple in the city had been destroyed by the priests of a Pagan Egyptian god. They make the whole incident known to Delaiah and Shelemaiah, the sons of Sanballat governor of Samaria.

REFERENCES

1. *Archaeology & The Old Testament* by Alfred J. Hoerth, 1998
2. *A Survey of Israel's History* by Leon J. Wood, 1986
3. *All the Men of the Bible* by Herbert Lockyer, 1958
4. *Bible Believer's Archaeology, Historical Evidence that Proves the Bible* by John Argubright, 2003
5. *Archaeology of the Old Testament* by Dr. James Borland, 1976 (Liberty Bible Institute cassette tapes)
6. WebBible Encyclopedia online at <http://www.christiananswers.com/dictionary/home.html>





THE RETURNS OF JEWISH EXILES TO JUDAH

THE EDICT OF CYRUS: EZRA 1:2-4; 6:1-4
see also EZRA 1:5-8:35
NEH. 1-3

- City
- City (uncertain location)
- ← Sheshbazzar's and Zerubbabel's route
- Ezra's and Nehemiah's route
- Cyrus's Persian Empire

