

# Old Testament History

## The Divided Kingdom – Lesson 14

### Background:

#### Introduction:

After the failed attempt to defend the remnant of the Assyrian Empire against the Babylonians, Necho II of Egypt returned home, but not before asserting Egyptian rule over Judah. As he passed through Judah, he learned that Jehoahaz, the son of Josiah who Necho has slain in a previous battle, had been appointed king of Judah. Under pretense of some insubordination, Necho removed Jehoahaz and appointed another son of Josiah to the throne, Eliakim (609-598 BC), whose name Necho changed to Jehoiakim. In exchange for this promotion, Jehoiakim was required to send an exorbitant tax to Egypt, a tax the people of Judah bitterly opposed.

Under Jehoiakim, the recent reforms of Josiah were all but forgotten, for the king was far from being any kind of spiritual leader. The book of Jeremiah graphically describes the religious conditions of the time as well as the weakness of the king in every respect. He was only interested in satisfying the wishes of the Egyptian overlords in order to retain his power. But his power was soon threatened by the Babylonians, who were now intent on seizing the territories Egypt was holding in Canaan, including Judah.

Nebuchadnezzar, a young commander of the Babylonian armies, decided to turn his attention to Canaan in 605 BC and, with little effort, overran the Egyptians at Carchemish and pursued them deep into Canaan. However, after learning of the death of the Babylonian king Nabopolassar, Nebuchadnezzar returned to the capital to safeguard his own interests there. After he was crowned king (605-562 BC), he returned to his campaign in Canaan and remained there for three years. Jehoiakim, no doubt, was all too eager to submit to Nebuchadnezzar as long as the Babylonians posed a threat to his own personal security. His allegiance shifted with the wind. It was during this second campaign into Canaan (605 BC) that the first deportation occurred of many people in Judah to Babylon – including a young man by the name of Daniel and his friends (Daniel 1:3). That deportation also marked the beginning of seventy years of captivity predicted by Jeremiah (Jeremiah 25:11).

In 601 BC Nebuchadnezzar faced Necho II once again, this time near the border of Egypt. Evidently Necho was so successful this time that the Babylonians had to retreat and leave Canaan unprotected for several years. Finally, the Babylonians marched west once again in 597 BC, but before they could reach Jerusalem to punish the rebellious Jehoiakim, he died, perhaps of assassination (Jeremiah 22:18-19). His son Jehoiachin (also called Jeconiah) could hold out only three months and then finally, with members

of his family and others, was also deported to Babylon<sup>1</sup>, also known in the Bible as "the land of the Chaldeans" (2 Kings 24:10-12). One of those deportees was the prophet Ezekiel (Ezekiel 1:2). As for Jehoiachin, he was kept under house arrest in Babylon all through the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Years later, after a change of rulers in Babylon, the new king Evil-Merodach, removed Jehoiachin from his imprisonment, exalted him above the other captive kings, and even gave him a lifelong allowance (2 Kings 25:27-30).

Jehoiachin's uncle, Mattaniah (597-586 BC), was placed on the powerless throne of Judah and received a new name Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17). Like others who ruled only to win the favor of the most powerful and influential, Zedekiah was not widely accepted as Judah's true king since Jehoiachin was still alive, although in Babylonian captivity. But he had a prior history of standing up against Nebuchadnezzar, mostly because of problems Nebuchadnezzar was having with Jewish captives in Babylonia, and also because certain false prophets in Jerusalem were encouraging the people there by predicting that the Babylonian yoke would soon be broken. Jeremiah rejected these false prophecies, for he had already prophesied that the captivity would last seventy years.

The final conquest of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar involved the destruction of the cities of Lachish, Azekah and other strategic cities, as the Lachish letters<sup>2</sup> confirm. When nothing stood in the way of the Babylonian armies except Jerusalem, it became the next key objective (Jeremiah 34:7). Meanwhile, the Egyptians had marched north to engage the Babylonians, but were completely unsuccessful to stop the Babylonian takeover. Nebuchadnezzar took the city with very little effort, arrested Zedekiah, carried him to Riblah, and then blinded him after forcing him to witness the execution of his sons (2 Kings 25:6-7). Zedekiah eventually died in Babylon.

A month later, Nebuzaradan, captain of the Babylonian guard, returned to Jerusalem and burned its buildings to the ground. Only the poor were left to care for the land; the rest, together with the objects of value from the temple, were taken to Babylon. Others among the rulers were taken to Riblah, where they were executed, probably because they had been the ringleaders of the resistance to Nebuchadnezzar. Some, like the prophet Jeremiah, were allowed to remain in the city because it was thought, mistakenly of course, that Jeremiah's prophecies against Judah meant they had been pro-Babylonian. With the king absent, the state formally ended, but Nebuchadnezzar decided to preserve the newly annexed province, to a limited degree, by appointing Gedaliah as ruler (2 Kings 25:22). His time was cut short because he was branded a traitor to the Jewish cause and was assassinated by Ishmael, a member of the royal family who had fled to Ammon. Those who were involved in the assassination plot fled

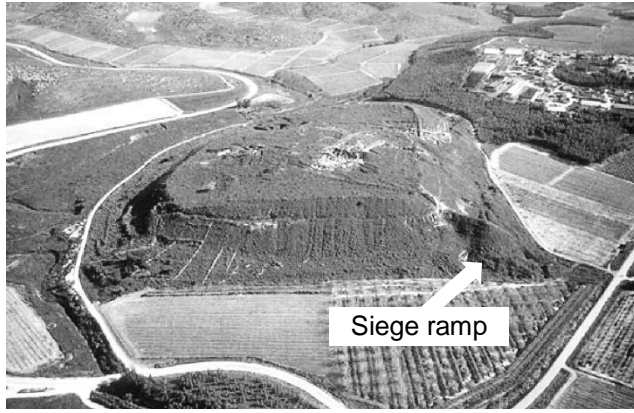
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<sup>1</sup> Babylon is also referred to in the Bible as "the land of the Chaldeans" (Ezekiel 1:3).

<sup>2</sup> The Lachish Letters, discovered in 1935, consist of eighteen clay tablets written in ancient Hebrew that record of the fall of Lachish and the eventual collapse of the southern kingdom of Judah at the hands of the Babylonians. These are currently in the British Museum.  
<http://www.bible-history.com/archaeology/israel/lachish-letters.html>

to Egypt, fearing retribution from Nebuchadnezzar. Among those who went to Egypt was the prophet Jeremiah.

### Historical Notes:



The ancient city of Lachish

Lachish (also Tel Lachish, or Tell ed-Duweir), is the site of an ancient city, now an archaeological site and an Israeli national park. Lachish is located southwest of Jerusalem between Mount Hebron and the Mediterranean. According to the Bible, the Israelites captured and destroyed Lachish for joining the league against the Gibeonites (Joshua 10:31-33). The territory was later assigned to the tribe of Judah (Joshua 15:39) and became part of the kingdom of Israel.

Of the cities in ancient Judah, Lachish was second in importance only to Jerusalem. One of the Lachish letters warns of the impending Babylonian destruction. According to the prophet Jeremiah, Lachish and Azekah were the last two Judean cities before the conquest of Jerusalem (Jeremiah 34:7). This pottery inscription can be seen at the Israel Museum in Jerusalem. Other fragments of the Letters are in the British Museum.



Fragments of some of the Lachish Letters

Modern excavation of the site has revealed that the Assyrians built a stone and dirt ramp up to the level of the Lachish city wall, thereby allowing the soldiers to charge up the ramp and storm the city. Excavations revealed approximately 1,500 skulls in one of the caves near the site, and hundreds of arrowheads on the ramp and at the top of the city wall, indicating the ferocity of the battle. The city occupied an area of 8 hectares (20 acres) and was finally destroyed in 587 BC. It was the last city to fall before Nebuchadnezzar turned north to take Jerusalem.

During Babylonian occupation, a large residence was built on the platform that had once supported the Israeli palace. At the end of the captivity, some exiled Jews returned to Lachish and built a new city with fortifications. Around 200 BC residents built a large altar (known as the Solar Shrine) on the east section of the mound. The shrine was abandoned after the fall of the Achaemenid Empire at the hands of Alexander the Great. The tell has been unoccupied since then.



**II. Jehoiakim, Jehoiachin, Zedekiah (2 Kings 23:34 – 25:30; 2 Chronicles 36:4-23)**

**A. Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34-37; 2 Chronicles 36:4-8)**

1. Who did Pharaoh Necho II place on the throne in Judah after he took Jehoahaz captive? What name did he give to the new king? What was his relationship to Josiah? What was his relationship to Jehoahaz? (2 Kings 23:34; 2 Chronicles 36:4)
2. How did Jehoiakim obtain the tribute for Pharaoh Necho? (2 Kings 23:35)
3. Describe Jehoiakim's character. (2 Kings 23:36-37; 2 Chronicles 36:5)
4. What king of Babylon invaded Judah during the reign of Jehoiakim? What territory did he control? What did he do to Jehoiakim? What did he carry to Babylon? (2 Kings 24:1-7; 2 Chronicles 36:6-7)
5. Who else invaded Judah? Why did God send these enemies against Judah? (2 Kings 24:2-4)

**B. Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:8-16; 2 Chronicles 36:9-10)**

1. To whom is Jehoiachin compared? (2 Kings 24:8-9; 2 Chronicles 36:9)

2. Who besieged Jerusalem during the reign of Jehoiachin? What was the result? (2 Kings 24:10-16; 2 Chronicles 36:10)

**C. Zedekiah (2 Kings 24:17 – 25:30; 2 Chronicles 36:10-21)**

1. Who did Nebuchadnezzar place upon the throne after he took Jehoiachin captive? What name did he give to the new king? What was his relationship to Jehoiakim? What was his relationship to Josiah? (2 Kings 24:17; 2 Chronicles 36:10; cf. Jeremiah 37:1)
2. Describe the character of Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24:20; 2 Chronicles 36:13)
3. Who did Zedekiah rebel against? (2 Kings 24:20; 2 Chronicles 36:13)
4. Describe the character of the priests and the people at this time. Why did the Lord send his messengers the prophets? How did the people receive the messengers? (2 Chronicles 36:14-16)
5. How long did Nebuchadnezzar's final siege of Jerusalem last? What affliction prevailed in the city during the final days of the siege? Who did the Chaldeans kill? (2 Kings 25:1-3; 2 Chronicles 36:17)

6. What was the fate of Zedekiah? (2 Kings 25:4-7)
  
7. Describe what happened to the following during the final siege of Jerusalem:
  - a. The temple, palaces, and walls of the city: (2 Kings 25:8-10; 2 Chronicles 36:19)
  
  - b. The remainder of those left in the city, those who escaped the sword: (2 Kings 25:11; 2 Chronicles 36:20)
  
  - c. The poorest of the land: (2 Kings 25:12)
  
  - d. The temple treasures: (2 Kings 25:13-17; 2 Chronicles 36:18)
  
  - e. The priests, nobles, officers: (2 Kings 25:18-21)
  
8. How long was Judah to remain in Babylonian captivity? (2 Chronicles 36:21; cf. Jeremiah 25:8-13; 29:10-14)

9. Who was appointed governor over the remnant that was left in Judah? (2 Kings 25:22-24)

10. Who conspired against him? Where did the remnant flee? (2 Kings 25:25-26)

11. What prophet was forced to accompany this group? (Jeremiah 40:1 – 43:13)

**D. The Aftermath (2 Kings 25:27-30; 2 Chronicles 36:22-23)**

1. Who released Jehoiachin from prison? What honor did Jehoiachin receive after he was released? (2 Kings 25:27-30)

2. What proclamation was made by Cyrus, king of Persia? When did this proclamation occur? (2 Chronicles 36:22-23; cf. Ezra 1:1-4)

**Application:**

In your own words, explain the lessons we can learn from these events, and how those lessons can be applied to present-day situations?