

## Chapter 8: The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

<u>Years BC</u>	<u>Event</u>	<u>Years BC</u>	<u>Event</u>
883-612	Neo-Assyrian empire period	588-586	3rd Babylonian invasion: Jerusalem besieged
740-680	The prophet <b>Isaiah</b> active		586 Jerusalem taken, destroyed; end of the southern kingdom of Judah
627-586	The prophet <b>Jeremiah</b> active	586-539	Israel subject to Babylon
612	Babylon and its allies attack Nineveh, destroy Assyrian empire	539	Medo-Persian empire conquers Babylonian empire, allows exiles to return to native lands
612-539	Neo-Babylonian empire period	539-331	Persian empire period
605	First Babylonian invasion: prophet <b>Daniel</b> exiled to Babylon. Beginning of Jews' 70 year captivity	538	Small groups of Jews begin returning to Israel
605-530	The prophet <b>Daniel</b> active	525	Persian empire conquers Egypt
597	Second Babylonian invasion: prophet <b>Ezekiel</b> exiled to Babylon	517	Jerusalem temple rebuilt
593-571	The prophet <b>Ezekiel</b> active	458	Beginning of rebuilding of wall of Jerusalem
		332	Alexander the Great conquers Tyre
		275	Babylon is abandoned
		1	Babylon a wasteland

“Welcome boys!” said Professor Ho with a broad smile as Xiao Wang and Xiao Li walked through his office door. He was sincerely glad to see them. Xiao Wang might not have realized it, but Professor Ho had been earnestly praying for him since their first meeting two months earlier.

Professor Ho had known in advance that it actually wouldn't be too hard for an honest, intelligent inquirer like Xiao Wang to think his way out of atheism, once he had the scientific evidence. But that would still leave the question, ‘Who is the Creator?’ Professor Ho had also known that the evidence for the historical accuracy of the Bible was abundant and constantly increasing; any unbiased person would acknowledge it if he took the trouble to examine the facts. Professor Ho's own doctorate was in history, and it hadn't taken him long to realize that the Bible was a reliable ancient document.

But to realize that the Bible was a revelation inspired by God, by the One true God—that had been much harder for Professor Ho, and he knew it would be a challenge for Xiao Wang, too. In his prayers, he was asking God to help Xiao Wang to realize that so many fulfilled prophecies in the Bible couldn't have happened by chance but had to have been revealed by Someone outside of time who knew the future before it happened.

“Today I'd like to look at some truly long term prophecies.”

“How long?” asked Xiao Wang.

“Forever!” Professor Ho replied with a smile. “The prophet Jeremiah predicted that the ancient, flourishing city of Babylon would become desolate and never be rebuilt. It never was. He also said that eventually no one would be worshipping the idol gods whom the peoples of his day had worshipped for thousands of years. No one has worshipped them for over a thousand years. The prophet Ezekiel predicted the Egyptians would never again be politically powerful or conquer another nation. They never did, even down to today. He also predicted that the dirt and stones of the mighty mainland city of Tyre would scraped up and thrown into the sea. Hundreds of years later the Greeks broke their backs fulfilling the prophecy they'd never heard of, and the stones are still on the former seabed today.”

Xiao Li brightened as Professor Ho spoke. “That sounds interesting!” he said. “I've heard about some of those prophecies, but I've never understood the details.”

“It's surprising how few Christians do!” Professor Ho agreed. “But for anyone who is trying to confirm that the Bible was inspired by God, the long term prophecies are the keystone.”

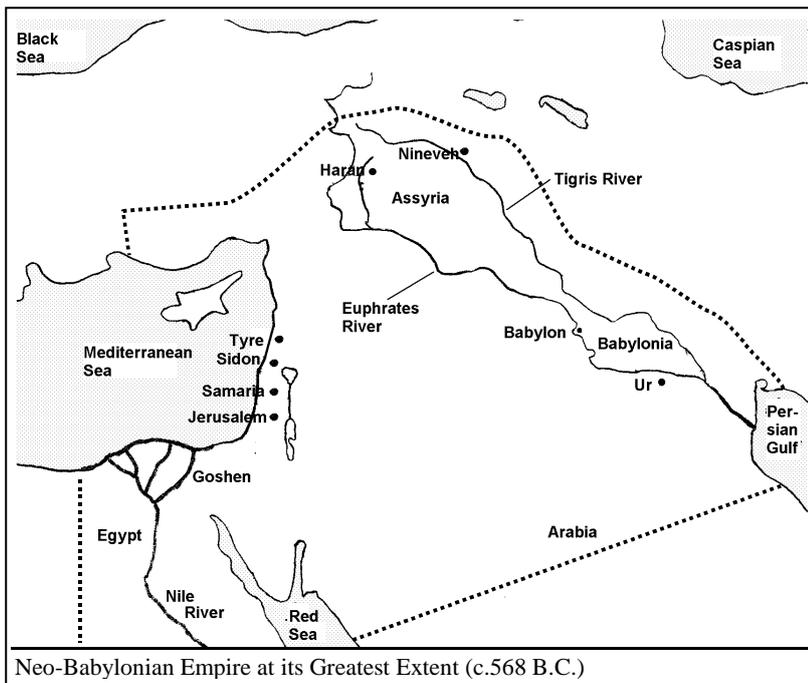
Xiao Wang nodded silently.

“However,” continued Professor Ho, “before we can understand the prophecies, we need to know the historical background in which they were given.” He turned to his bookshelves and pulled down a folio volume, flipped to the appendices in the back and opened to a map.

“The power politics of the ancient near eastern world underwent a sudden, radical shakeup in the course of a few decades. In 650 BC, the Assyrian empire with at it's zenith, controlling most of the territory in a huge arc from Egypt all the way to the Persian Gulf. Just twenty-five years later, Assyria was fighting for it's life. In 625 BC a Chaldean named Nabopolassar revolted and established his capital at Babylon. A little more than a decade later, Nabopolassar's son Nebuchadnezzar and his allies took and destroyed the Assyrian capital of Nineveh in 612 BC. It was never rebuilt. The mightiest empire the near east had known to that time was gone forever. This was predicted in the Bible, but we can't go into that today.<sup>A</sup>

“Suddenly the Babylonians skyrocketed to prominence and in fifty years established an empire larger than the one the Assyrians had achieved in over 200 years of imperial expansion. At the beginning, Egypt fought it out with Baby-

<sup>A</sup> Interested readers should see the prophecies of Zephaniah (especially 2:13-15) and Nahum.



lon for control of Palestine. The dom of Judah once more found itself caught between rival ‘superpowers’ to it’s north and south. Into this unsettled world, the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel were born.”

#### The Prophet Jeremiah: c.627-c.586 BC.

“The historical confirmation for the events in the book of Jeremiah is so rich that we can’t even discuss a tenth of it today. But in continuing with step two of our three step proof, I want to select a few details to show how minutely accurate the book is, and how completely integrated the prophecies are with the historical context. The prologue to Jeremiah allows us to date his activities very precisely.” Professor Ho opened the well worn Bible that was always on his desk-top and read:

The words of Jeremiah the son of

Hilkiah, of the priests who were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin, to whom the word of the LORD came in the days of Josiah the son of Amon, king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign [627 BC]. It came also in the days of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the end of the eleventh year of Zedekiah the son of Josiah, king of Judah, until the exile of Jerusalem in the fifth month [586 BC]. [Jeremiah 1:1-3 NAS]

“By this point in Biblical history, we can confidently date events to an accuracy of within one year. Jeremiah prophesied from 627 BC, the thirteenth year of Josiah’s reign, to 586 BC, the year Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians.<sup>B</sup> Thus he began prophesying just as Assyria entered it’s precipitous decline. Unlike the situation in the book of Isaiah, the Assyrians were no longer a threat to the Jews, and so they get hardly any mention in the book of Jeremiah. Even the fall of Nineveh in 612 BC only gets a backwards glance. [See Jeremiah 50:17-18.]

“The lifetime of Jeremiah was dominated by the Babylonians’ three invasions of Judah in 605, 597 and 588-86 BC.”

#### 605 BC: The battle of Carchemish and the first Babylonian invasion

Professor Ho turned back to the book with the map and pointed to a dot. “After losing all the cities in their home territory, the remaining Assyrians fell back westward to a city called Carchemish on the Euphrates river. Meanwhile, the Egyptians hoped to regain the control they had enjoyed over Palestine centuries before. To do that, they had to make sure the Babylonians didn’t expand southwards. The Egyptians marched northwards to Carchemish and allied with the few remaining Assyrians to oppose the Babylonians. The result was the famous battle of Carchemish in 605 BC, where Egypt and Babylon fought the first round of their struggle for supremacy in the ancient near east. Before their swords had crossed, Jeremiah predicted the outcome:

1 That which came as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet... 2 ...concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was by the Euphrates River at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah [605 BC]: ... 11

“...Egypt...there is no healing for you. 12 The nations have heard of your shame, and the earth is full of your cry of distress; for one warrior has stumbled over another, and both of them have fallen down together.” [Jeremiah 46:1-2, 11-12 NAS]

“But,” Xiao Wang quickly objected, “if you say the prophecy was made the same year as the battle, how can that give me in the 21<sup>st</sup> century any confidence that the prediction came before the fulfillment?”

“Of course!” agreed Professor Ho. “I’m not suggesting this proves inspiration for us today. For us this prophecy shows the historical accuracy and sets the timeframe. But the people of his own time should have begun to learn that what Jeremiah predicted would certainly happen! And it did.

“After defeating the Egyptians as predicted, the Babylonians continued southwards and overran Judah. The king of Judah, Jehoiakim, submitted to the Babylonians, so he was allowed to continue reigning as a feudal vassal of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonians carried off some of the treasure from the LORD’s temple in Jerusalem back with them to Babylon, as well as a group of nobles who would serve as hostages. One of the hostages was the prophet Daniel:

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah [606-605 BC], Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon

<sup>B</sup> In addition, Jeremiah chapters 40-44 record events and prophecies occurring a few months, or a most a few years, after the destruction of Jerusalem in August 586 BC.

came to Jerusalem and besieged it. The Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar [Babylon], to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. Then the king ordered Ashpenaz, the chief of his officials, to bring in some of the sons of Israel, including some of the royal family and of the nobles, [Daniel 1:1-3 NAS]

This invasion is mentioned in at least three places in the Bible. [See 2Kings 24:1, 2Chronicles 36:6, Daniel 1:1-3.] Some decades ago, it was claimed there was no specific evidence for this invasion outside of the Bible. I'll give you three guesses what the unbelieving scholars said about it."

"They claimed it never happened," Xiao Wang replied promptly.

"Exactly," agreed Professor Ho with a nod, "or at least they termed it doubtful.<sup>12</sup> And guess what happened next?"

"They dug up evidence for it."

"You're catching on!" said Professor Ho with a smile. "The Babylonian Chronicle discovered by archaeologists is a part of the ancient court records of Babylon from the time of Nebuchadnezzar. It specifically records a campaign in 605 BC, the year Nebuchadnezzar's father died and he began his reign." Professor Ho pulled another archaeology book from his shelves, checked the index, and then read:

The *Babylonian Chronicle*...states, 'At that time Nebuchadnezzar captured the whole area of the Hatti-country.' This includes all Syria and Palestine south to the border of Egypt. In the midst of the campaign, on the eighth of Av (August 16), King Nabopolassar died, and Nebuchadnezzar hurried back to Babylon to take the throne left by his father. Twenty-three days later he 'sat on the royal throne in Babylon.'<sup>3</sup>

"Although the text doesn't specifically mention Jerusalem, both the place and the time fit the events recorded in the Bible. The year in which Nebuchadnezzar became king has been determined by archaeologists to be 605 BC."<sup>4</sup> Professor Ho pulled another book down from his shelves. "The first century AD Jewish historian Josephus also preserves an account of this event which he attributes to Berossus, a Babylonian historian who lived about 300 BC. According to Josephus, when Nebuchadnezzar suddenly had to return to Babylon to claim the throne, he

...committed the captives he had taken from the Jews, and Phoenicians, and Syrians, and of the nations belonging to Egypt to some of his friends, that they might...[take them to] Babylonia...<sup>5</sup>

Xiao Wang was a little confused. "I thought the critics used to claim there was no evidence outside the Bible for the 605 BC invasion. What about Josephus? Is he in the Bible?"

"No," Professor Ho affirmed, "he was a Jew who lived from about 37 to 100 AD and wrote several important histories of the Jews."

"Then isn't his history evidence from outside the Bible?"

Professor Ho smiled ironically. "One would think so! Ah, but you see, Josephus believed in the historicity of the Old Testament Bible—and for that reason, anything he said that agrees with the Bible is distrusted by the critics! Anyone who believes the Bible is guilty unless proven innocent! Even when he claims to be quoting a non-Jewish historian. But now we have the evidence dug up in the city of Babylon itself. It's another example of 'Dig and you will find it.'"

Xiao Li was getting bored by the historical details that Professor Ho kept 'digging up.' "Professor Ho, this is as dry as my old history classes," he complained. "Dates and battles and names of ancient kings..."

Professor Ho was used to hearing this kind of complaint, but he still had to suppress an impulse of resentment at hearing his specialty maligned that way. "Well, Xiao Li, how about some evidence you can really sink your teeth into?"

"Like what?"

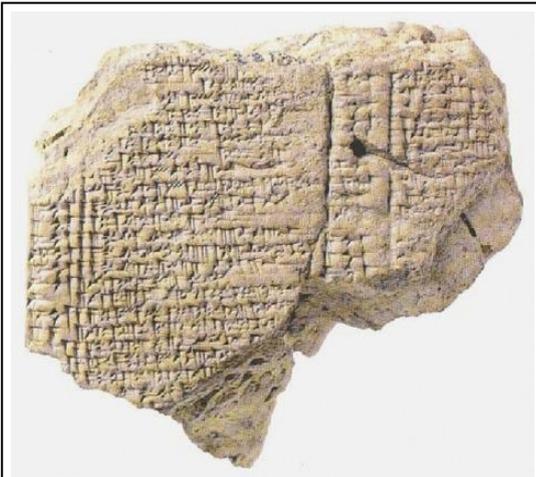
"The meal ticket of the king of Judah when he ate at the Café Babylon!"

#### 597 BC: The second Babylonian invasion and the deportation of King Jehoiachin

"Being conquered by Babylon in 605 BC was a disciplinary punishment from God because of the Jew's sins, especially idolatry. God explicitly told them so through the prophet Jeremiah and instructed them to repent of their sins and submit to Babylon. They did neither. After a couple of years of sending tribute to Babylon, the Jewish rulers rebelled again. The result was a second invasion by the Babylonians in 597 BC. They deported the young king Jehoiachin, also called Jeconiah and Coniah, to Babylon, as Jeremiah had predicted." Professor Ho began to flip through his Bible and read.

24 "As I live," declares the LORD, "...Coniah [Jehoiachin, Jeconiah] the...king of Judah... 25 ...I will give you over into the hand of those who are seeking your life, yes, into the hand of those whom you dread, even into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and into the hand of the Chaldeans. 26 I will hurl you and your mother who bore you into another country [Babylon] where you were not born, and there you will die. 27 But as for the land [Judah] to which they desire to return, they will not return to it." [Jeremiah 22:24-27 NAS]

When the Babylonian army encircled Jerusalem in 597 BC, Jehoiachin did not put up much of a fight. He chose to surrender to Nebuchadnezzar after a brief siege. Perhaps for this reason, Nebuchadnezzar treated him leniently. As Jeremiah predicted, he was never allowed to return to Israel. But he and his family were well fed and cared for in Babylon,



One of the cuneiform clay tablets found in Babylon which record rations given to Jehoiachin and his family. Note 1.

and the Bible notes he fathered several sons [1 Chronicles 3:16-18]. Eventually, the year after Nebuchadnezzar died, Jehoiachin was given greater freedom.<sup>C</sup>

31 Now it came about in the thirty-seventh year of the exile of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month, on the twenty-fifth of the month [c.561 BC], that Evil-merodach king of Babylon, in the first year of his reign, showed favor to Jehoiachin king of Judah and brought him out of prison. 32 Then he spoke kindly to him and set his throne above the thrones of the kings who were with him in Babylon. . . . 34 For his allowance, a regular allowance was given him by the king of Babylon, a daily portion all the days of his life until the day of his death. [Jeremiah 52:31-32, 34 NAS]

Nebuchadnezzar and his successor held a large number of minor kings hostage in their palace complex. One of the most amazing finds of biblical archaeology are four clay tablets discovered among the thousands dug from the ruins of Babylon. These are receipts for rations issued to various dependents of the royal household, including captives. They date from c.594-569 BC. The tablets note provisions of oil to both ‘Youkin,’ the Babylonian equivalent of Jehoiachin, who is called the ‘king of Judah,’ and ‘for the five sons of the king of Judah,’ as well as for other another ‘eight men from Judah.’<sup>6</sup> It’s a spectacular discovery, a precise confirmation of specific details in the Bible—the right man and his children in the right place at the right time, all confirmed in the written records of people who knew and cared nothing about the Bible. The entire Bible is accurate history, every detail. There are no mistakes<sup>D</sup> and no one has ever successfully demonstrated any, though an army of critics has been attacking it for 200 years.

“The rest of the Bible’s details about what happened in the 597 BC invasion are equally accurate. The book of Jeremiah notes that Nebuchadnezzar appointed Jehoiachin’s uncle Zedekiah as king in his place:

Now Zedekiah...whom Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had made king in the land of Judah, reigned as king in place of Coniah [Jehoiachin, Jeconiah] the son of Jehoiakim. [Jeremiah 37:1 NAS]

The Babylonians also took thousands of people captive:

After Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon had carried away captive Jeconiah [Coniah, Jehoiachin] the son of Jehoiakim, king of Judah, and the officials of Judah with the craftsmen and smiths from Jerusalem and had brought them to Babylon... [Jeremiah 24:1 NAS]

These are the people whom Nebuchadnezzar carried away into exile: in the seventh year [of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign] 3,023 Jews; [Jeremiah 52:28 NAS]<sup>7</sup>

Among the captives was the prophet Ezekiel [see Ezekiel 1:2-3]. In addition to captives, Nebuchadnezzar also carried a substantial amount of treasure with him back to Babylon:

11 And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city [Jerusalem]... 13 He carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king’s house... [2Kings 24:11, 13 NAS]

Those are the main events of the 597 BC invasion according to the Bible. Most of the details are repeated in several different books of the Bible. I’ve mostly chosen Jeremiah’s record, because our focus today is on proving the date and the accuracy of the book of Jeremiah. Where shall we turn to confirm it’s accuracy? How about to Nebuchadnezzar’s record, dug up thousands of years later in the ancient rubble of his capital.” Here Professor Ho read from the folio sized book he had opened earlier, which was an anthology of translations of ancient near eastern documents found by archaeologists:

Seventh year [597 BC]: In the month Kislimu, the king of Akkad [Babylonia] called up his army, marched against Hattu-land [Syria and Palestine], encamped against the city of Judah and seized the town on the second day of the month Adar [March 16]. He captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice. He took much booty from it and sent it to Babylon.<sup>8</sup>

“Note the detailed agreement.” Professor Ho ticked off the items on his fingertips.

1. “The timing: Nebuchadnezzar’s seventh year, namely 597 BC, which is also correct for the beginning of Zede-

<sup>C</sup> The following quotation, from Jeremiah chapter 52, was not written by Jeremiah himself. Note that Jeremiah 51:64 ends with the words, “Thus far are the words of Jeremiah.” Chapter 52 of the book of Jeremiah is an appendix added later by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Compare 2Kings 25 which contains most of the same information; also see 2Chronicles 36:10-21 and Jeremiah 39:1-10.

<sup>D</sup> There are occasional copying errors in our present manuscripts, but these are rarely significant. The original manuscripts had no errors.

- kiah's reign.<sup>E</sup>
2. The taking of Jerusalem.
  3. The capture of the king, namely Jehoiachin / Jeconiah / Coniah.
  4. The replacement of the king with a new one chosen by Nebuchadnezzar, namely Zedekiah.
  5. The looting of treasure.”

Professor Ho paused and looked up at the boys over the top of his glasses. “Repeatedly seeing this kind of confirmation of the historical details in the Bible gradually convinced me that it’s record is accurate and reliable—real people, real events, correct timeframes. As I saw more and more meticulously accurate detail, it became harder and harder to believe that the books had been composed far later than their historical setting, or pieced together by editors who added in numerous sections a bit at a time across hundreds of years.”

#### c.593-588 BC: The Jews rebel against Babylon and ally with Egypt

Professor Ho straightened up in his chair and paused again. His eyes looked past the boys out through the window in his office door. For a moment his thoughts seemed far away. When he started speaking again, it was as if he were talking to himself: “It’s remarkable how slow human beings are to learn from their mistakes.” His eyes turned back to the boys. “It seems the Jews didn’t learn anything from the invasion of 597 BC and the deportation of king Jehoiachin. A few years later, they rebelled against Babylon again.”

“Wasn’t it right for them to try to gain their independence?” asked Xiao Wang.

“Under ordinary circumstances it might have been,” agreed Professor Ho. “But the Jews were not an ordinary nation. Their ethnicity was specially established by God to be His means of communicating with the world. Therefore they were specially under His management and supposed to listen to His commands relayed to them through His prophets.

“Through the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, God plainly told the Jews that He had allowed the first two Babylonian conquests in 605 and 597 BC as a discipline, and that they should repent of their sins and submit to Nebuchadnezzar’s overlordship:

1 In the beginning of the reign of Zedekiah [c.597 BC]...this word came to Jeremiah from the LORD, saying...4...Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel... 5 "I have made the earth, the men and the beasts which are on the face of the earth by My great power and by My outstretched arm, and I will give it to the one who is pleasing in My sight. 6 Now I have given all these lands into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon...7 All the nations shall serve him and his son and his grandson until the time of his own land comes... 8 ...the nation or the kingdom which will not serve...the king of Babylon, I will punish...with the sword, with famine and with pestilence," declares the LORD, "until I have destroyed it by his hand." ... 12 I [Jeremiah] spoke words like all these to Zedekiah king of Judah, saying... 17 ‘...serve the king of Babylon, and live! Why should this city [Jerusalem] become a ruin?’ [Jeremiah 27:1, 4-8, 12, 17 NAS]

“But wasn’t Nebuchadnezzar an idolater and an imperialist?” Xiao Li asked. “Why would God be pleased with him or choose him to rule?”

“I can understand why you ask that,” Professor Ho replied with a slight nod. “You see, God’s purposes in history center around Israel, especially until Jesus came and the gospel spread to the whole world. The Babylonians probably weren’t particularly better or worse than most of the peoples they conquered. But they were God’s chosen instrument, at the time, to discipline Israel for their inveterate, idolatrous worship of false gods. Therefore God allowed the Babylonian conquests to succeed.

“The Jews could have avoided additional suffering at the hands of the Babylonians if they had accepted God’s exhortation through Jeremiah in 597 BC. But most of the Jews, including Zedekiah, their king, did not listen to God. Instead, they rebelled against Babylon and turned to Egypt for help. Jeremiah repeatedly condemned this alliance and warned that it would be worthless:

18 But now what are you doing on the road to Egypt, to drink the waters of the Nile? ... 36 ... you will be put to shame by Egypt... [Jeremiah 2:18, 36 NAS]

Archaeologists have unearthed a remarkable confirmation of the Jews’ diplomatic relations with Egypt at that time.”

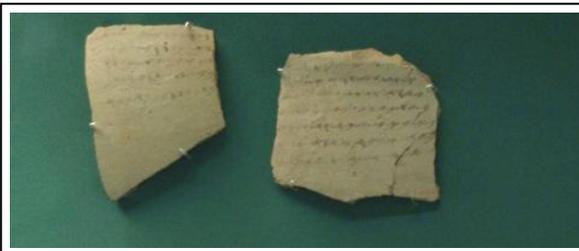
“Did they find a record of it in Egyptian history?” suggested Xiao Li.

“No,” Professor replied with a smile, “they found it in a pile of broken pottery! Pottery sherds on the floor of an army guardroom in the Jewish city of Lachish.”

#### The Lachish letters

Professor Ho flipped through the pages of the archaeology book and stopped at a picture of pottery fragments with writing on them. “As you may remember from our discussion of Isaiah, Lachish was one of the most heavily fortified cities in Israel. Located about 45 kilometers southwest of Jerusalem, it was a major target for any invader. The site is uninhabited today. In the 1930s, archaeologists excavating Lachish found 21 letters written on pottery sherds dated to just before the final Babylonian invasion of 588 BC. Most of them are correspondence between a military leader, prob-

<sup>E</sup> Readers with an eye for detail may notice differences between 2 Kings 24 and Jeremiah 52. Interested readers may consult Note 7.



Some of the Lachish letters. Note 1.



Lachish archaeological excavations . Note 1.

ably at an outpost, and his superior, apparently in Lachish.<sup>F</sup> In them we find striking confirmation of Jeremiah's historical tails.<sup>G</sup> Letter 3 reflects the alliance with Egypt. The er reports to his superior:

Your servant Hoshai...[to] my lord Yaosh: May Yahweh cause my lord to hear tidings of peace! .... And it has been reported to your servant, saying, 'The commander of the host, Coniah son of Elnathan, has come down in order to go into Egypt...'<sup>9</sup>

This is just at the time when Israel would have been seeking help from Egypt against the advancing Babylonian armies. The event reported in the letter would appear to be a military tion going to discuss strategy, which is exactly in keeping with the Jeremiah passages we looked at a moment ago.

"Of course this alliance aroused the attention of Nebuchadnezzar. The Babylonian army returned in force in 589 BC, reaching Jerusalem by January 15, 588 BC. They surrounded and besieged the city. Meanwhile the Jewish leaders had been frantically calling on Egypt (not on God!) for help. The tians did come, as the Jeremiah records:

Meanwhile, Pharaoh's army had set out from Egypt; and when the Chaldeans [i.e. Babylonians] who had been sieging Jerusalem heard the report about them, they lifted

the siege from Jerusalem. Then the word of the LORD came to Jeremiah the prophet, saying, "Thus says the LORD God of Israel, 'Thus you are to say to the king of Judah, who sent you to Me to inquire of Me: "Behold, Pharaoh's army which has come out for your assistance is going to return to its own land of Egypt. The Chaldeans will also return and fight against this city, and they will capture it and burn it with fire.'" [Jeremiah 37:5-8 NAS]

### 588-586 BC: The final siege and destruction of Jerusalem; The third deportation and the beginning of the Babylonian captivity

"As Jeremiah had predicted, the Egyptians were defeated by the Babylonians in a battle in southern Palestine in 588 BC and withdrew. Nebuchadnezzar returned, continued his siege, and took Jerusalem in 586 BC:

This is how Jerusalem was captured: In the ninth year of Zedekiah king of Judah, in the tenth month [January 588 BC], Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon and all his army came to Jerusalem and laid siege to it; in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, in the fourth month, in the ninth day of the month [July 18, 586 BC], the city wall was breached. [Jeremiah 39:1-2 composite translation from NAS / NIV]

"I suppose we have the Babylonian record of the capture of Jerusalem?" asked Xiao Wang.

Professor Ho pursed his lips and shook his head. "Regrettably, the extant Babylonian Chronicle discovered by archaeologists is broken off in Nebuchadnezzar's 11<sup>th</sup> year, 595 BC. His palace has been excavated, but apparently he didn't see fit to adorn it's walls with scenes of bloody conquest cut in stone the way the Assyrians did! But Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah and the exile of the Jews is not really a matter of dispute. Even among the hardcore anti-biblical critics, almost no one has ever denied it, and in any case the archaeologists long ago confirmed that there was a hiatus of Jewish occupation in Palestine during most of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.<sup>10</sup>

"On the other hand, Babylonian records found by archaeologists do provide another kind of confirmation of Jeremiah's historical accuracy"

### Precisely accurate Babylonian terms in Jeremiah

"Jeremiah's record of the fall of Jerusalem includes Hebrew transliterations of the names and titles of specific Babylonian officials. When Jerusalem finally fell in 586 BC, Jeremiah notes:

Then all the officials of the king of Babylon came in and sat down at the Middle Gate: Nergal-sarezer of Samgar, Nebu-sarsekim the Rab-saris [i.e. chief eunuch], Nergal-sarezer the Rab-mag [i.e. chief prince], and all the rest of the officials of the king of Babylon. [Jeremiah 39:3 NAS; parsing modified based on NIV]

The strange names transliterated in the passage are distinctly Babylonian; for example, Nergal-sarezer means '(may) Nergal protect the king' in the language used by the Babylonians. Nergal and Nebu were the names of Babylonian gods.

<sup>F</sup> Some scholars suggest they were actually draft copies of correspondence from a military commander in Lachish to his superior in Jerusalem.

<sup>G</sup> See the Appendix of this chapter for more examples from the Lachish letters.



Nebo-Sarsekim tablet. Note 1.

Here the names of the gods are used as parts of personal names, similar to the way the name Isaiah had ‘Yah,’ short for ‘Yahweh,’ as part of his name.

“The term ‘Rab-saris’ originally meant ‘chief eunuch’ and was used by Babylonians for a high ranking official.<sup>11</sup> Similarly, ‘Rab-mag’ is from a Babylonian term meaning ‘chief prince,’<sup>12</sup> a type of high ranking Babylonian military official who was sometimes sent on diplomatic missions to rulers of other countries.<sup>13</sup>

“Do we know from outside the Bible who they were?” Xiao Wang wanted to know.

“Probably—and certainly!” Professor Ho replied enigmatically. “First the probably. One of the two men in this passage named Nergal-sarezer was very probably the man by that name known to have been Nebuchadnezzar’s son-in-law. He later

reigned as king of Babylon from 560-556 BC.<sup>14</sup>

“But the ‘certainly’ is much more interesting. Until the 21<sup>st</sup> century, no one had heard of ‘Nebu-sarsekim the Rab-saris’ except for this single, off-handed mention in the book of Jeremiah.

“In the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, tens of thousands of cuneiform tablets were excavated from the site of ancient Babylon. Many of these wound up in the British Museum. Thousands of them are lying there to this day, unread. One day in 2007 a visiting scholar was sifting through the tablets looking for information on Babylonian officials, and he found this—” Professor Ho pulled an archeology magazine from a storage box on his bookshelves, flipped it open and read:

(Regarding) 1.5 minas (0.75kg) of gold, the property of Nabu-sharrussu-ukin [i.e. Nebu-sarsekim], the chief eunuch, which he sent to (the temple) Esangila...Month 11, day 18, year 10 (of) Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon [i.e. 595 BC].<sup>15</sup>

Though the Babylonian spelling is, of course, slightly different from the Hebrew transliteration, scholars agree that it is the same person, with the same title, chief eunuch, from the same place, Babylon, in the same time period—just nine years before the Jeremiah 39:3 passage.

Think of this: the name and title of one of the most obscure characters in the Bible plucked from a pile of thousands of ancient tablets! No wonder one of the museum keepers—obviously not a believer—said:

...If Nebo-Sarsekim existed, what other lesser figures in the Old Testament existed? A throwaway detail in the Old Testament turns out to be accurate and true. I think that means that the whole of the narrative (of Jeremiah) takes on a new kind of power.<sup>16</sup>

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. “I can answer the keeper’s question: *all* the figures in the Old Testament existed, exactly as the Bible records!” Professor Ho continued enthusiastically. “Even a foreigner with a strange sounding name that had to be written phonetically in Hebrew, a man mentioned once in passing who doesn’t say or do anything except sit down, a man who, until 2007 AD, was unknown in the annals of history outside the Bible—he’s real. That’s because the Bible really is 100% accurate history!”

“Dig through the tablets and you will find it!” Xiao Wang bantered with a friendly smile.

Professor Ho laughed at himself, realizing he had been getting excited.

Meanwhile, Xiao Li was sitting silently with a blank look on his face. Professor Ho leaned forward, turned toward him and gave him an understanding smile. “Xiao Li, I’m afraid you might be bored by these details.”

Xiao Li dropped his eyes and tried to be polite. “I know the battles were very important. And the clay tablet is...interesting.”

Professor Ho’s smile deepened almost into a laugh. “But perhaps you don’t find the lists of names so interesting?” Xiao Li looked up. “I don’t really see what it has to do with proving the Bible was inspired by God.”

Professor Ho was serious now and nodded to Xiao Li. “I see your point. The Bible is accurate, yes—stunningly so—but what does that have to do with showing it came from God? Let me draw the line for you connecting a list of ancient names to God’s inspiring the prophets. The accuracy of these historical details provides evidence helping us confirm the time when the book of Jeremiah was written.”

“And why is that so important?” asked Xiao Li.

Xiao Wang quickly answered him: “The date when the text was written matters so we can know the prophecies were made before the events happened.”

“Exactly,” agree Professor Ho. “And, to that end, let’s look at some of the evidence.”

#### When was the book of Jeremiah written?

“Remember, the unbelieving critics will generally claim that Jeremiah was compiled in its final form sometime after 450 BC,<sup>17</sup> well over a hundred years later than the book of Jeremiah itself indicates. That would also be a century or more after the passing of the Babylonian empire. But minutely accurate historical details—details that are downright

obscure—provide evidence that the text we have was written down during the Babylonian empire period, not concocted over a hundred years later when Babylon had long been replaced by the Persian empire. Such details would have been forgotten the way our friend Nebo-Sarsekim was!”

Xiao Wang immediately objected, “But that doesn’t mean the entire book of Jeremiah was written then. Parts could have been added later.”

“That’s logically possible,” agreed Professor Ho. “But there are four reasons which make me confident that’s not what happened.

“My first reason is the one we just discussed: all the minutely accurate historical details. Jeremiah records Nebu-sarsekim the Rab-saris, an obscure Babylonian official who was otherwise lost to history. Jeremiah details the Babylonians’ invasion of Judah in 605 BC, which the critics used to doubt had ever happened. Jeremiah records the capture and exile of the historically insignificant king Jehoiachin and places it in the correct timeframe, facts confirmed by the Babylonians’ records. And there are many more examples we could look at. [See Appendix 8-1: More details demonstrating the time of composition and historical accuracy of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.] How could the book of Jeremiah be dotted with fabrications added across a few hundred years and yet still be so precisely accurate everywhere we can test it?

“Second, the language used throughout the book of Jeremiah is in keeping with a date before the Jews were exiled to Babylon. After the Jews returned from the exile beginning in 539 BC, their ordinary language steadily shifted from pure Hebrew to the related language of Aramaic, which was widely spoken in the near east. This shift is reflected in the extensive influence of Aramaic in the book of Daniel, completed around 535 BC, and the books of Ezra and Nehemiah, written after 450 BC. Those later books not only have lengthy Aramaic sections, but also show significant Aramaic influence in their Hebrew portions. The Hebrew used throughout the book of Jeremiah does not show significant Aramaic influence.<sup>18</sup> Nor does Jeremiah use loanwords from Persian, as later Old Testament books sometimes do, or Greek, as still later non-Biblical Jewish writings do. You may recall we discussed a similar situation for the book of Isaiah. [See chapter 7.]

The Lachish letters which we discussed a moment ago are universally acknowledged to have been written before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BC. Even the unbelieving critics wouldn’t dispute that. Therefore these letters provide a point of comparison for the language of Jeremiah. As one Old Testament scholar notes,

The most significant light cast upon the period of Jeremiah by the Lachish correspondence is to be found in the linguistic field. The type of Hebrew employed in these ostraca bears a very marked similarity to that which appears in the writings of Jeremiah, and serves to confirm the genuineness of his prophecies as stemming from the beginning of the sixth century BC.<sup>19</sup>

The language used in Jeremiah fits the early 6<sup>th</sup> century. It is noticeably different from the language of at least some of the later books of the Bible, like Ezra and Nehemiah, which were written in the mid to late 5<sup>th</sup> century. It is even more different from Jewish writings from outside the Bible composed after 400 BC.”

“Third, four copies of the book of Jeremiah were found among the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran. The oldest of them, Jeremiah ‘A’ from

cave number four,<sup>H</sup> has been dated to about 200 BC.<sup>1, 20</sup> This is a fantastic find; it’s from less than 400 years after Jeremiah, among the very earliest manuscripts we currently have! Only part of the manuscript is extant, but the portions we have show that it closely followed our standard Hebrew text, the so-called ‘Masoretic’ version. Of course, the manuscript portion from 200 BC is only a copy, and that copy had made it’s way into the possession of an obscure, reclusive sect living in mountain caves in the desert of Judea. Obviously the original manuscript must have been much earlier. In reality, the book of Jeremiah was finished before 550 BC. But I would guess that no one but the most stridently atheistic of the unbelieving critics would claim a date later than 300 BC for the completion of Jeremiah.”

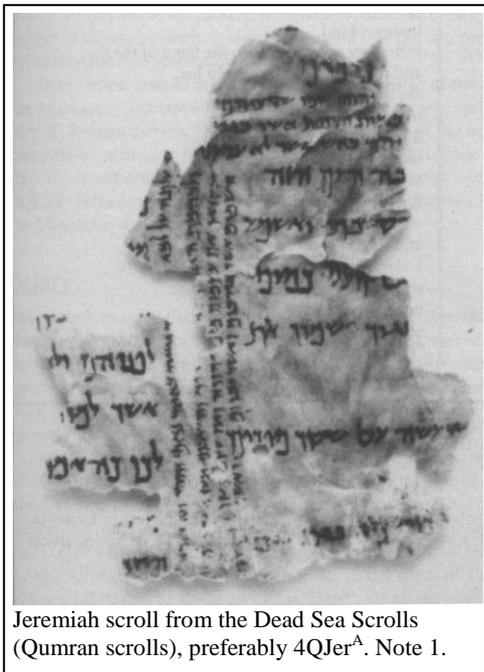
“And there prophecies in Jeremiah fulfilled after that?” Xiao Wang quickly asked.

Professor Ho nodded in the affirmative. “Yes. In fact, all but one of the prophecies I want to look at today are fulfilled later than that. But first, I have one more reason to be confident that Jeremiah was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

“My fourth and final reason for not believing Jeremiah contains later additions is the attitude of the Jews toward the scriptures. The Jews venerated their sacred books and were exquisitely careful about copying them correctly. We discussed that carefulness with regards to the Dead Sea Scrolls Isaiah manuscript. Furthermore, the Jews made a clear distinction between prophetically inspired writings and merely human words. They were all aware of the sharp warning in Deuteronomy:

<sup>H</sup> Scholars designate it as 4QJer<sup>A</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran) manuscripts is done based on the shapes of the letters and a number of other factors. Most or all of the dating was done by scholars who are unbelievers. For details, see Note 20.



Jeremiah scroll from the Dead Sea Scrolls (Qumran scrolls), preferably 4QJer<sup>A</sup>. Note 1.

'But the prophet who speaks a word presumptuously in My name which I have not commanded him to speak, or which he speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.' [Deuteronomy 18:20 NAS]

Even most of the unbelieving critics will agree that the prophet Jeremiah was known to and revered by the 'post-exilic' Jews, the ones who returned from Babylon starting in 539 BC and reestablished the nation of Israel. Everything he had predicted, including their captivity and restoration, had come true. Are we really to believe that the Jews would have accepted a whole series of additions to Jeremiah added across a couple of centuries?

"In fact, we have good evidence they would not have accepted additions. Several hundred years after Jeremiah's time two short works appeared among the Jews. One is the book of Baruch, which claimed to be written by Jeremiah's secretary Baruch.<sup>J</sup> The other is the so-called Epistle or Letter of Jeremiah, a short work claiming to be a letter from Jeremiah to the Babylonian exiles. Neither work was ever accepted into the Jewish canon or acknowledged as authoritative by the Jews.<sup>21</sup> In fact, the only early copies we have of both works are in Greek—no Hebrew versions have been found. Both works were possibly composed in Greek in the first place, unlike actual Old Testament books, which were written in Hebrew or the cognate Aramaic. It is obvious that both were composed long after the time of Jeremiah and Baruch—and both were rejected by the Jews! They simply did not casually accept additions to the recognized prophetic books."

Xiao Wang looked thoughtfully at Professor Ho. "Your reasons are weighty—more pebbles in your scales!—but I still wonder. The critics claim Jeremiah was completed much later?"

"Yes, 100 or 200 years later than the book of Jeremiah itself indicates." Professor Ho replied.

"If the evidence that it's early is so strong, why don't they agree?"

Professor gave a brief laugh. "Because they don't want to admit there is any fulfilled prophecy! You see, the critics have to claim there were later additions to Jeremiah and to the other prophets so they can claim the prophecies were written after the events happened. Their goal is to avoid as much fulfilled prophecy as possible. But it doesn't help them much. As I just mentioned, there are prophecies in Jeremiah fulfilled long after the latest possible date for the text."

Xiao Li brightened. "Can we talk about fulfilled prophecies now?"

"Absolutely!" Professor Ho smiled and assented. "But if you don't mind, let's start with a 'short-term' prophecy and work our way up."

#### The return of the Jews from Babylon: Fulfilled after 70 years

"Jeremiah not only predicted the Babylonian captivity. He also predicted when it would end." Professor Ho turned through the pages of his old Bible and read:

1 The word that came to Jeremiah concerning all the people of Judah, in the fourth year [c.606-605 BC] of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah (that was the first year of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon), 2 which Jeremiah the prophet spoke to all the people of Judah and to all the inhabitants of Jerusalem, saying, 3 "...these twenty-three years the word of the LORD has come to me, and I have spoken to you again and again, but you have not listened. 4 And the LORD has sent to you all His servants the prophets again and again... 5 saying, 'Turn now everyone from his evil way and from the evil of your deeds, and dwell on the land which the LORD has given to you and your forefathers forever and ever; 6 and do not go after other gods to serve them and to worship them, and do not provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands, and I will do you no harm.' 7 "Yet you have not listened to Me," declares the LORD, "in order that you might provoke Me to anger with the work of your hands to your own harm. 8 "Therefore thus says the LORD of hosts, 'Because you have not obeyed My words, 9 ...I will send to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, My servant, and will bring [his armies] against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about... 10 'Moreover, I will take from them the voice of joy and the voice of gladness, the voice of the bridegroom and the voice of the bride, the sound of the millstones and the light of the lamp. 11 'This whole land will be a desolation and a horror, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years. [Jeremiah 25:1-11 NAS]

"In this prediction you can see how God's plan and human choices work together. On the one hand, the prediction of domination by Babylon was conditional. If the Jews had been willing to repent, God would not have allowed the Babylonians to conquer them, just as He had not allowed the Assyrians to conquer king Hezekiah a hundred years earlier. On the other hand, God knew that they would not repent, so He had already prepared the Babylonian military juggernaut to sweep through Palestine and conquer both the Jews and the surrounding nations—which they subsequently did.

"Note that here God specifies the length of time of the Babylonian captivity: 70 years. It is counted with regard to the Jews, so the starting point is the first deportation in 605 BC, less than a year after this prophecy was made. In that year a group of Jewish nobles, including the prophet Daniel, were taken to Babylon as hostages.

"A few years later, after the second, much larger deportation in 597 BC, Jeremiah sent word to the exiles in Babylon:

1 Now these are the words of the letter which Jeremiah the prophet sent from Jerusalem to the rest of the elders of the exile, the priests, the prophets and all the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had taken into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. 2 (This was after King Jeconiah and the queen mother, the court officials, the princes

<sup>J</sup> For the real Baruch see Jeremiah chapter 36.

of Judah and Jerusalem, the craftsmen and the smiths had departed from Jerusalem.) [597 BC] ... 10 "For thus says the LORD, 'When seventy years have been completed for Babylon, I will visit you and fulfill My good word to you, to bring you back to this place. [Jeremiah 29:1-2, 10 NAS]

This time God specified that after the 70 years of Babylonian domination were over, there would be a restoration of the Jews to Israel. This timeframe is specified only in these two passages, but throughout the prophecies of Jeremiah the coming destruction of Jerusalem, the total captivity of the Jews, and the eventual restoration of the Jews to Israel are repeatedly predicted.

"And that's not all. As I mentioned last time, Isaiah who had lived a hundred years earlier than Jeremiah had also predicted the Babylonian captivity:

6 'Behold, the days are coming when all that is in your house and all that your fathers have laid up in store to this day will be carried to Babylon; nothing will be left,' says the LORD. 7 'And some of your sons who will issue from you, whom you will beget, will be taken away, and they will become officials in the palace of the king of Babylon.'" [Isaiah 39:6-7 NAS]

And Isaiah had also predicted the restoration after the captivity:

1 ...the LORD will have compassion on Jacob and again choose Israel, and settle them in their own land... 3 And it will be in the day when the LORD gives you rest from your pain and turmoil and harsh service in which you have been enslaved, 4 that you will take up this taunt against the king of Babylon, and say, "How the oppressor has ceased, And how fury has ceased!" [Isaiah 14:1, 3-4 NAS; see also Isaiah 43:14-17, 44:26-28, 48:14-15.]

Both Isaiah and Jeremiah asserted that the Jews would be exiled to Babylon but would later return and reestablish the country of Israel. But only Jeremiah specified the length of the captivity: seventy years."

Professor Ho leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtful. "Seventy years! The Jews exiled in Babylon were waiting. And counting. Especially one who had been dragged off to Babylon as a youth in the first deportation in 605 BC. About 67 years passed and he had grown very old counting down the years. And reading the prophecy.

1 In the first year [539-538 BC] of Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of Median descent, who was made king over the kingdom of the Chaldeans -- 2 in the first year of his reign, I, Daniel, observed in the books the number of the years which was revealed as the word of the LORD to Jeremiah the prophet for the completion of the desolations of Jerusalem, namely, seventy years. 3 So I gave my attention to the Lord God to seek Him by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth and ashes. [Daniel 9:1-3 NAS]

What Daniel prayed for actually happened a couple of years later. Cyrus, the first emperor of the Medo-Persian empire, encouraged the Jewish exiles scattered throughout the empire to return to Israel and resume worship of their God, Yahweh:

1 Now in the first year [538-537 BC] of Cyrus king of Persia, in order to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he sent a proclamation throughout all his kingdom, and also put it in writing, saying: 2 "Thus says Cyrus king of Persia, 'The LORD, the God of heaven, has given me all the kingdoms of the earth and He has appointed me to build Him a house in Jerusalem, which is in Judah. 3 'Whoever there is among you of all His people, may his God be with him! Let him go up to Jerusalem which is in Judah and rebuild the house of the LORD, the God of Israel; He is the God who is in Jerusalem. 4 'Every survivor, at whatever place he may live, let the men of that place support him with silver and gold, with goods and cattle, together with a freewill offering for the house of God which is in Jerusalem.'" ...

7 ...the articles of the house of the LORD, which Nebuchadnezzar had carried away from Jerusalem and put in the house of his gods... 8 ...Cyrus, king of Persia, had them brought out by the hand of Mithredath the treasurer, and he counted them out to Sheshbazzar, the prince of Judah. [Ezra 1:1-4, 7-8 NAS]

And so the first group of Jews returned, arriving right on time. The exiles were in the land by the autumn of 537 BC. [See Ezra 1:1, 3:1-3.] The seventy years are probably counted as 606-605 BC being year one, and 537-536 BC being year seventy."

"Why would a Persian king believe in Yahweh, the God of the Jews?" wondered Xiao Wang.

"A good question!" agreed Professor Ho. "And let's make an even more skeptical query: Did all this really happen? Did the Persians really encourage the Jews to return, fulfilling Jeremiah's prophecy right on time? Or was it all just made up afterwards? Is the Bible's history accurate here? What do you think, Xiao Wang?"

Xiao Wang gave Professor Ho a puzzled look; then his expression changed to a smile, he gave a chuckle and said: "I know what you're going to tell me!" Xiao Wang raised his eyebrows and deepened his voice: "The critics used to say that it never happened, but then an archaeologist found..."

Professor Ho couldn't help laughing at Xiao Wang's accurate imitation of him. Then he replied, "Well, not quite. I doubt if even the most hardened of the anti-Biblical critics ever denied that the Persians allowed Jews to return and rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. But the Bible specifically says that the first ruler of the Persian Empire, Cyrus, issued a proclamation supporting it."

"Have the archaeologists found it?" asked Xiao Li.



The Cyrus Cylinder in the British Museum. Note 1.

“What they found,” Professor Ho replied, “was Cyrus’s general proclamation about his policy of returning exiled people groups to their native lands and supporting them in reestablishing the worship of their gods. In 1879, an Iraqi archaeologist digging in Babylon found an inscription on a clay cylinder. It was composed sometime 539-531 BC and says in part:

...From [Babylon] I [Cyrus] sent back to their places [the gods]...whose shrines had earlier become dilapidated, the gods who lived therein, and made permanent sanctuaries for them. I collected

together all of their peoples and returned them to their settlements...

[T]he gods...which Nabonidus {Babylonian king defeated by Cyrus}...had brought into Shuanna [Babylon], at the command of Marduk [a god worshipped in Babylon], the great lord...I returned them unharmed to their cells, in the sanctuaries that make them happy. May all the gods that I returned to their sanctuaries, every day before Bel and Nabu [Babylonian gods], ask for a long life for me, and mention my good deeds.<sup>22</sup>

Notice four points Cyrus makes, each one of which is exactly in keeping with the record in the Bible:

1. Cyrus was returning the people groups whom the Babylonians had deported to their homelands.
2. The Babylonians had also carried off the idols of those peoples to Babylon.
3. Cyrus was sending these idols ‘home.’ For the Jews, of course, it was just temple furnishings, not an actual idol.
4. The temples of those gods had fallen into disrepair, and Cyrus was supporting their rebuilding.

Finally, notice how the inscription sheds light on Cyrus’s motives:

5. Cyrus hopes that these returned foreign gods will ask the gods of Babylon to bless him.

On the one hand, Cyrus was a polytheist and wanted the good will of any and every god. That is stated explicitly in the inscription. This helps us understand why the pagan king of Persia would be so willing to help the Jews restore the worship of Yahweh. At the same time, we can readily imagine Cyrus’s policy would tend to gain him the support of the different ethnicities scattered throughout the vast empire he had recently conquered and thus help him consolidate his rule.

“The Cyrus Cylinder strongly confirmed the Bible’s history. But the critics still tried to raise one caveat. The Bible states that Cyrus made a decree. The critics, however, tried to quibble that the Cyrus cylinder was just a ‘foundation deposit’ inscription to be placed in a temple, not a royal proclamation as such.<sup>23</sup> Part of the misunderstanding arose because the cylinder had pieces missing and thus its text was incomplete. Then in 2009 parts of a copy of the same proclamation of restoration were found on fragments of a tablet which had been discovered at another site south of Babylon. The fragments had lain in the British museum, unexamined for over a hundred years. After analyzing them, British Museum scholars cautiously affirmed:

...the new pieces...show that the ‘declaration’ on the [Cyrus] Cylinder is much more than a standard Babylonian building inscription. It was probably an imperial decree that was distributed around the Persian empire, and it may have been pronouncements of this sort that the author of the Biblical book of Ezra was able to draw upon when writing about Cyrus.<sup>24</sup>

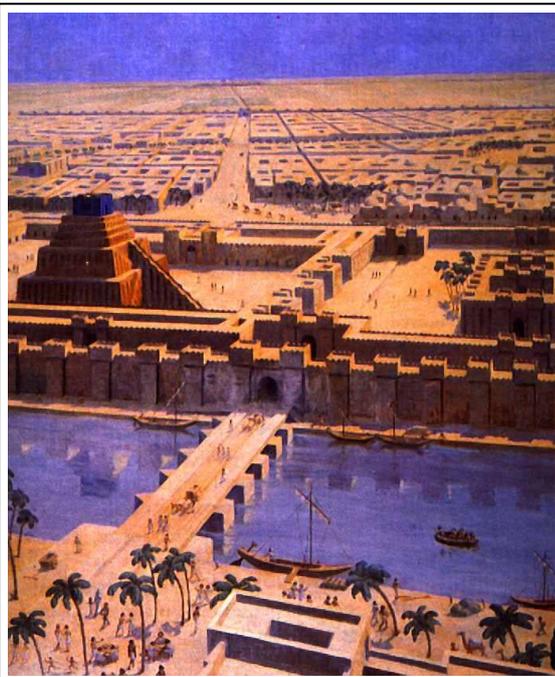
Once more the Bible was shown to be correct even in its small details. At the same time, the timing of Jeremiah’s prophecy about the Jews’ returning after 70 years is also vindicated. The proclamation on the Cyrus Cylinder must date from after Cyrus conquered Babylon in 539 BC. Cyrus died in 531 BC. So the proclamation falls between 539-531 BC, which includes the time exactly 70 years after the beginning of the Jews’ captivity in 605 BC. Accurate history; fulfilled prophecy.”

“I agree about the accurate history,” Xiao Wang replied, “but how can you be sure this prophecy wasn’t written after the events occurred? You don’t have manuscripts early enough to really prove it was written before 539 BC.”

“I can see how you would think that way,” agreed Professor Ho. “I myself am quite convinced now that the book of Jeremiah really was completed decades before 539 BC and that Jeremiah really did predict the return of the Jews long before there was any sign of it. But back when I was first considering the evidence, the ‘short term’ prophecies like the return of the Jews after 70 years weren’t enough to convince me that God had inspired prophets, just like they don’t convince you now. So let’s ratchet up the timing a notch. Let’s look at a prophecy fulfilled over 300 years after Jeremiah made it.”

#### The permanent desolation of Babylon: Fulfilled after more than 300 years

“At the time of Jeremiah, the city of Babylon was rising to the zenith of its development. Nebuchadnezzar used the rich tribute exacted from his vast empire to expand Babylon into a glorious metropolis which straddled both sides of the Euphrates river. The metropolitan area’s population is estimated by archaeologists to have been 400,000—a huge number for that time—living inside a massive defensive wall over 15 kilometers long.<sup>25</sup> The famous hanging gardens of Babylon, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, reproduced a forested mountainside on the flat alluvial plain



Artist's conception of Babylon at its height. Note 1.

inside the city. It is said to have been built to please nezzar's queen Amytis, who was from the country of Media in what is today Iran and missed the mountain scenery of her homeland. At this moment, with Babylon perhaps the largest and most glorious city in the world, the capital of a vast empire—at that moment, in c.593 BC, Jeremiah announced:

50:1 The word which the LORD spoke concerning Babylon, the land of the Chaldeans, through Jeremiah the prophet: ... 39 "...the desert creatures will live there along with the jackals; the ostriches also will live in it, and it will never again be inhabited or dwelt in from generation to generation. 40 As when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah with its neighbors," declares the LORD, "no man will live there, nor will any son of man reside in it. ... 51:37 Babylon will become a heap of ruins, a haunt of jackals, an object of horror and hissing, without inhabitants." [Jeremiah 50:1, 39-40, 51:37 NAS]

51: 59 ...[when] Seraiah...went with Zedekiah the king of Judah to Babylon in the fourth year of his reign [593 BC]... 60 ...Jeremiah wrote in a single scroll all the calamity which would come upon Babylon.... 61 Then Jeremiah said to Seraiah, "As soon as you come to Babylon, then see that you read all these words aloud, 62 and say, 'You, O LORD, have

promised concerning this place to cut it off, so that there will be nothing dwelling in it, whether man or beast, but it will be a perpetual desolation.' 63 "And as soon as you finish reading this scroll, you will tie a stone to it and throw it into the middle of the Euphrates, 64 and say, 'Just so shall Babylon sink down and not rise again because of the calamity that I am going to bring upon her...'" [Jeremiah 51:60-64 NAS]

About a century earlier, sometime around 700 BC, Isaiah had predicted the same thing:

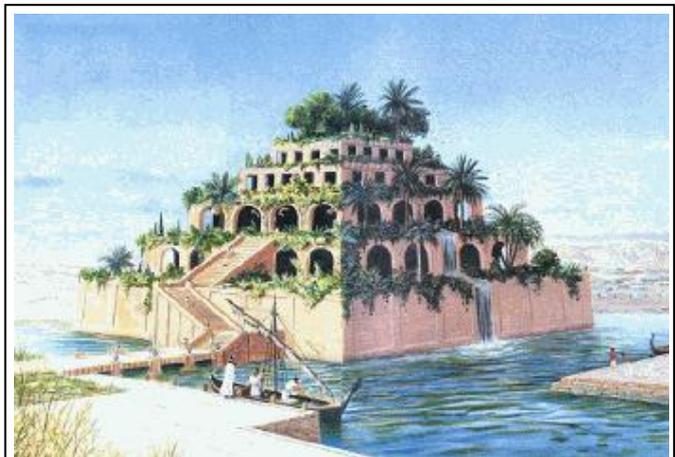
13:19 And Babylon, the beauty of kingdoms, the glory of the Chaldeans' pride, will be as when God overthrew Sodom and Gomorrah. 20 It will never be inhabited or lived in from generation to generation; nor will the Arab pitch his tent there, nor will shepherds make their flocks lie down there. 21 But desert creatures will lie down there, and their houses will be full of owls; ostriches also will live there, and shaggy goats will frolic there. 22 Hyenas will howl in their fortified towers and jackals in their luxurious palaces. Her fateful time also will soon come and her days will not be prolonged. ... 14:22 "I will rise up against them," declares the LORD of hosts, "and will cut off from Babylon name and survivors, offspring and posterity," declares the LORD. 23 "I will also make it a possession for the hedgehog and swamps of water, and I will sweep it with the broom of destruction," declares the LORD of hosts. [Isaiah 13:19-22, 14:22-23 NAS]

Let's be clear about these prophecies. Jeremiah and Isaiah weren't merely predicting a conquest of Babylon, or destruction by an invading army, or a temporary eclipse. They were claiming that Babylon would become a permanently uninhabited wasteland. And Jeremiah was making his prediction as Babylon was attaining a larger population and greater prosperity than every before in its history! But it's been a wasteland for over 2,000 years now."

Xiao Wang immediately raised a skeptical question. "Maybe it was just an intelligent guess."

Professor Ho nodded. "Of course we must consider that possibility. But if it had been a guess, it would not have been an intelligent one. Consider the facts about the city.

"Babylon was situated on the lower reaches of the mighty Euphrates river. This assured a steady supply of water for irrigation. The surrounding alluvial plain was crisscrossed by canals which provided both abundant water to raise crops in the fertile soil and convenient transportation for produce. The river connects to the Persian Gulf, facilitating international trade. By 600 BC, Jeremiah's time, the city of Babylon was at least more than 1,200 years old. Humanly speaking, there was ever reason to think it would continue indefinitely. We must realize that the locations of ancient cities were chosen with extreme care. They grew because of natural advantages that usually endured from age to age, things like good water supply and ease of transportation. Thus many other major cities from Jeremiah's time remain to this day, despite invasions and sometimes even complete destructions. Damascus is still capital of Syria; Amman still capital of Jordan; Sidon continues in Leba-



Artist's conception of Hanging Gardens. Note 1.



Reconstructed Ishtar gate in Berlin museum. Note 1.

non; Jerusalem is still the key city of Israel; Xi'an and Luoyang are still important metropolises today. There are dozens if not hundreds of other examples. There was absolutely no reason in Isaiah's or Jeremiah's time to expect that long-flourishing Babylon would become a wasteland.

"When the Babylonian empire fell to the Persians in 539 BC, Babylon was essentially untouched by the conquerors. It continued as one of the great cities of the empire. Two centuries after Jeremiah's prophecy, the Greek historians Herodotus<sup>26</sup> in c.450 BC and Xenophon<sup>27</sup> in c.400 BC were both impressed by Babylon's size and splendor. There was still no sign of the impending fulfillment of the prophecy 200 years after it was uttered.

"When the Greeks under Alexander the Great occupied Babylon in 331 BC it was still a great city, though not so impressive as in the days of Nebuchadnezzar. In

323 BC, after completing his conquest of the Persian empire, Alexander returned to Babylon from the border of India. His stated plan was to make it his capital and build it into an even more glorious metropolis than it had been in Nebuchadnezzar's time. Thus 270 years after Jeremiah's prediction, there was no humanly visible sign that his prophecy would ever be fulfilled.

"So I think you can see why we can't consider Isaiah's and Jeremiah's prophecies 'intelligent guesses.' There was nothing in their own time to indicate Babylon would be desolate, and nothing to that effect happened for a long time afterwards."

Xiao Wang was silent for a moment, thoughtful. Then he asked, "What happened next?"

Professor Ho continued. "As he was planning the rebuilding of Babylon, Alexander the Great died suddenly in 323 BC. Warfare broke out among his generals and the empire was partitioned among them. During the fighting, Babylon was seized and sacked several times, suffering severe damage. Finally one of Alexander's general named Seleucus gained control of Mesopotamia and founded the Seleucid Empire. At first the Seleucids used Babylon as their capital and planned to rebuild it. But the cost of restoring it seemed greater than that of establishing a new city, so in 275 BC they forced most of the population to move 65 kilometers north to their new capital, Seleucia. This was the beginning of the fulfillment of the prophecy, the beginning of the end for Babylon. From then on, its decline was rapid, exacerbated in part by the salinization of the surrounding farmland. By 1 BC Babylon was essentially deserted. The region of southern

Babylonia gradually became swampland infested with malarial mosquitoes. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century AD, European archaeologists excavating the long deserted ruins reported that the local Arabs were not even willing to pitch their tents at the site of ancient Babylon because they regarded it as an accursed place<sup>28</sup>—a minute fulfillment of Isaiah 13:20, 'Nor will the Arab pitch his tent there!'"

All three were silent again. Xiao Wang was thinking deeply, his brow furrowed. Finally he objected "If you make enough predictions, some of them are bound to come true eventually."

"Quite so," agreed Professor Ho. "But the difference with the Bible is: all of the predictions come true! The Bible's predictions are precise. The prophets didn't rattle off a scattershot list of cities doomed to permanent desolation with a few of them coming true by chance. The prophets did indeed make predictions about many other cities: Damascus, Amman, Sidon, Jerusalem, Philistine cities, cities in Egypt, probably dozens of others. Only for a very few cities<sup>K</sup> did they predict permanent desolation—and in all of those cases, that's what actually happened."

#### Were the prophecies about Babylon fulfilled by chance?

Professor Ho paused and leaned forward, looking intently at Xiao Wang. "What do you think, Xiao Wang? Was

Cities predicted to become permanently desolate and people groups predicted to cease to exist.			
Place	Scripture	Prophecy Date	Fulfillment Date
Nineveh	Nahum 1:8, 14	sometime 663-613 BC	612 BC
Tyre	Ezekiel 26	587-586 BC	572 BC; 332 BC (some later?)
Babylon	Isaiah 13:1—14:23 Jeremiah 50 and 51	c.700 BC 593 BC	by 1 AD
Hazor	Jeremiah 49:33	c.600 BC	Unknown (city never found)
Philistines (ethnicity)	Amos 1:7-8	767-753 BC	by c.165 BC
Edomites (ethnicity)	Obadiah 1:9-10, 18 Malachi 1:3-5	pre-400 BC c.400 BC	by 100 AD
Ammonites (ethnicity)	Ezekiel 25:1-7, 10	588 BC	before 200 AD

<sup>K</sup> Such as Nineveh and the mainland city of Tyre (see below for Tyre).

Babylon a lucky guess?”

“Logically speaking, it could have been!”

Professor Ho nodded, “Oh yes, that’s not impossible. But is it reasonably probable? If today I predicted that Guangzhou would be abandoned and become an uninhabited wasteland, would you believe it? Guangzhou, with its 2,000 year history, reliable water supply, excellent climate for agriculture, surrounding flat, fertile land, ready access to the ocean for trade, and present booming expansion is, in fact, very much like Babylon in Jeremiah’s day. Would it be reasonable to predict the utter demise of Guangzhou? How could I know in advance?”

“A point,” admitted Xiao Wang, “but it still could have been good luck.”

“One can always posit that,” Professor Ho conceded. “That’s why just one example of fulfilled prophecy would not, of course, prove inspiration. The prophecies concerning Babylon are just one more pebble thrown onto the scales of evidence. But as those pebbles accumulate, eventually the weight on one side grows too great, and the scales tip decisively in favor of the Bible’s having been inspired.”

#### Were the prophecies about Babylon written after the fact?

There was silence again for a moment. Xiao Wang pondered, then he said, “I was wondering whether the prophecies might have been written after Babylon was deserted, but I guess the texts we have to too early to believe that.”

Professor Ho nodded sharply. “I agree with you! But the prophecies were made before that. There was no good indication, humanly speaking, that Babylon would eventually be desolate until 275 BC at the very earliest. As we discussed earlier, we have a copy of Jeremiah in Hebrew from 200 BC. The original must be substantially earlier.

Furthermore, the Greek translation of the Old Testament produced during the third to second centuries BC, was completed by 150 BC at the latest.<sup>29</sup> It was obviously based on older, pre-existing Hebrew manuscripts. The book of Jeremiah in this ancient Greek translation also has the verses about Babylon’s destruction that we looked at a moment ago. It’s just not reasonable to think the predictions about Babylon were written after 275 BC.

“But in any case, my next example was fulfilled long after 200 BC.”

#### The end of worship of false gods: Fulfilled after more than 1,000 years

“In Jeremiah’s day, every people group in the near east—perhaps every nation in the world!—was worshipping idols representing a plethora of false gods. As the Bible testifies and archaeology demonstrates, this had been going on for thousands of years already. It was an inevitable outcome of the downward course taken when humans reject the knowledge of the one true God:

For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God or give thanks, but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures. [Romans 1:21-23 NAS]

This was an utterly ubiquitous phenomenon. As you may remember, God had called Abraham out of an idolatrous family background and established the Jewish race, insisting that they worship Him alone, the only true God. It was the Jews repeated lapses back into the worship of other gods which finally forced God to discipline them by means of the Babylonian captivity.”

Xiao Li spoke up: “But I’ve heard that in early China our ancestors worshiped ‘Heaven,’ just one god, and did not make idols. Confucius talked about it.”

Professor Ho nodded, “I remember hearing similar statements and being very excited about the possibility. But I was not able to find clear historical evidence for it. It is true that we Chinese, like all humanity, are Noah’s descendents. It may be that when our ancestors first arrived in China, they still remembered that there was only one God and perhaps did not use idols to worship Him. Confucius [c.551-479 BC], who lived shortly after Jeremiah, looked back nostalgically to the time of the Duke of Zhou and noted:

周公郊祀后稷以配天；宗祀文王于明堂一配上帝 [孔子《孝经，圣治》]

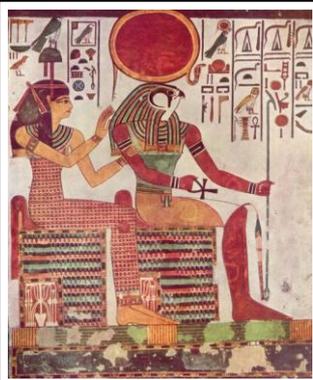
The Duke of Zhou offered the border sacrifice to Heaven for the good of society; King Wen [the Duke of Zhou’s father] offered sacrifice to God [lit. the Ruler Above] at the Bright Hall. [Confucius, Classic of Filial Piety]

Did the Duke of Zhou worship other gods in addition to ‘Heaven’ [天], also called the ‘Ruler Above’ [上帝]? We don’t know for sure. Did he use idols in his worship? It is, of course, possible that such worship was carried out in China without any idols at some time before 1000 BC, but our archaeological findings from so early a time are very limited and I have not seen any proof for that idea. On the other hand, it is certain that long before the time of Jeremiah or Confucius’s time, the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, China had already degenerated into polytheism and idolatry. China is no exception to the rule that all humanity was sunk into idolatry.”

Xiao Li looked disappointed. Then his face lifted again. “But I’ve seen how you can see Bible stories and even the gospel in ancient Chinese characters!”

Professor Ho shook his head sadly. “I’ve seen those explanations, too. To be honest, Xiao Li, I find them completely unconvincing. Our ancient writing system is subtle and complex and has undergone a long period of development. It’s just too easy to read into the components meanings or origins that aren’t really there.”

Xiao Li looked surprised and slightly offended, but Xiao Wang smiled a little smugly. They had discussed this issue



Egyptian sun god Ra (holding scepter).



Babylonian god Marduk.



Canaanite god Baal. Note 1.

before, and Xiao Wang had not been impressed.

Professor Ho cleared his throat, smiled, and steered the conversation back to Jeremiah. “It was bad enough that most of the world was in darkness. But in Jeremiah’s time even most of the Jews had turned back to polytheism and idolatry. The one people group on earth who had the light of the knowledge of the true God were turning back to the darkness of paganism! It must have seemed like the last spark of light was going to wink out.

“Under these seemingly hopeless circumstances, Jeremiah was inspired to utter an amazing prophecy:

2 Thus says the LORD, "Do not learn the way of the nations... 8 ...they are altogether stupid and foolish in their discipline of delusion -- their idol is wood! ... 11 Thus you shall say to them, "The gods that did not make the heavens and the earth will perish from the earth and from under the heavens." [Jeremiah 10:2, 8, 11 NAS]

What an astonishing claim, when idolaters were about to invade and destroy the only place on earth which still had the knowledge of the one true God! Don’t miss the meaning here: Jeremiah is predicting nothing less than the complete end of the worship of all the false gods of the ancient near eastern nations, worship which had been carried on for thousands of years and showed no sign of stopping. The ancients worldwide expended their greatest efforts in building and adorning gorgeous temples for their gods. Idols large and small, made of crude clay or glittering gold, were everywhere—archaeologists can hardly turn a spade without unearthing one!

“Jeremiah said it would all stop.

“Furthermore, this prediction was to be proclaimed among the pagans themselves. In original, Jeremiah 10:11 was not written in Hebrew like the rest of the book of Jeremiah, but instead was written Aramaic, the most widely spoken language in the region at that time. It’s as if today you would suddenly insert a sentence in English in the middle of a Chinese article to tell the reader how to express your key idea to the widest possible range of foreigners. And Jeremiah’s key idea was: the day will come when **no one** will worship your gods and idols. We can picture Jeremiah, dragged down to Egypt at the end of his life [see Jeremiah 43:4-13], standing in front of the immense temples where Egypt’s gods were worshipped in a religion passed down for a hundred generations, and calmly saying: ‘One day no one will worship any of these falsehoods anymore.’

“It was over a thousand years before the prophecy even began to be fulfilled. But now it is true.

“No one worships Ra any more, the sun god of the Egyptians. No one burns incense to the Canaanite gods and goddesses, Baal and Astarte. No one sacrifices to Marduk, the Babylonians’ highest deity. No one in the country of Jordan burns their infants to Chemosh, the god of the Moabites. We enjoy the stories of the gods of the ancient Greeks and Romans, but no one bows before the statues of Zeus and Venus. When we dig up these ‘sacred’ images we drag them off to museums—without asking their permission first!

“Nine hundred years after Jeremiah’s time, people were still worshipping the most of the same idol gods as they had in his day—Ra and Baal and Zeus and all or most of the rest. The first steps in the significant fulfillment of the prophecy waited for the late fourth century AD as the influence of Christianity spread through the region. And it was probably later than the year 1000 AD until the process was completed. But today, as Jeremiah predicted, *none* of the gods from his time are worshipped anymore. Except one.

Yahweh! He is worshipped by Christians and Jews around the world.”

“Did Jeremiah’s prophecy apply to the idols of the whole world?” Xiao Wang asked.

“A good question,” Professor Ho affirmed. “Obviously it applied to the ‘known world’ of the Jews, which would include at least the entire Mediterranean basin, northern Africa, the entire middle east, and central Asia all the way to the border of India. But in point of fact, so far as I know, none of the false gods worshipped anywhere in the world in 600 BC are still worshipped today.<sup>L</sup> The gods some people worship today in China had not been invented yet. Guanyin is a Buddhist deity, but Buddha hadn’t even been born yet in Jeremiah’s time. The Taoist gods like the Jade Emperor may have their roots in older folk religions, but Laozi himself could only have been born after 600 BC; in Jeremiah’s day, there was certainly no Taoist religion as it came to be in later centuries.

“In point of fact, Christianity and Judaism are probably the oldest religions still being practiced in the world today.”

<sup>L</sup> A possible exception is some of the presently worshipped Hindu deities. There is no certainty, however, about the date of composition of the earliest Hindu scriptures. In addition, there are, of course, various forms of spiritism, animism and worship of natural forces continuing in some parts of the world, but these are generally not the organized worship of clearly defined deities referred to in the Jeremiah passage.

“But Christianity started less than 2,000 years ago!” Xiao Wang immediately objected. “Buddhism is older than that!”

“I understand your confusion,” Professor Ho replied. “But you see, Christianity is completely based on and rooted in the Jewish Old Testament. There is no break between Judaism and Christianity. Jesus Christ was a Jew, all of the early Christians were Jews, and none of them regarded themselves as leaving Judaism. Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of the Old Testament prophecies; the very word ‘Christ’ is from the Old Testament Hebrew word ‘messiah.’ Jesus is the messiah, the one who was prophesied to come and bring blessing to all nations. So there is an unbroken line from Abraham, in 2000 BC, through Jesus in 30 AD, right down to our own time—4000 years of continuous worship of Yahweh!

“Meanwhile, worship of the idol gods of Jeremiah’s day has disappeared from the face of the earth.

“Can we call Jeremiah’s prophecy an intelligent guess? But it would have been an absurd guess! Everything in recorded history would have indicated to Jeremiah that worship of false gods and idols would survive any political upheavals, cultural changes or technical advances, as it had for thousands of years. There had been no observed tendency away from idolatry anywhere in the world. In Jeremiah’s time, one of Nebuchadnezzar’s favorite activities was restoring and expanding Babylon’s ancient temples! Human wisdom and foresight would never have predicted all those religions would cease. Jeremiah’s prophecy was the least likely outcome, humanly speaking. But it happened. And not due to politics or scientific advances or human culture, but due to advance of the gospel.”<sup>M</sup>

### The prophet Ezekiel: c.593-571 BC

“At the same time as Jeremiah was prophesying in Jerusalem, two of his contemporaries who had been exiled to Babylon also received inspiration from God and predicted the future. One was Daniel, who was deported with the noble and royal hostages in 605 BC. Daniel’s prophecies are so important and detailed that we’ll need another session to discuss them. [See chapter 9.] The other was Ezekiel, who was taken to Babylon in the much larger deportation of 597 BC. All of his prophecies are closely dated and were given during the years 593-571 BC.”

By now Xiao Wang knew what to ask. “How old are the oldest copies of Ezekiel we have?” he said.

Professor Ho smiled. “The oldest fragment found among the Dead Sea Scrolls has been dated to 100-50 BC. However, a translation of the book of Ezekiel appears in the Greek version of the Old Testament which, as we mentioned earlier, is believed to have been completed by 150 BC. In addition, there is a Jewish writing called Ecclesiasticus, also known as Sirach, dating from about 180 BC.<sup>30</sup> Ecclesiasticus both names Ezekiel and refers to details of his vision of God recorded in the first chapters of the book of Ezekiel. Thus if we considered only the manuscript evidence, it would be completely unreasonable to hold that Ezekiel did not already exist as a book before 200 BC.

“But the language and the contents of the book provide additional evidence which shows that Ezekiel was written in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, just like Jeremiah. Ezekiel’s language fits the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, being mostly pure Hebrew. There is some slight influence from Aramaic, but that fits with the fact that Ezekiel spent most of his adult life in Babylonia, where Aramaic was widely used as a *lingua franca* among peoples from different nations.<sup>31</sup> The contents and historical background of the book also fit the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, not a later date.<sup>32</sup> The structure of the book indicates it was composed by one person, not pieced together and added to over time.”<sup>33</sup>

“I’m afraid you might not have patience to hear another entire set of such details today, boys. So here’s a little document I wrote up which explains them.” Professor Ho dug up a file folder from the piles on his desk, took out two photocopied sheets and gave one to each of the boys to look at later. [See Appendix 8-1: More details demonstrating the time of composition and historical accuracy of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.]

“Ezekiel has many fascinating prophecies, but today I just want to look at two of them.”

### Ezekiel’s prophecy about the weakness of Egypt: Continuing to be fulfilled after 2,600 years

The first prophecy is so exceptionally long term that there is no need to prove the exact date of composition of Ezekiel to see it was given before the events occurred. Furthermore, somewhat like Isaiah’s and Jeremiah’s predictions about Babylon, it is exactly the opposite of what human foresight would predict.

You will recall that the Jews, as a group, rejected Jeremiah’s prophetic warnings and allied themselves with Egypt against Babylon. [See the section “c.593-588 BC: The Jews rebel against Babylon and ally with Egypt” earlier in this chapter.] Just as with Jeremiah, God revealed to Ezekiel that the alliance was against His will and that the Egyptians would not be able to protect the kingdom of Judah from destruction by the Babylonians. About 592 he predicted:

15 'But he [Zedekiah, last king of Judah] rebelled... by sending his envoys to Egypt that they might give him horses and many troops. Will he succeed? Will he who does such things escape? Can he indeed break the covenant and escape? 16 'As I live,' declares the Lord GOD... 17 'Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company will not help him in the war, when they [the Babylonians] cast up ramps and build siege walls to cut off many lives.' [Ezekiel 17:15-17 NAS]

You will recall the history we discussed a few minutes ago. Things turned out as Jeremiah and Ezekiel had predicted. In 588 BC, the Babylonians attacked Judah, the Egyptians marched out and counterattacked against Babylon, the Egyptian army was defeated in a battle in southern Palestine, and they retreated back to Egypt. At this point, in 587 BC, God made a sweeping prediction about the long term future of Egypt:

<sup>M</sup> Part of the process was carried out by the Muslims in the 7<sup>th</sup> century AD and later, but Islamic monotheism and opposition to idolatry is quite obviously based in the Judeo-Christian heritage of the Bible, despite Muslims’ assertions of errors in the Bible.

<u>Years</u>	<u>Egypt's Situation</u>	<u>Years</u>	<u>Egypt's Situation</u>
c.2575-2134 BC	Old Kingdom: Powerful	525-405	Invaded, controlled by Persia
c.2134-2040	1 <sup>st</sup> Intermediate Period: Weak	405-359	Temporary independence, but weak
c.2040-1640	Middle Kingdom: Powerful	359-332	Persians regain control
c.1640-1550	2 <sup>nd</sup> Intermediate Period: Weak	332-323	Alexander the Great invades, controls
c.1550-1070	New Kingdom: Powerful	323- 30BC	Part of Greek Empire
c.1070-712	3 <sup>rd</sup> Intermediate Period: Weak	30BC-AD639	Part of Roman and Byzantine Empires
c.712-525	Late Dynastic Period: Powerful	AD639-1250	Controlled by several Arab dynasties
588	Defeated in Palestine by Babylon	1250-1798	Controlled by Marmeluke and Ottoman Turks
587	Ezekiel's prophecy about Egypt	1798-1882	Controlled by Turkish dynasties and Europeans
568	Babylon invades	1882-1952	Full / Partial British control
		c.1946-now	Independent, weak nation

1 In the tenth year, <sup>N</sup> in the tenth month, on the twelfth of the month [January 7, 587 BC], the word of the LORD came to me saying, 2 "Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt and prophesy against him and against all Egypt. 3 "Speak and say, "Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, Pharaoh king of Egypt... 14... Egypt... will be a lowly kingdom. 15 It will be the lowest of the kingdoms, and it will never again lift itself up above the nations. And I will make them so small that they will not rule over the nations. 16 And it will never again be the confidence of the house of Israel, bringing to mind the iniquity of their having turned to Egypt. Then they will know that I am the Lord GOD." [Ezekiel 29:1-3, 14-16 NAS]

Notice the three categorical predictions made here:

1. Egypt would permanently be a weak nation;
2. Egypt would never again defeat or control another nation;
3. The Jews would never again rely on Egypt for help.

Each one of these prophecies has been completely fulfilled during all of the past 2,600 years.”

Professor Ho pulled another sheet out of the folder in front of him. “Here’s a timeline showing the history of Egypt from Ezekiel’s time to the present. Since Ezekiel made his prophecy, Egypt has been and remains a weak, ‘lowly’ nation. In 568 BC, King Nebuchadnezzar successfully invaded Egypt. Later, in 525 BC, the Persians defeated Egypt and made it a part of their empire. Except for the fifty years from 405-359 BC, Egypt was ruled by a long succession of empires and invaders for the next 2,500 years. It finally regained full independence around 1946 AD, but it unquestionably remains an economically poor, militarily insignificant, ‘lowly’ country.

“What a stark difference from Egypt’s glorious past!

“The second part of the prophecy has also been fulfilled. Since the time Ezekiel made his prediction, Egypt has never once, as an independent nation, defeated or controlled another country. In fact, 588 BC was the last time an independent Egypt even fought outside of its own territory until 1948 AD. Then from 1948 to 1973 Egypt fought in five wars against tiny Israel—and lost every one! The last time, the 1973 ‘Yom Kippur’ war, Israel would have destroyed the entire Egyptian military if other nations hadn’t intervened and pressured them to stop. After this defeat, Egypt had no better choice than to seek a peace treaty, eventually accepting American economic aid under the Camp David accords in return for making peace with Israel.

“What a stark difference from Egypt’s powerful past!

“Consider Egypt’s history during the 2,000 years before Ezekiel’s day. As the timeline shows, she had undergone at least three periods of decline and eclipse, but each time had recovered unity, native, independent rule, economic prosperity and military might. Human foresight would have predicted that even if Egypt were to face another period of decline, she could be expected to recover sooner or later. Ezekiel’s prophecy of permanent weakness was completely counterintuitive. But what he said actually happened, and it still holds true today.

“Compare China’s history—the reverses, the periods of disunity, the invasions, the rule by foreign powers. All these things have happened, but we have always recovered our independence, prosperity, and military might. Would you believe me if I predicted China would become a ‘lowly kingdom’ forever, for the rest of human history? Such a prediction would be unreasonable, contrary to all that history teaches us and what we know about the Chinese spirit. But that’s just the kind of prophecy that Ezekiel made about long-mighty Egypt. He never could have known such a thing would happen unless God had revealed it to him.

“Finally, Ezekiel predicted that the Jews would never again ally themselves with or rely for help on Egypt. Based on past history and human foresight, Ezekiel never would have reached this conclusion. The Jews were weak and vacillating in their commitment to God. They had repeatedly turned to Egypt for alliance and aid since at least the days of King Solomon. That’s the nature of politics: today’s enemy is tomorrow’s ally—and the next day’s enemy! To suggest that a time would never again come when the Jews would find it expedient to ally with the Egyptians was a prediction contrary to human intelligence. But in the 2,600 years since Ezekiel made the prophecy, it has never happened. Of course, as we just saw, for much of that time Egypt was not free and could not make alliances with anyone. But who

<sup>N</sup> Ezekiel counts his dates from the beginning of his exile in 597 BC. See Ezekiel 1:2, 8:1, etc.

could have foreseen that? Furthermore, during the more than half a century since Egypt regained independence around 1946 and Israel was restored in 1948, there has never been an alliance. Of course that's easy to understand in light of present political realities, but how could Ezekiel have foreseen it all?

"Think of a modern example for comparison. France and England were enemies for centuries, including during the Seven Years' War in 1756-63 and the Napoleonic Wars in 1799-1815. But they were allies in the 20<sup>th</sup> century during World War I and II when they were united against common enemies. Would you believe me if I predicted that France would never again rely on or be an ally of England as long as the world lasted? That's the kind of unlikely prediction that Ezekiel was inspired to make. It has been precisely fulfilled.

"But Ezekiel made an even more amazing prophecy." Professor Ho flipped back a couple pages in his Bible. "Listen to what he predicted about Tyre."

#### Ezekiel's prophecy about Tyre: Fulfilled after 250 years

1 Now in the eleventh year [587-586 BC], on the first of the month, the word of the LORD came to me [Ezekiel] saying, 2 "Son of man, because Tyre has said concerning Jerusalem, 'Aha, the gateway of the peoples is broken; it has opened to me. I shall be filled, now that she is laid waste,'

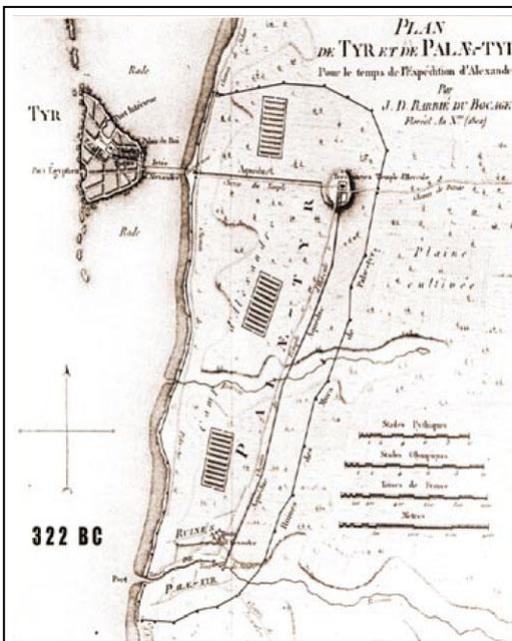
3 therefore thus says the Lord GOD, 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and I will bring up **many nations** against you, as the sea brings up its waves. 4 **They** will destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; and I will scrape her debris from her and make her a bare rock. 5 'She will be a place for the spreading of nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,' declares the Lord GOD, 'and she will become spoil for **the nations**. 6 'Also her daughters who are on the mainland [literally: in the field] will be slain by the sword, and they will know that I am the LORD.'"

7 For thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will bring upon Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, chariots, cavalry and a great army. 8 **He** will slay your daughters on the mainland [literally: in the field] with the sword; and **he** will make siege walls against you, cast up a ramp against you and raise up a large shield against you. 9 "The blow of his battering rams **he** will direct against your walls, and with his axes **he** will break down your towers. 10 "Because of the multitude of **his** horses, the dust raised by them will cover you; your walls will shake at the noise of cavalry and wagons and chariots when **he** enters your gates as men enter a city that is breached. 11 "With the hoofs of his horses **he** will trample all your streets. **He** will slay your people with the sword; and your strong pillars will come down to the ground.

12 "Also **they** [other peoples who would invade Tyre after the Babylonians] will make a spoil of your riches and a prey of your merchandise, break down your walls and destroy your pleasant houses, and throw your stones and your timbers and your debris [literally: dust] into the water. 13 "So I will silence the sound of your songs, and the sound of your harps will be heard no more. 14 "I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken," declares the Lord GOD.

19 For thus says the Lord GOD, "When I make you [Tyre] a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will bring you down ...[to] the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places...so that you will not be inhabited... 21 I will bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again," declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 26:1-14, 19-21 NAS]

Professor Ho looked up from his reading. "It's important to understand here that this prophecy is divided up into different sections talking about different events. You can distinguish them by the grammatical number of the nouns and pronouns. The plural 'they' is used in verses 3-6, referring to 'many nations' which would attack Tyre over time. The singular 'he' is used in verses 7-11, referring to Nebuchadnezzar leading the army of Babylon, one specific attacker among the 'many nations' which would be coming. Then the text shifts back to the plural 'they' in verses 12-14, referring to other groups of invaders who would come after Nebuchadnezzar. Finally, in verses 19-21 there is no human agent actively doing anything. 'I,' the LORD, is doing things to 'you,' Tyre.



**Above:** island Tyre was separate from the mainland at the time of Alexander's siege. Map above includes causeway Alexander built. From Note 34.



Location of country of Lebanon, just north of Israel.

There are at least seven specific prophecies in this passage:

1. A series of invaders will attack Tyre over time (verse 3)
2. Tyre's 'daughters on the mainland [literally: in the field],' that is, smaller Tyrian towns and villages inland from the main city, will be conquered, with many inhabitants killed (verses 6, 8)
3. Tyre's defensive walls and towers will be broken down (verses 4, 8-9, 12)
4. Tyre will be looted (verses 5, 12)
5. The site of Tyre will be scraped bare (verses 4, 14)
6. The stones, timber and even topsoil of Tyre will be thrown into the sea (verse 12)
7. Tyre will never be rebuilt (verse 14)

#### Tyre: A double city

"Ancient Tyre was a major city of the Phoenicians located in what is today the country of Lebanon. Tyre was composed of two separate sections. The oldest part was a well-fortified coastal city. Ancient Egyptian and Assyrian documents refer to it as 'Ushu,' while the Greeks of Alexander the Great's time called it 'Palaeo-Tyros,' that is, 'Old Tyre.'<sup>34</sup> The other section was on an island a little less than a kilometer away from the coast. Both the island and mainland cities had ports, with the port of the mainland city apparently being about six kilometers south of the island city. The wealth of Tyre came mostly from its maritime trading activities carried out throughout the Mediterranean and from its production of 'Tyrian purple,' a highly prized cloth dye made from a local shellfish.

#### Ezekiel 26:1-2: Events of 586 BC

"The prophecy was given sometime during 587-586 BC. Ezekiel records that the people of Tyre were gloating over the siege and impending fall of Jerusalem. Apparently they expected that trade which had formerly passed through Jerusalem would now be redirected through Tyre. Their rejoicing over Jerusalem's coming destruction by Babylon was especially unjust because just six years earlier, in 593 BC, Tyre had been a member, along with Judah, of a coalition of Palestine peoples which had plotted to revolt against Babylonian rule. [See Jeremiah 27:1-15.] Now they were openly glad about their former partner's destruction. But God warns that doom is coming on them, too.

"It's worth noting in passing that the Tyrians were more than deserving of punishment. Throughout their history they were ruthlessly greedy slave traders and unusually cruel, even by the standards of the time. They had kidnapped and sold into slavery the populations of entire towns of the Jews. [See Joel 3:4-6, Amos 1:9.] According to one source I consulted, their precious purple dye was ground between stones moved by slaves who had been purposely blinded to keep them from escaping.<sup>35</sup> The heavy grindstones needed a great deal of strength to move and such strong slaves were too expensive to risk losing! Meanwhile, it is quite certain that their worship of the idol god Moloch included child sacrifice.

#### Ezekiel 26:3-6: A summary prediction of Tyre's future after 586 BC

"The first part of the prediction, verses 3-6, is a summary statement about what invaders would do to Tyre in the days to come. Notice that verse 3 says the various invading nations would come in a series with time intervals between each one, like waves striking a shoreline. It's a prediction to be fulfilled across many years.

#### Ezekiel 26:7-11: Fulfilled by Nebuchadnezzar in 585-572 BC

"The second section, verses 7-11, focuses on the first wave which would strike Tyre: Nebuchadnezzar. He is predicted to fulfill some of the prophecies, namely:

2. Tyre's 'daughters on the mainland [literally: in the field],' that is, smaller Tyrian towns and villages inland from the main city, will be conquered, with many inhabitants killed (verse 8)
3. Tyre's defensive walls and towers will be broken down (verses 8-9)— here referring to the walls of the mainland city.

"The Tyrians had been happy about Jerusalem's fall, but Tyre itself was next on Nebuchadnezzar's agenda. From 585-572 BC the Babylonians besieged the mainland city of Tyre. Obviously they first would have quickly reduced the surrounding dependent towns and villages, thus fulfilling the prophecy about the 'daughters who are on the mainland,' literally, 'daughters in the field,' before camping out around the walls of the mainland city itself.

"Formerly critics raised doubts about whether Nebuchadnezzar actually succeeded in capturing mainland Tyre— recall that we don't have Nebuchadnezzar's court annals after the year 595 BC. However, other scattered Babylonian inscriptions seem to confirm that he did. A Babylonian document from two years after the siege ended includes the king of Tyre on a list of kings at Babylon; we would hardly expect him to be making a pleasure trip to visit his enemies in Babylon! Most likely he had been taken there as a long term hostage after Tyre fell, the way king Jehoiachin and many other kings were held by the Babylonians. Meanwhile other Babylonian tablets seem to indicate that the city was under Babylonian governors after the siege ended.<sup>36</sup>

"However, Nebuchadnezzar did not have a fleet, and thus he failed to capture the island part of the city of Tyre. Apparently most of the wealth of the mainland city was transferred to the island city, or perhaps to the Phoenicians' colonies elsewhere in the Mediterranean, because the year after Nebuchadnezzar's siege of Tyre finally ended, Ezekiel was given an additional prophetic revelation:

17 Now in the twenty-seventh year, in the first month, on the first of the month [April 26, 571 BC], the word of the LORD came to me saying, 18 "Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon made his army labor hard against Tyre; every head was made bald and every shoulder was rubbed bare. But he and his army had no wages from Tyre for the labor that he had performed against it." 19 Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army. 20 I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed [in besieging Tyre], because they acted for Me," declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 29:17-20 NAS]

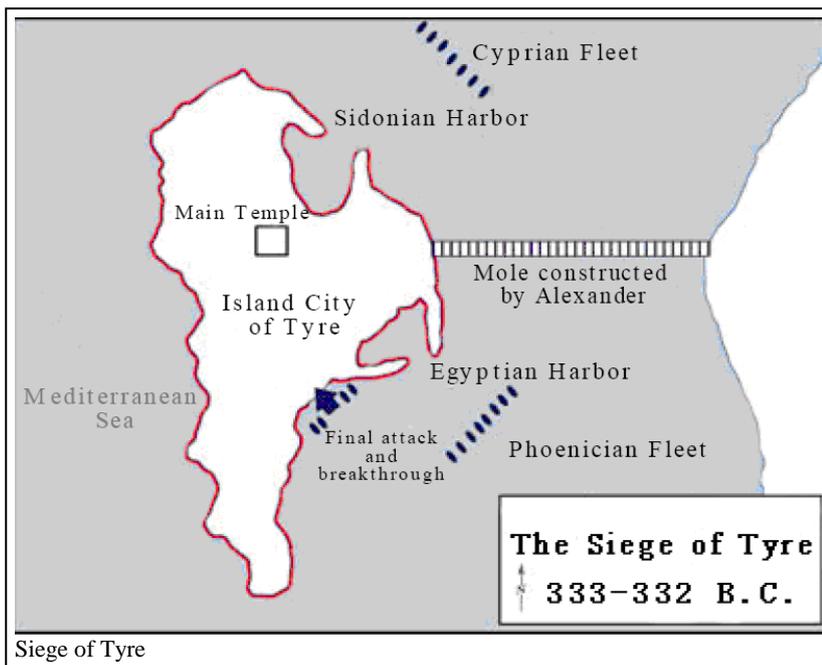
The promise to Nebuchadnezzar about conquering Egypt was fulfilled in 568 BC, but what's important to note here is that Nebuchadnezzar did not gain significant spoil from Tyre. What Nebuchadnezzar did *not* do is as important as what he *did* do, because it shows the precision of the prophecy. In verses 7-11, Ezekiel did not say that Nebuchadnezzar's army would scrape the site bare, or throw its stones into the sea, or take spoil. They did none of these. A later conqueror from another nation did so, just as Ezekiel predicted."

"Can we go back to Nebuchadnezzar's taking the mainland city?" Xiao Wang asked. "I was expecting you to say something like, 'The critics' unfounded doubts were decisively refuted when the archaeologists excavated the site of mainland Tyre.'" He was getting remarkably good at imitating Professor Ho's voice and manner! Xiao Wang continued, "What *do* the archaeologists say? Do their excavations give evidence for or against a major destruction of mainland Tyre at that time? Like the evidence for the destructions of Lachish?"

Professor Ho shook his head emphatically. "No—the archaeologists have found absolutely nothing! Nothing significant from the ancient mainland city of Tyre has ever been found, or ever will be."

Xiao Wang looked at him in surprise. "How can you be sure nothing will be found in the future?"

Professor Ho smiled. "Because of the amazing fulfillment of Ezekiel's next set



of prophecies!"

#### Ezekiel 26:12-14: Fulfillment begins with Alexander the Great in 332 BC

"The third section, of Ezekiel's prophecy about Tyre, verses 12-14, describes the waves of invaders who would come after Nebuchadnezzar. They would fulfill most of the remaining prophecies, including:

3. Tyre's defensive walls and towers will be broken down (verse 12)—here referring to the walls of the island city.
4. Tyre will be looted (verse 12)
5. The site of Tyre will be scraped bare (verse 14)
6. The stones, timber and even topsoil of Tyre will be thrown into the sea (verse 12)

"The mainland city of Tyre was not rebuilt after Nebuchadnezzar's conquest but lay in ruins for 250 years. The island city, however, continued and prospered. It was both strongly fortified and protected by its fleets.

"In 332 BC Alexander the Great was campaigning down the coast of Palestine as he conquered the Persian empire. Many cities yielded without a struggle, but the Tyrians refused to allow him to occupy their island city. They felt secure behind their high walls surrounded by the sea—they had no reason to think Alexander would succeed where others before him had failed! But then Alexander and the Greeks tried a stratagem unprecedented in military history to that time. He decided to build a causeway across the 800 meters of ocean from the shore to the island. The fascinating story of how the Greeks did this despite stiff resistance from the Tyrians is told in detail by several ancient Greek historians.<sup>37</sup>

"In order to get materials for his causeway, Alexander's troops scoured off all the remaining ruins of the former mainland city of Tyre, which the Greeks called 'Old Tyre.' They took all the stones, any remaining timbers, and even scraped up the very dirt of the site, and threw it all into the sea to build the causeway.<sup>38</sup> The result was, the island became linked to the mainland. Over the centuries, sand drifted up against the causeway and widened it until now the area is a peninsula.

"This event was one of the most remarkable fulfillments of prophecy in the entire Bible. God fulfilled it by having an army of tens of thousands of men who'd never heard of Ezekiel come from over 1,500 kilometers away and spend

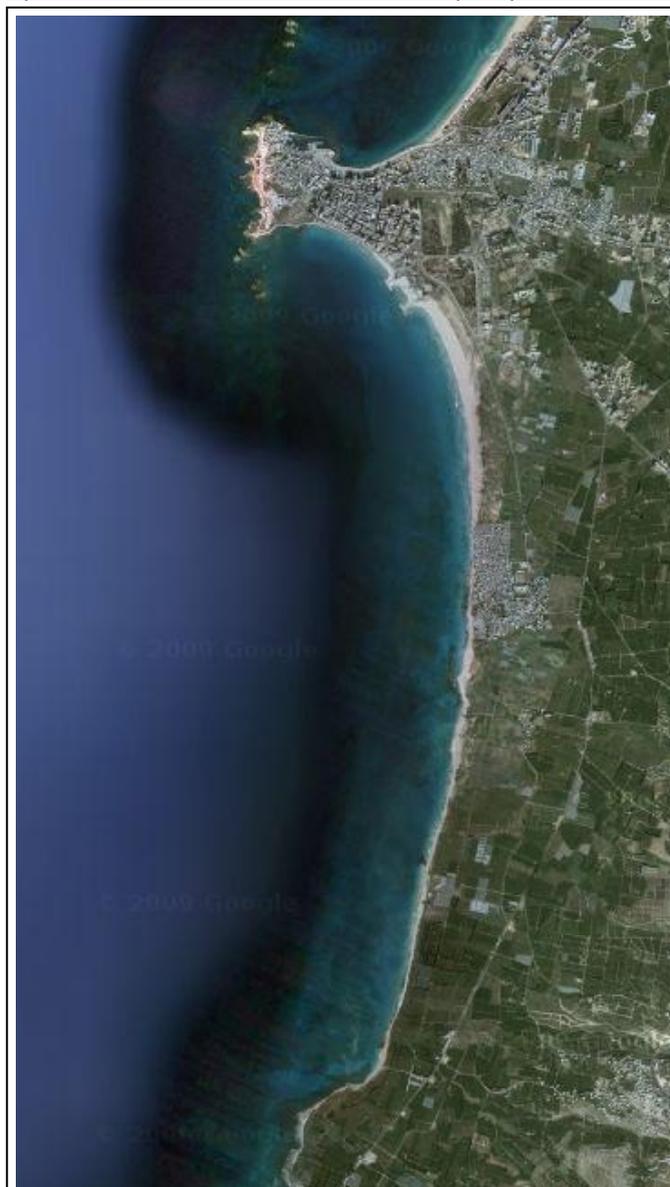
nine months digging up the remains of Old Tyre, even the very dirt, carting it off and throwing it into the sea. Who could have foreseen such a thing? Who would have even dreamed of it?

“And now you see, Xiao Wang, why I said we don’t have any archaeological evidence of Nebuchadnezzar’s conquering mainland Tyre. There’s nothing left there to dig up! We aren’t even sure precisely where the walls of the mainland city stood. As one modern historian noted, mainland ‘Old Tyre’ was:

...totally dismantled by Alexander the Great in his famous siege...and disappeared totally.<sup>39</sup>

In addition to fulfilling the prophecies about scraping the site bare and throwing debris in the water, Alexander also fulfilled most of the other predictions in verses 12-14, the ones about taking spoil and destroying houses. The Greeks looted island Tyre and burned or razed most of the city.”

Tyre never to be rebuilt: The mainland city only? Or the island city too?



Coast of Lebanon for more than 6km below site of ancient island Tyre, which is the peninsula at top of picture. Mainland Old Tyre was located somewhere in this stretch. Thin white line on coast is beach; green is fields. Note 42.

Professor Ho paused, leaned back in his chair and looked thoughtful. “Only one point remains: the fulfillment of the seventh prediction:

7. Tyre will never be rebuilt (verse 14)

Specifically, Ezekiel predicted:

14 "I will make you a bare rock; you will be a place for the spreading of nets. You will be built no more, for I the LORD have spoken," declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 26:14 NAS]

Tyre’s unique nature as a double city causes an interpretation problem at this point: does the prophecy refer to the mainland city only, or also to the island city?”

Mainland Tyre was never rebuilt

“At a minimum it includes the mainland city. In Ezekiel’s day, mainland Tyre was very probably larger than the island city and may very well have been the more important of the two.

“Furthermore, the passage itself shows that Ezekiel definitely had the mainland city in view in part of his prophecy. Note that back in verses 7-11 Ezekiel predicted Nebuchadnezzar would erect ‘siege walls’ and ‘a ramp.’ That’s not possible around an island; even Alexander, with his unprecedented causeway, didn’t erect any ramps against the island city! Alexander’s troops breached the island city with siege engines located on ships and entered on foot.<sup>O</sup> Furthermore, Nebuchadnezzar is depicted as bringing ‘cavalry and chariots and wagons’ through gates after breaching the cities defenses. Alexander and the Greeks didn’t drive strings of carts through a gate.<sup>P</sup>

“Even in the parts of the prophecy are clearly predicting Alexander’s activities, it is the ruined mainland city which would be ‘scrape[d]’ [verse 4] and have it’s ‘stones,’ ‘timbers,’ and ‘debris’ thrown ‘into the water’ [verse 12]. So clearly Ezekiel had mainland ‘Old Tyre’ in view in much of the prophecy.”

“Professor Ho, I admit the parts about Tyre being scraped and thrown into the sea are impressive, but couldn’t it have just been a good guess that mainland Old Tyre would never be rebuilt?” Xiao Wang sug-

<sup>O</sup> In point of fact, Alexander’s impressive causeway was not very effective. Gathering a larger fleet of ships than the Tyrians had was the actual key to Alexander’s success. The Greeks did not breach the wall from the causeway. In the end, the walls were breached by ship-borne siege engines at a point about half a kilometer south of the causeway. The Greek troops then attacked and entered the city on foot via gangways from the ships. See Arrian’s Anabasis of Alexander.

<sup>P</sup> There was no gate in the wall of Tyre where Alexander’s causeway approached the island—the wall directly abutted the sea. Even if the Greeks brought any cavalry, chariots or wagons along the causeway after the city fell, they would have entered Tyre across the torn down wall, not through a gate.

\*\*\*Picture: Fishing nets drying at Tyre

gested.

Professor Ho pursed his lips and shook his head. “The prediction that the mainland city would never be rebuilt was quite surprising and counterintuitive.” Professor Ho pulled down yet another book from his shelves and read aloud:

There was every reason to think that, despite [Nebuchadnezzar’s conquest]...the city [mainland Tyre] would continue to thrive. ... Her location was ideal for trade. The harbors...were commodious. A constant stream of fresh water—averaging 10,000,000 gallons a day and a rarity in the region—gushed from the Ras-el-Ain springs.

With a perfect location for commerce, an adequate water supply, and a long history, Tyre seemed destined to exist forever. Besides, victors rebuilt and repopulated most cities destroyed in warfare. They were far more interested in tribute and slaves than in deserted ruins. Moreover, builders in antiquity chose their sites with great care and did not abandon them hastily. Yet, Ezekiel confidently declared Tyre would not be rebuilt.<sup>40</sup>

Professor paused and looked up. “Mainland Tyre’s superb location argued for a rebuilding—but it never happened. Instead, as Ezekiel predicted, it became a scraped bare spot by the seaside, convenient for drying fishnets.” Professor Ho turned back to the book open on his desk again. “An early 20<sup>th</sup> century writer noted:

Old [mainland] Tyre today stands as it has for twenty-five centuries, a bare rock, uninhabited by man! ...there is not a ruin to mark the spot. It has been scraped clean and never been rebuilt.<sup>41</sup>

To check the situation in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, I went on the internet<sup>42</sup> and looked at the satellite pictures of the coastline for ten kilometers south of the island city of Tyre, which is now a peninsula. As I mentioned before, we aren’t precisely sure where mainland Tyre was located; it may have been six kilometers south of island Tyre, so I checked ten kilometers to be extra sure. There’s almost nothing but bare beaches on the shoreline with farmers’ fields under crops a little ways inland. There’s only one tiny town, called Rachidiye, in the entire ten kilometer stretch, but it’s not a port and it’s not Tyre! So I think we can be sure that Ezekiel’s prophecy about mainland Tyre, unlikely as it was, has certainly come true. It was destroyed a few years after Ezekiel spoke and never rebuilt since.”

#### Island Tyre: Included in the prophecy or not? It was eventually destroyed.

“The question that remains is, did Ezekiel’s prophecy include the island city as well? I confess to being uncertain about that. It might be easier to answer that question if we knew the exact state of the island city in Ezekiel’s day—not before or after. I have a suspicion—it’s just a guess—that in Ezekiel’s day the island city might have just been a port area where few people lived and thus not really considered a part of the city proper.”

“Do you have evidence for that?” queried Xiao Wang.

“No,” admitted Professor Ho, “and the histories I’ve read seem to seem to indicate the opposite. However, it remains true that we do not have archaeological confirmation of the state of the island city in c.600 BC. Most of what has been found is late Roman, and almost no digging has been done in levels before the Greek period. I would dearly love to see a thorough excavation down to bedrock carried out there! Maybe one of you boys can undertake it!”

Xiao Wang looked at him thoughtfully.

“But for the moment that’s purely a speculation,” Professor Ho continued. “If the island city *was* included in Ezekiel’s prophecy, the final fulfillment came much later than for the mainland city. Island Tyre was rebuilt after Alexander’s destruction. Subsequently, ‘waves’ of invaders continued to wash up on her shore across the next 1,600 years, including Greeks, Romans, Crusaders, and Muslims. Finally in 1291 AD island Tyre was torn down by the Mamelukes and never rebuilt. If Ezekiel’s prophecy about never being rebuilt included the island city, that was the final fulfillment. As late as the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century there was nothing there but an impoverished fishing village of 60 or so huts,<sup>43</sup> whose inhabitants were busy every day fulfilling prophecy about spreading out nets to dry on the site of ancient Tyre.”

“What about today?” Xiao Wang wondered.

Professor Ho nodded. “I checked that on a satellite picture, too. The land on which a third of the former island city stood subsided and sunk beneath the water of the sea hundreds of years ago. Of the part remaining above water, a large section is an uninhabited archaeological preserve covered with mostly late Roman period remains. In these days of population growth, the fishing village has expanded to cover much of the rest of surface of the island which is still above water, but no one could reasonably call it a rebuilt city of Tyre.”

#### Ezekiel 26:19-21: Tyre to be sunk under the water and never found

“Finally, the last section,<sup>Q</sup> verses 19-21, predicts Tyre underwater:

<sup>Q</sup> Verses 15-18 (Ezekiel 26:15-18) are skipped here because they are not relevant to our discussion. Those verses predict the reaction of the rulers of various coastal cities (v.16 ‘princes of the sea’) to hearing about the fall of the island city of Tyre to Alexander in 332 BC. These cities would have been some of Tyre’s former trading partners; see Ezekiel 27.

19 For thus says the Lord GOD, "When I make you [Tyre] a desolate city, like the cities which are not inhabited, when I bring up the deep over you and the great waters cover you, 20 then I will bring you down ...[to] the lower parts of the earth, like the ancient waste places...so that you will not be inhabited... 21 I will bring terrors on you and you will be no more; though you will be sought, you will never be found again," declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 26:19-21 NAS]

Some interpreters think these statements are just metaphors describing the desolation of Tyre. However, the specific predictions are that Tyre one: will be underwater, and two: will never be found again. Both have been fulfilled.

"Obviously, the remains of mainland Old Tyre which Alexander threw into the sea went to 'the lower parts of the earth' and were covered by 'the great waters,' and obviously mainland Tyre is 'not inhabited.' Perhaps only that much is being predicted. But the fascinating fact is, much of the island city of Tyre has subsided over the centuries and is now under the waters of the Mediterranean sea. It really has gone down to the 'lower parts of the earth' and is covered by the waters!

"Finally, note that ancient Tyre has been 'sought' but never 'found again.' Archaeologists have been unable to find anything of the mainland city. Even it's precise location is uncertain, despite it's having been 'sought.'

"On the island city, extensive excavations have been carried out, some even being done underwater. But to date very little or, more likely, nothing of the Tyre of Ezekiel's day has been unearthed. The pictures you see of archaeological remains from Tyre are all much later, a little from the Greek period, but mostly from the late Roman period.<sup>44</sup>

"Thus the present situation is: the mainland city is bare ground, a third of the island city is underwater, and very little or nothing of Tyre from Ezekiel's time has ever been found."

#### Tyre: What's the conclusion?

Xiao Li had been listening with interest, but his brow had slowly wrinkled into a crease which showed his confusion. "Professor Ho, I don't understand. In the end, what can we be sure of from Ezekiel's predictions about Tyre?"

Professor Ho had been focusing on Xiao Wang. Now he raised his eyebrows and turned to Xiao Li with a smile. "Sorry! I lost us in the details and caveats; I have a bad habit of doing that.

"The absolute minimum we can conclude with total certainty is this: the mainland city of Old Tyre was scraped bare, thrown into the sea, and never rebuilt. Those were incredibly unlikely events, and they were predicted in detail by Ezekiel hundreds of years before they happened—at a time when there was no indication that such things would ever occur."

#### Ezekiel's prophecies about Tyre: Were they added after the fact? Were they just good luck?

All three were silent for awhile. Xiao Wang was obviously deep in thought. Finally he spoke. "Impressive! I admit it's impressive, especially the 'scraped' part. But I'm still bothered by two things..." Xiao Wang hesitated.

Professor Ho finished Xiao Wang's sentence for him. "Number one, were the prophecies written after the fact? Number two, was Ezekiel just lucky?"

Xiao Wang nodded, "Yes, those two questions."

"I've faced those questions too" Professor Ho continued. "Let's first consider the possibility that the prophecies were written after the events occurred."

#### Not added later: Ezekiel's writing fits the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC

"The objection that a prophecy might have been added later at first glance seems rational and valid. It used to really bother me. But as I studied more about the reliability and integrity of the documents, I came to realize that 'it was added later' was often just the critics' last, desperate resort in their attempt to deny inspiration.

"First, a counter-question: What evidence is there that it was added later? Do we have manuscript versions which lack it? No. Are there statements by ancient commentators claiming it was a later interpolation? None that I've heard of—and you can be sure the critics would use them if there were any!

"But let's face the 'added later' assertion head on. Alexander's siege and the scraping of mainland Tyre is a well documented event which occurred in 332 BC. Is it reasonable to think additions were made to the book of Ezekiel after that date?

"The answer, essentially, is the same as for the book of Jeremiah. [See When was the book of Jeremiah written? earlier in this chapter.] There are four reasons for concluding that the entire book of Ezekiel was completed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, hundreds of years before Alexander the Great. First, the language used in Ezekiel is that of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Second, Ezekiel's minutely accurate historical details support the conclusion that it was written in the Babylonian period—people writing in Palestine centuries later would probably have made anachronistic mistakes. Third, manuscript and historical evidence conclusively demonstrates that Ezekiel was a recognized book before 200 BC. Finally, it is known that the Jews revered their prophetic books and rejected attempted additions to them.

"Meanwhile, as I said a moment ago, there is absolutely no evidence, manuscript or otherwise, to support the idea that there have been additions to the text. In the end, there are no factual grounds for asserting the prophecies about Tyre were added to the existing, recognized texts of Ezekiel some time after 332 BC. A rational skepticism doubts when there are reasons to doubt. An irrational or prejudiced skepticism will always doubt and deny—even when there are no known grounds to do so."

Xiao Wang looked earnestly at him. "Professor Ho, it's not that I want to find any possible excuse to doubt, like the

unbelieving critics. It's just that I want to be certain!"

Professor Ho's expression softened. "I do understand that, Xiao Wang. I went through the same process myself. To help us be certain that the predictions were made before the events, God included the long term prophecies. Consider the case of Ezekiel's prophecy about Egypt. It requires an ongoing, permanent fulfillment. For the Egypt prophecy, the 'it was added later' objection is meaningless. It would have been miraculous even if it had been made after 332 BC. But it was actually given in 587 BC.

"Since Ezekiel was able, by God's inspiration, to predict the unlikely future of Egypt, why wouldn't we expect he predicted Tyre's future, too?"

"You have a point," Xiao Wang agreed. But doubts still rose in his mind.

They paused for a moment. Professor Ho's thoughts raced back to his own days of examining and doubting. He really could sympathize with Xiao Wang. For more than a year he'd struggled with questions. When were the documents written? Had the prophecies been fulfilled just by chance? That thought brought him back to Xiao Wang's other doubt. "But you had a second question," Professor Ho began again. "Could Ezekiel's prediction about Tyre have just been a lucky guess?"

#### Not just lucky: Ezekiel's prophecies about Sidon provide a contrast to Tyre

"What makes it impossible for me to believe that it's just luck is the number of fulfilled prophecies and their specificity. If the Biblical prophecies were made and fulfilled by chance, then some of them—in fact a lot of them—should end up failing to come true. But none of them have failed. There is not one single counterexample. I've been reading the Old Testament carefully for decades. I have entire books examining the prophecies. Not one of the prophecies recorded in the Old Testament has been shown to be wrong—this despite the fact that they are generally very specific."

"Consider a case that correlates directly to Ezekiel's prophecies about Tyre. Tyre's 'sister city' was the slightly older city of Sidon, located about 40 kilometers up the coast to the north. The similarities between the two are striking. They were of the same Phoenician ethnicity and were closely associated, Tyre apparently having been founded by Sidonians. Both were well-fortified port cities. Both had islands close to shore. Both housed many merchants who had grown rich from extensive maritime trade. Both were also noted for their highly skilled artisans and craftsmen. Both were conquered or controlled by Assyria, Babylon, Persia and Alexander the Great. Both had existed for over 1,000 years in Ezekiel's day. And Ezekiel prophesied about both of them. Regarding Sidon, in 587-586 BC he said:

22 ... 'Thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I am against you, O Sidon, and I will be glorified in your midst. Then they will know that I am the LORD when I execute judgments in her, and I will manifest My holiness in her. 23 For I will send pestilence to her and blood to her streets, and the wounded will fall in her midst by the sword upon her on every side; then they will know that I am the LORD. " [Ezekiel 28:21-23 NAS]

Sidon was predicted to face warfare and bloodshed, but no mention was made of it being scraped, thrown into the sea, or never rebuilt. Subsequently, Sidon has suffered from devastating invasions, destructions and earthquakes many times in its history, but has always been rebuilt. It has been continuously inhabited on the same site down to the present.

"At the same point in history, Ezekiel made predictions about two very similar, closely linked cities which had had similar histories theretofore. But his predictions about the futures of the two were radically different, and the subsequent histories of the two cities were likewise different. How could he have known in advance? Is it reasonable to think he was just lucky?"

"The Bible has scores of examples like this. Each one is another pebble thrown in the scales of evidence—though I personally think the predictions about Tyre are more like a fist-sized rock! As the examples accumulate, it becomes unreasonable to try to write them off as luck. Meanwhile, there are no convincing counterexamples of 'failed' prophecies to throw into the other side of the scales. I know the unbelieving critics claim otherwise, but when you examine the facts, their claims don't hold water."

#### Fulfilled prophecy demonstrates inspiration

"How do we know the Bible was inspired by God? The proof is long term and short term prophecies in the Bible, all of which come true, every last one! Human beings simply do not know and cannot predict the future. One famous Bible scholar of a century ago put it this way." Professor Ho flipped through his old Bible and read from the explanatory notes at the bottom of one of the pages:

Fulfilled prophecy is a proof of inspiration because the Scripture predictions of future events were uttered so long before the events took place that no mere human wisdom or foresight could have anticipated them, and these predictions are so detailed, minute, and specific as to exclude the possibility that they were simply fortunate guesses. Hundreds of predictions concerning Israel, the land of Canaan, Babylon, Assyria, Egypt, and numerous individuals—so ancient, so singular, so seemingly improbable, as well as so detailed and definite that no mortal could have anticipated them—have been fulfilled by natural elements and by men who were ignorant of them, or who utterly disbelieved them, or who struggled with frantic desperation to avoid their fulfillment. It is certain, therefore, that the Scriptures which contain them are inspired [by God].<sup>45</sup>

Professor Ho looked up and concluded: "I don't think I could say it any better than that!"

The three were silent again as Xiao Wang pondered what Professor Ho had said. He had been looking into the Bi-

ble's prophecies quite a bit on his own recently. Some of them he couldn't understand because he didn't know enough of the historical background. But the fulfillments of many of them were very clear. And he was finding more and more fulfillments the longer he looked. He was already finding it hard to believe that so many prophecies could have come true by chance. But he was still doubtful.

Xiao Wang's gaze met Professor Ho's. "I'd like to see more prophecies like the one about Egypt—really long-term ones that leave no question about whether they were written before the fulfillment!"

"Excellent!" Professor Ho replied with a broad smile. "If you can come next week, we'll look at some of the most detailed long-term prophecies of all: the ones in the book of Daniel."

"Great. I'll read over the book before I come."

"And have your questions ready," Professor Ho said with a smile.

Xiao Wang smiled back.

## Appendix 8-1: More details demonstrating the time of composition and historical accuracy of Jeremiah and Ezekiel.

### The invasion of Egypt by Babylon

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel explicitly predicted that Nebuchadnezzar would successfully invade Egypt:

9 "Take some large stones in your hands and hide them in the mortar in the brick terrace which is at the entrance of Pharaoh's palace in Tahpanhes, in the sight of some of the Jews; 10 and say to them, "Thus says the LORD of hosts, the God of Israel, "Behold, I am going to send and get Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon, My servant, and I am going to set his throne right over these stones that I have hidden; and he will spread his canopy over them. 11 "He will also come and strike the land of Egypt; those who are meant for death will be given over to death, and those for captivity to captivity, and those for the sword to the sword. 12 "And I shall set fire to the temples of the gods of Egypt, and he will burn them and take them captive. So he will wrap himself with the land of Egypt as a shepherd wraps himself with his garment, and he will depart from there safely. 13 "He will also shatter the obelisks of Heliopolis, which is in the land of Egypt; and the temples of the gods of Egypt he will burn with fire." [Jeremiah 43:9-13 NAS]

Therefore thus says the Lord GOD, "Behold, I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon. And he will carry off her wealth and capture her spoil and seize her plunder; and it will be wages for his army. "I have given him the land of Egypt for his labor which he performed, because they acted for Me," declares the Lord GOD. [Ezekiel 29:19-20 NAS]

As has so often been the case, the unbelieving critics tended to deny that the predicted invasion ever actually happened because there was little or no extra-Biblical evidence for it. And, as so often been the case, the critics were later proven wrong and unjustified in their skepticism and the Biblical record was vindicated. We quote from Old Testament scholar Gleason L. Archer:

Until a few decades ago, considerable skepticism was voiced by many critics as to the fulfillment of the prediction made by Jeremiah in 43:9-13 and 44:30 that northern Egypt would be devastated by an invasion of the Chaldeans [Babylonians] under Nebuchadnezzar (cf. also Ezek. 29:19-20, which contains a similar prediction). The pagan Greek historians make no mention of such an invasion....<sup>46</sup>

Later, however, a Babylonian inscription was found which records just such an invasion:

...R. Campbell Thompson of Oxford remarks: "The small fragment of a Babylonian Chronicle first published by Pinches shows that Nebuchadnezzar launched an expedition against Egypt in his thirty-seventh year, i.e. about 567 B.C. ...." In ANET<sup>3</sup> [Ancient Near Eastern Texts] (p.308) appears a translation of a fragmentary Babylonian text in the British Museum containing the following sentence: "In the thirty-seventh year (568/67), Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, marched against Mi-sir [Egypt] to deliver a battle."<sup>47</sup>

In addition to the Babylonian record, there is a record of what is probably the same invasion from a contemporary governor in southern Egypt who had feared that the invaders would advance south to his territory:

Additional archaeological confirmation is found in an inscription on the statue of Nes-hor in the Louvre. Nes-hor was a governor of southern Egypt under Hophra [reigned c.588-69] .... In this biographical record he states that an army of Asiatics and northern peoples [i.e. people from the Middle East] who had invaded [northern] Egypt attempted to advance [southwards] up the Nile valley to Ethiopia, but this was fortunately averted by the favor of the gods.<sup>48</sup>

There is no longer any valid reason to doubt that Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt, exactly as both Jeremiah and Ezekiel predicted he would. The critics were wrong; the Bible is accurate.

### Clay seals of two officials from Jeremiah's day excavated in Jerusalem

Jeremiah records the names of many minor officials in Jerusalem in his day. Many of these opposed his message from God commanding the Jews to submit to the Babylonians.



One of the seals found with a name from Jeremiah 38:1. Source unknown.

1 Now Shephatiah the son of Mattan, and **Gedaliah the son of Pashhur**, and **Jucal the son of Shelemiah**, and Pashhur the son of Malchijah heard the words that Jeremiah was speaking to all the people... 4 Then the officials said to the king, "Now let this man be put to death..." [Jeremiah 38:1, 4 NAS]

In 2005 and 2008, two well preserved clay seals (bullae) were excavated at Jerusalem in a layer dating from the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 BC, the time of Jeremiah. The seal found in 2008 bore the name "Gedaliah ben Pashur," while the seal unearthed in 2005 was inscribed "Yehuchal ben Shelemayahu"<sup>49</sup> Note that "ben" means "son of" and the apparent spelling differences in the names are just different ways of representing the same Hebrew words in English. A report of the discovery notes:

The two men were ministers in the court of King Zedekiah, the last king to rule in Jerusalem before the destruction of the First Temple. According to Dr. Eilat Mazar of the Hebrew University who is leading the dig, this is the first time in the annals of Israeli archeology that two clay bullae with two Biblical names that appear in the

same verse in the Bible have been unearthed in the same location. "It is not very often that such a discovery happens in which real figures of the past shake off the dust of history and so vividly revive the stories of the Bible," Mazar noted. The first bulla was uncovered inside an impressive stone structure, which Mazar believes to be the Palace of David, while the second bulla was found at the foot of the external wall of the same structure, under a tower that was built in the days of Nehemiah. Both bullae, clearly preserved, measuring 1 cm. in diameter each and lettered in ancient Hebrew, were found among the debris of the destruction of the First Temple period (8th to 6th centuries BCE).<sup>50</sup>

Why does Jeremiah correctly record the names of petty officials otherwise lost to history? Because it was written at exactly the time it claims, the early 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

#### Lachish letter 4: Fortress cities of Lachish and Azekah

The Lachish letters were discussed above. They are 21 letters written on pottery sherds dated to just before the final Babylonian invasion of Jerusalem in 588 BC. Most of them are correspondence between a military leader, probably at an outpost, and his superior, apparently in Lachish. In addition to precisely confirming the international relations and diplomatic activities stated in Jeremiah, the Lachish letters also confirm the strategic military situation. According to Jeremiah, Nebuchadnezzar conquered the smaller cities of the southern kingdom of Judah relatively quickly, then settled in to besiege the three remaining major fortified cities:

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 NAS]

Thus Jeremiah portrays Lachish and Azekah as fortress cities, military centers strong enough to be the last holdouts in addition to the strongly defended capital of Jerusalem.

The strategic importance of Lachish and Azekah as major military centers is reflected in Lachish Letter 4. In it, the local military commander writes to his superior:

May Yahweh cause my lord to hear this very day tidings of good! And now according to everything that my lord has written, so has your servant done; ... And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah.<sup>51</sup>

Note that these two cities, Lachish and Azekah, are mentioned together, just as they are in Jeremiah. Lachish Letter 4 is dated by archaeologists to c.589-588 BC, but we are uncertain exactly when. If it was written when Nebuchadnezzar's invasion was well under way, it may also be confirmation that Lachish and Azekah were among the last holdouts.

#### Lachish letter 1: Names common in the time of Jeremiah and Ezekiel

Further indirect confirmation of Jeremiah comes from Lachish Letter 1, also dated to c.589-588 BC. It is just a list of Hebrew names, but three of those names only appear in the Old Testament in the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, plus in one historical passage concerning the same time period. These three names from Lachish Letter 1 are Gemariah, Jaazaniah, and Neriah.<sup>52</sup> The corresponding uses in the Old Testament are:

Then Baruch read from the book the words of Jeremiah in the house of the LORD in the chamber of **Gemariah** the son of Shaphan the scribe... [Jeremiah 36:10 NAS; see also Jeremiah 29:3, 36:11, 12, 25]

Then I took **Jaazaniah** the son of Jeremiah, son of Habazziniah, and his brothers and all his sons and the whole house of the Rechabites, [Jeremiah 35:3 NAS; see also 2Kings 25:23; Ezekiel 8:11, 11:1]

Then Jeremiah called Baruch the son of **Neriah**, and Baruch wrote on a scroll at the dictation of Jeremiah all



Lachish Letter I. Note 1.

the words of the LORD which He had spoken to him. [Jeremiah 36:4 NAS; see also remiah 32:12, 16; 36:8, 14; 43:3, 6; 45:1; 51:59]

Unique names like these are a dating method, although not an exact one. Names come in and go out of fashion over time. Some stay popular for a long time, but others are only common during relatively short time periods. The Bible contains hundreds of different names from time periods spanning more than 2,000 years. The appearance of these three names only in Jeremiah and Ezekiel, and the equivalently dated passage in 2 Kings, is evidence that Jeremiah and Ezekiel were written around the same time as the Lachish letters—namely the first half of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC.

#### Ezekiel's dating system

Ezekiel is one of the most precisely dated books in the entire Bible. Thirteen of his sixteen dates are counted from the beginning of his exile in 597 BC. In that year, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Israel and Jerusalem for the second time and deposed king Je-

hoiachin (also called Jeconiah and Coniah), replacing him on the throne with his uncle king Zedekiah. Ezekiel, however, still calls Jehoiachin king five years later:

On the fifth of the month in the fifth year [593 BC] of King Jehoiachin's exile, the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him. [Ezekiel 1:2-3 NAS]

Formerly, some of the unbelieving critics took this strange time reference as evidence that the book of Ezekiel was composed much later than it claimed and was not historically trustworthy.

One of C.C. Torrey's [formerly professor at Yale University and an influential critic] principle arguments against the authenticity of the book [of Ezekiel] concerned the unusual dating of events by the years of 'king Jehoiachin's captivity'.... This method of dating, however, now turns out to be an...[argument] in favor of the genuineness of Ezekiel, as shown by archaeological discoveries.<sup>53</sup>

It turns out that the Jews themselves still regarded Jehoiachin as the king of the southern kingdom of Judah, even though he never again exercised power. His uncle, king Zedekiah, was probably seen as regent for his captive nephew who was being held in Babylon. This was demonstrated by seal impressions on three jar handles found by archaeologists in Israel:

Archaeological evidence of the name of Jehoiachin was found in the excavation of Tell Beit Mirsim, thirteen miles southwest of Hebron, believed to represent the site of the biblical town of Kiriath Sepher [Debir].... In the upper stratum (dated a little after 600 B.C.) the excavators found two stamped jar handles with the same seal impression, reading 'Belonging to Eliakim steward of Yokin'.... Yokin is a shortened form of the name rendered 'Jehoiachin' in the Bible, so the seal impression says in effect 'Belonging to Eliakim steward of Jehoiachin.' An identically inscribed jar handle was found in the excavation of Beth Shemesh [over 30km away].... Careful examination showed that all three jar handles had been impressed with the same seal.... Evidently Eliakim was charged with the administration of Jehoiachin's property while the king was in Babylon.<sup>54</sup>

That archaeologists dug up three such seals in two different locations separated by over 30km indicates that many of them must have been made. When we remember that Jehoiakim only actually ruled for three months [see 2Kings 24:8], which was followed by 11 years of Zedekiah's rule, it becomes obvious that "Eliakim" was continuing to act as royal steward on behalf of the exiled king in the subsequent years. Furthermore, as noted above, Jehoiachin's Babylonian ration tablets have been found. On those tablets, dating from the same year, 593 BC, he is also referred to as "king of Judah." Once more, the Bible was demonstrated to be accurate in its details and the critics' claims were shown to be unfounded.

#### Ezekiel has many precise dates

Ezekiel's unique dating system, counted from 597 BC, provides a way to confirm the accuracy of his dates by comparing them to calculations made from other sources. Regarding the start of the siege of far away Jerusalem, Ezekiel received a revelation:

And the word of the LORD came to me in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month, saying, "Son of man, write the name of the day, this very day. The king of Babylon has laid siege to Jerusalem this very day. [Ezekiel 24:1-2 NAS]

The 'ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth of the month' of king Jehoiachin's and Ezekiel's captivity calculates to January 15, 588 BC. From other Biblical sources, we can confirm that Nebuchadnezzar's third and final siege of Jerusalem was indeed in 588 BC.

Over a decade later, Ezekiel's dates provide another cross-comparison for accuracy:

In the twenty-fifth year of our exile, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth of the month, in the fourteenth

year after the city was taken, on that same day the hand of the LORD was upon me... [Ezekiel 40:1 NAS]

Note that Ezekiel equates the twenty-fifth year of his exile with the fourteenth year after the destruction of Jerusalem. These two ways of counting point to the same result:

Based on exile:  $597\text{BC} - 25\text{years} = 572\text{BC}$

Based on destruction of Jerusalem:  $586\text{BC} - 14\text{years} = 572\text{BC}$

This kind of detailed accuracy in the recording of dates does not come from traditions or from legends fabricated hundreds of years later.

#### Jeremiah and Ezekiel fit their timeframe: The condemnation of idolatry

Both Jeremiah and Ezekiel incessantly condemn the idolatry and worship of false gods being practiced by the Jews in their time. The Babylonian captivity was God's discipline on Israel for this disobedience, and it was effective. After the Jews returned to Israel beginning in 539 BC, they never again worshiped gods other than Jehovah or made idols. Thus the books of the Old Testament which were actually written after 539 BC and describe the conditions of that time (Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi) never accuse the Jews of idolatry or exhort them to repent of worshipping false gods at that time. Jeremiah's and Ezekiel's constant condemnation of the Jews' idol worship provides indirect evidence that the books are products of the period before 539 BC.

#### Jeremiah and Ezekiel fit their timeframe: The history covered stops by 570 BC

Sometimes what is not included in a book is as important as what is. Neither Jeremiah nor Ezekiel record any events later than 570 BC. (Recall that Jeremiah chapter 52 is an inspired appendix; see footnote C above.) The books do not record the fulfillment of their prophecies after that time—not even those occurring shortly thereafter, like Nebuchadnezzar's invasion of Egypt in 569 or 568 BC. This is further indirect evidence that they were written by Ezekiel and Jeremiah themselves. A forger adding additions to the books a century or more later (as the critics claim happened) might easily have added anachronistic items.

#### Ezekiel fits his location: He did not have predictions against Babylon

Unlike the books of Isaiah and Jeremiah, Ezekiel contains no prediction of the destruction of Babylon, despite prophesying about at least seven other non-Jewish nations and cities. Why wasn't he inspired to make a prediction about Babylon? It was perhaps partly because God used him to urge his fellow Jewish exiles to submit to the rule of Babylon and prepare to stay there for the rest of their lives. However, his contemporary Jeremiah both urged the Jews to submit to Babylon and also prophesied Babylon's later desolation. This difference between the two prophets provides indirect evidence that Ezekiel did indeed make his predictions while living in Babylon, contrary to the doubts expressed by some critics. As a captive there, if Ezekiel had prophesied the destruction of Babylon, it certainly would have been regarded as rebellion and the Babylonians would have killed him.

After the captivity, Babylon became a symbol of painful oppression to the Jews and was often remembered with bitterness, (for one example, see Psalm 137:1). If the book of Ezekiel had been concocted or added to after the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, we would expect the writers to have put a prediction of wrath against the Babylonians into Ezekiel's mouth. Why is there nothing like that in the book? The reasonable answer is, because it was actually written by Ezekiel, who was living as a captive in Babylon. God knew Ezekiel could not have safely proclaimed a prophecy against Babylon, and so He did not give him one. In contrast, God revealed Babylon's future destruction to Jeremiah, who was safely located in Jerusalem, far from Babylon. In both cases, the actual contents of the books fit authors living in the places where they are recorded to have prophesied.

#### <sup>1</sup> Picture sources:

Cuneiform clay tablets: ©Associates for Biblical Research. All rights reserved. [biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/nebo-sarsekim-found-in-babylonian-tablet.aspx](http://biblearchaeology.org/post/2008/04/nebo-sarsekim-found-in-babylonian-tablet.aspx)

Lachish excavations: Mark A. Wilson [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LachishFrontGate.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:LachishFrontGate.jpg)

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Jeremiah scrolls from the Dead Sea Scrolls 4QJerA: Need to acquire rights of usage. VanderKam J. and Flint P. [The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls](#), Harper San Francisco, 2002. Pg.135 Fig6.6

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Ra: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maler\\_der\\_Grabkammer\\_der\\_Nefertari\\_001](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Maler_der_Grabkammer_der_Nefertari_001)

Baal: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Baal\\_Ugarit\\_Louvre\\_AO17330.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Baal_Ugarit_Louvre_AO17330.jpg)

Marduk: [en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marduk-nādin-aḥḥē.jpg](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:Marduk-nādin-aḥḥē.jpg)

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- <sup>2</sup> Free, Joseph R. and Howard F. Vos. Archaeology and Bible History, Revised Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1992. Pg.189, 193.
- <sup>3</sup> Note 1, Pg.193.
- <sup>4</sup> Note 1, Pg.194.
- <sup>5</sup> Josephus, Flavius. Against Apion. Book 1, Chapter 19 (sentence 137). William Whiston's translation.
- <sup>6</sup> Note 8, Pg.205.
- <sup>7</sup> Two discrepancies might be imagined here: the year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign and the number of prisoners.  
Second Kings 24:12 says Nebuchadnezzar attacked Jerusalem 'in the eighth year of his reign,' while Jeremiah 52:28 and the Babylonian record say it was the seventh year. The Babylonians used the 'accession year' dating system, under which the year a king began his reign was not counted, but instead his first regnal year began at the next New Year's. Jeremiah chapter 52, written after the fall of the southern kingdom of Judah, follows this system. Second Kings, based on excerpts from the court annals of the kingdom of Judah, uses the non-accession year system, under which the day the king takes the throne begins his first regnal year—thus adding one more year to the total, eight years instead of seven years. (Some scholars suggest, however, that the difference is in the counting of the beginning of the New Year.) For a discussion, see Finegan, Jack Handbook of Biblical Chronology, Revised Edition, Hendrickson Publishers, 1998, Sections 421 and 438.
- Regarding the number of captives, Jeremiah 52:28 mentions '3,023 Jews' while 2 Kings 24:14 mentions 'ten thousand captives' and 2 Kings 24:16 further mentions 'men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand.' Firstly, the seven thousand and one thousand may be subtotals of the ten thousand. Secondly, Jeremiah 52 and 2 Kings 24 may be referring to different groups of captives. If they are referring to the same group, it is possible that the number 3,023 in Jeremiah 52 refers to adult males only, while the larger numbers in 2 Kings 24 includes wives and children. We know that at least some of the captives were taken in family groups, and in fact probably all or most of them were entire families (see 2 Kings 24:12, 15, Jeremiah 29:1-7, etc.).
- <sup>8</sup> Pritchard, James B., Ed. The Ancient Near East Volume I, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures. Princeton University Press, 1958. Pg. 203. Professor Ho's 'folio sized book' would be the multi-volume Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament, also edited by James B. Pritchard.
- <sup>9</sup> Note 8, Pg.213. English modernized.
- <sup>10</sup> Archer, Gleason L. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. Updated and Revised Edition. Moody Press, 1994. Pg.412 notes the archaeologists' findings. One example is given there of a critic who expressed doubts about the historicity of the Babylonian captivity, Professor C.C. Torrey writing in 1930, but he stood virtually alone in his extreme stance even then.
- <sup>11</sup> Unger, Merrill F., R.K. Harrison, Howard F. Vos and Cyril J. Barber. The New Unger's Bible Dictionary, Revised and updated edition. Moody Press, 1988. Pg.1059.
- <sup>12</sup> Note 11, Pg.1059.
- <sup>13</sup> Barker, Kenneth L., General Editor. The NIV Study Bible, 10<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition. Zondervan Publishing House, 1995. Commentary at Jeremiah 39:3.
- <sup>14</sup> Note 13.
- <sup>15</sup> Wood, Bryant G. "Nebo-Sarsekim Found in Babylonian Tablet." *Bible and Spade*, 20.3 (2007). Pg.67.
- <sup>16</sup> quoted in Note 15, Pg.67.
- <sup>17</sup> Harrison, R.K. Introduction to the Old Testament. William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1969. Pg.809-815.
- <sup>18</sup> Note 10, Pg. 144-145.
- <sup>19</sup> Note 10, Pg.405.
- <sup>20</sup> Vanderkam, James and Peter Flint. The Meaning of the Dead Sea Scrolls. HarperOne, 2004. Pg.134.
- <sup>21</sup> Note 10, Pg.81-84.
- <sup>22</sup> Quoted in: Wood, Bryant G. "The Ongoing Saga of the Cyrus Cylinder: The Internationally-Famous Grande Dame of Ancient Texts." Posted August 18, 2010. [biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/08/18/The-Ongoing-Saga-of-the-Cyrus-Cylinder-The-Internationally-Famous-Grande-Dame-of-Ancient-Texts.aspx](http://biblearchaeology.org/post/2010/08/18/The-Ongoing-Saga-of-the-Cyrus-Cylinder-The-Internationally-Famous-Grande-Dame-of-Ancient-Texts.aspx)
- <sup>23</sup> See Note **Error! Bookmark not defined.**
- <sup>24</sup> Quoted in Note 22.
- <sup>25</sup> Vos, Howard F. Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Manners & Customs. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg. 307.
- <sup>26</sup> Herodotus. Histories, Book 1, 180ff.
- <sup>27</sup> Xenophon. Anabasis.
- <sup>28</sup> Note 10, Pg.566-67.
- <sup>29</sup> Note 10, Pg.49; Note 11, Pg.1342.
- <sup>30</sup> Note 17, Pg.1232.
- <sup>31</sup> Note 17 Pg.847.
- <sup>32</sup> Note 17, Pg.831-832.
- <sup>33</sup> Note 17, Pg.848-849.
- <sup>34</sup> Ferguson, Paul. "Ezekiel 26:1-14: A Proof Text for Inerrancy or Fallibility of the Old Testament?" *Bible and Spade* 19.2 (2006), Pg. 48-58. Available online at: [biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/12/07/Ezekiel-261-14-A-Proof-Text-For-Inerrancy-or-Fallibility-of-The-Old-Testament.aspx](http://biblearchaeology.org/post/2009/12/07/Ezekiel-261-14-A-Proof-Text-For-Inerrancy-or-Fallibility-of-The-Old-Testament.aspx)
- <sup>35</sup> Williamson, Joanne. Hittite Warrior. Bethlehem Books / Ignatius Press, 1999. Pg.38.
- <sup>36</sup> Note 34, Pg.52.
- <sup>37</sup> Including Diodorus Siculus in Bibliotheca Historica, Arrian in Anabasis of Alexander, Quintus Curtius Rufus in The History of Alexander.
- <sup>38</sup> See the ancient Greek historian Diodorus Siculus Bibliotheca Historia 17.40
- <sup>39</sup> Quoted in Note 34, Pg.51.
- <sup>40</sup> Barfield, Kenny. The Prophet Motive: Examining the Reliability of the Biblical Predictions. Gospel Advocate Company, 1995. Pg.95.
- <sup>41</sup> Quoted in Note 40, Pg.95.
- <sup>42</sup> From [www.maps.google.com](http://www.maps.google.com), accessed March 18, 2011.

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<sup>43</sup> Note 34, Pg.55.

<sup>44</sup> Note 34, Pg.56.

<sup>45</sup> Scofield, C.I. New Scofield Study Bible, New American Standard. Oxford University Press and World Bible Publishers, 1988. Note at 2 Peter 1:19.

<sup>46</sup> Note 10, Pg.403.

<sup>47</sup> Note 10, Pg. 404.

<sup>48</sup> Note 10, Pg. 404.

<sup>49</sup> JPost.com Staff. "A 2,600-year-old clay seal uncovered intact in Jerusalem dig" *Jerusalem Post*, August 19, 2008. Accessed online at [www.JPost.com](http://www.JPost.com).

<sup>50</sup> Note 49.

<sup>51</sup> Note 8, Pg.213. English modernized.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in McDowell, Josh D. The New Evidence that Demands a Verdict. Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999. Pg.113.

<sup>53</sup> Note 1, Pg. 195.

<sup>54</sup> Note 1, Pg. 189.