

The Hebrew Corner

Any reader of the Tanach (Old Testament) will quickly encounter an emphasis on prophecy. The word prophet in Hebrew is navi (נביא, nah-VEE), and is best described as a designated spokesperson for God. The message from God may concern events in the past, present, or future. The focus this month is on the prophecies and events surrounding the deportation of King Jehoiachin (also known as Jeconiah or Coniah) of Judah to Babylon.

Let's take a look at the history of the nation of Israel and the events leading to this deportation. The nation of Israel, including all 12 tribes, was united under King David and then continued under King Solomon. After the death of Solomon, an internal dispute between the tribe of Judah and the other tribes led to a division or schism of Israel from which ten tribes formed a northern kingdom referred to as Israel or Samaria, and the remaining tribes, dominated by the tribe of Judah, formed the southern kingdom of Judah. Both Samaria and Judah lapsed into idol worship and disregarded the word of God as given by the prophets. Due to this, God pronounced judgment first on Samaria, which was conquered by Assyria in about 721 BC. The nation of Judah was blessed with several good kings who attempted to reverse this trend and remove the idolatry, but in the last years there were evil kings, particularly Manasseh who reigned over 50 years, that continually provoked God by encouraging all sorts of idol worship.

The book of Jeremiah contains a number of dates that allow us to see the sequence of prophecies that Jeremiah gave to Judah. Jeremiah began his prophetic mission in the days of King Josiah, a

good king who was attempting to turn Judah back to God and destroy the idols that were set up by Manasseh and his son Amon. In the book of Jeremiah Chapter 3 we see that his attempts were not having the intended effect (Jeremiah 3: 6-10):

“The LORD said also unto me in the days of Josiah the king, Hast thou seen that which backsliding Israel hath done? She is gone up upon every high mountain and under every green tree, and there hath played the harlot. And I said after she had done all these things, Turn thou unto me. But she returned not. And her treacherous sister Judah saw it. And I saw, when for all the causes whereby backsliding Israel committed adultery I had put her away, and given her a bill of divorce; yet her treacherous sister Judah feared not, but went and played the harlot also. And it came to pass through the lightness of her whoredom, that she defiled the land, and committed adultery with stones and with stocks. And yet for all this her treacherous sister Judah hath not turned unto me with her whole heart, but feignedly, saith the LORD.”

The phrase translated feignedly uses the Hebrew word sheqer (שקר, SHEH-kehr), which is deception or falsehood. We see in a later passage from Jeremiah that the judgment of God upon Judah has become inevitable (Jeremiah 11:9-14):

“And the LORD said unto me, A conspiracy is found among the men of Judah, and among the inhabitants of Jerusalem. They are turned back to the iniquities of their forefathers, which refused to hear my words; and they went after other gods to serve them: the house of Israel and the house of Judah have broken my covenant which I made with their fathers. Therefore thus saith the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon them, which they will not be able to escape; and

though they shall cry unto me, I will not hearken unto them. Then shall the cities of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem go, and cry unto the gods unto whom they offer incense: but they shall not save them at all in the time of their trouble. For according to the number of thy cities were thy gods, O Judah; and according to the number of the streets of Jerusalem have ye set up altars to that shameful thing, even altars to burn incense unto Baal. Therefore pray not thou for this people, neither lift up a cry or prayer for them: for I will not hear them in the time that they cry unto me for their trouble.”

In addition, Jeremiah pronounced the judgment of God on the three kings that succeeded Josiah, first against Shallum (Jeremiah 22:11-12):

“For thus saith the LORD touching Shallum the son of Josiah king of Judah, which reigned instead of Josiah his father, which went forth out of this place; He shall not return thither any more: But he shall die in the place whither they have led him captive, and shall see this land no more.”

Then he pronounced judgment against Jehoiakim (Jeremiah 22:18-19):

“Therefore thus saith the LORD concerning Jehoiakim the son of Josiah king of Judah; They shall not lament for him, saying, Ah my brother! or, Ah sister! they shall not lament for him, saying, Ah lord! or, Ah his glory! He shall be buried with the burial of an ass, drawn and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem.”

Finally, he pronounced this curse upon Coniah (Jeremiah 22:24-30):

“As I live, saith the LORD, though Coniah the son of Jehoiakim king of Judah were the signet upon my right hand, yet would I pluck thee

hence; And I will give thee into the hand of them that seek thy life, and into the hand of them whose face thou fearest, even into the hand of Nebuchadrezzar king of Babylon, and into the hand of the Chaldeans. And I will cast thee out, and thy mother that bare thee, into another country, where ye were not born; and there shall ye die. But to the land whereunto they desire to return, thither shall they not return. Is this man Coniah a despised broken idol? Is he a vessel wherein is no pleasure? wherefore are they cast out, he and his seed, and are cast into a land which they know not? O earth, earth, earth, hear the word of the LORD. Thus saith the LORD, Write ye this man childless, a man that shall not prosper in his days: for no man of his seed shall prosper, sitting upon the throne of David, and ruling any more in Judah.”

Jehoiakim was placed on the throne in the place of Shallum (Jehoahaz) by Pharaoh Necho, to fulfill Jeremiah's first prophecy against the seed of Josiah. Shallum was taken to Egypt, where he died (see 2 Kings 23:34).

From here we turn to the book of Daniel, where we see that King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon has come against Jerusalem for the first time (Daniel 1:1-6):

“In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah came Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon unto Jerusalem, and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, with part of the vessels of the house of God: which he carried into the land of Shinar to the house of his god; and he brought the vessels into the treasure house of his god. And the king spake unto Ashpenaz the master of his eunuchs, that he should bring certain of the children of Israel; and of the king's seed, and of the princes; children in whom was no blemish, but well-favoured, and skilful in all wisdom,

and cunning in knowledge, and understanding science, and such as had ability in them to stand in the king's palace, and whom they might teach the learning and the tongue of the Chaldeans. And the king appointed them a daily provision of the king's meat, and of the wine which he drank: so nourishing them three years, that at the end thereof they might stand before the king. Now among these were of the children of Judah, Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah.”

So we see that in the first deportation of Jews by Nebuchadnezzar, which has been dated at 606 BC, that the prophet Daniel was among the people taken captive. He quickly gained favor with the king, by consulting God to reveal and interpret his dream, and Nebuchadnezzar made him ruler over the whole province of Babylon (see Daniel 2:48).

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim's reign, Jeremiah pronounced this judgment of the Lord against Judah and the surrounding nations (Jeremiah 25:4-12):

“And the LORD hath sent unto you all his servants the prophets, rising early and sending them; but ye have not hearkened, nor inclined your ear to hear. They said, Turn ye again now every one from his evil way, and from the evil of your doings, and dwell in the land that the LORD hath given unto you and to your fathers for ever and ever: And go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands; and I will do you no hurt. Yet ye have not hearkened unto me, saith the LORD; that ye might provoke me to anger with the works of your hands to your own hurt. Therefore thus saith the LORD of hosts; Because ye have not heard my words, Behold, I will send and

take all the families of the north, saith the LORD, and Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and will bring them against this land, and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, and will utterly destroy them, and make them an astonishment, and an hissing, and perpetual desolations. Moreover I will take from them the voice of mirth, 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 candle. And this whole land shall be a desolation, and an astonishment; and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. And it shall come to pass, when seventy years are accomplished, that I will punish the king of Babylon, and that nation, saith the LORD, for their iniquity, and the land of the Chaldeans, and will make it perpetual desolations.”

So we have the prophecy of Jeremiah that Judah will be made desolate, serving the king of Babylon seventy years. The phrase translated seventy years in Hebrew is shiveem shana (שבעים שנה, shih-VEEM shah-NAH).

In the fifth year of Jehoiakim's eleven year reign in Jerusalem, he stubbornly refused to listen to the words of the Lord given to Jeremiah and written on a scroll by Baruch the scribe, as evidenced by the following passage (Jeremiah 36:20-23):

“And they went in to the king into the court, but they laid up the roll in the chamber of Elishama the scribe, and told all the words in the ears of the king. So the king sent Jehudi to fetch the roll: and he took it out of Elishama the scribe's chamber. And Jehudi read it in the ears of the king, and in the ears of all the princes which stood beside the king. Now the king sat in the winterhouse in the ninth

month: and there was a fire on the hearth burning before him. And it came to pass, that when Jehudi had read three or four leaves, he cut it with the penknife, and cast it into the fire that was on the hearth, until all the roll was consumed in the fire that was on the hearth.”

The reign of Jehoiakim ended in 597 BC with him being bound by the king of Babylon (2 Chronicles 36:5-7):

“Jehoiakim was twenty and five years old when he began to reign, and he reigned eleven years in Jerusalem: and he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD his God. Against him came up Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, and bound him in fetters, to carry him to Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar also carried of the vessels of the house of the LORD to Babylon, and put them in his temple at Babylon.”

At this time Jehoiachin (Coniah) was made king in place of his father, but his reign was short (2 Kings 24:8-16):

“Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he began to reign, and he reigned in Jerusalem three months. And his mother's name was Nehushta, the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. And he did that which was evil in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father had done. At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up against Jerusalem, and the city was besieged. And Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came against the city, and his servants did besiege it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he, and his mother, and his servants, and his princes, and his officers: and the king of Babylon took him in the

eighth year of his reign. And he carried out thence all the treasures of the house of the LORD, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD, as the LORD had said. And he carried away all Jerusalem, and all the princes, and all the mighty men of valour, even ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and smiths: none remained, save the poorest sort of the people of the land. And he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon, and the king's mother, and the king's wives, and his officers, and the mighty of the land, those carried he into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of might, even seven thousand, and craftsmen and smiths a thousand, all that were strong and apt for war, even them the king of Babylon brought captive to Babylon.”

The deportation of Coniah and his family has been dated at 597 BC. Nothing concerning the time of captivity of Coniah is mentioned in the Tanach until the following (Jeremiah 52:31-34):

“And it came to pass in the seven and thirtieth year of the captivity of Jehoiachin king of Judah, in the twelfth month; in the five and twentieth day of the month, that Evil-merodach king of Babylon in the first year of his reign lifted up the head of Jehoichin king of Judah, and brought him forth out of prison, And spake kindly to him, and set his throne above the throne of the kings that were with him in Babylon. And changed his prison garments: and he did continually eat bread before him all the days of his life. And for his diet, there was a continual diet given him of the king of Babylon, every day a portion until the day of his death, all the days of his life.”

This event has been dated at 562 BC. The Evil-Merodach referred to here has been identified by secular sources as Amel-Marduk, who

succeeded Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon. This brings us to a consideration of the facts gained from the references above concerning the circumstances surrounding the deportation and release of Coniah:

- Coniah was cursed by God due to his wickedness.
- Coniah remained in prison all of the years in which Nebuchadnezzar was king.
- Daniel had authority in Babylon when Coniah was deported.
- In the book of Daniel, Coniah is never mentioned.

These points lead to the conclusion that the release of Coniah from prison was not in alignment with God's desire, and that it was in direct opposition to the curse that God pronounced on Coniah. Daniel, being in a position of power, could have asked the king for the release of Coniah, who likely would have granted his petition. Now the Tanach records that after Nebuchadnezzar was given a vision that was interpreted by Daniel, and after being humbled by God, who caused him to eat grass with the oxen for seven years, that he issued this proclamation (Daniel 4:37):

“Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth, and his ways judgment: and those that walk in pride he is able to abase.”

The release of Coniah from prison, and lifting his status above all the other kings of Babylon, may indicate a turning back to idol worship in Babylon after the death of Nebuchadnezzar. This likely hastened the fall of Babylon. Chapter 5 of the book of Daniel portrays King Belshazzar, who has been found in secular history to have been a co-regent with Nabonidus, as holding a feast in which

the golden vessels taken by Nebuchadnezzar taken from Jerusalem to Babylon were brought forth, and the participants drank wine from them and praised idols. At this time a man's hand visibly wrote a message upon a wall near a menorah. During this reign Daniel obviously was not in a position of authority, as King Belshazzar did not know Daniel, but instead the queen informed him that Daniel could interpret the handwritten message. Daniel was brought in, and gave this interpretation described in Aramaic (Daniel 5:18-29):

“O thou king, the most high God gave Nebuchadnezzar thy father a kingdom, and majesty, and glory, and honour: And for the majesty that he gave him, all people, nations, and languages, trembled and feared before him: whom he would he slew; and whom he would he kept alive; and whom he would he set up; and whom he would he put down. But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him: And he was driven from the sons of men; and his heart was made like the beasts, and his dwelling was with the wild asses: they fed him with grass like oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven; till he knew that the most high God ruled in the kingdom of men, and that he appointeth over it whomsoever he will. And thou his son, O Belshazzar, hast not humbled thine heart, though thou knewest all this; But hast lifted up thyself against the Lord of heaven; and they have brought the vessels of his house before thee, and thou and thy lords, thy wives, and thy concubines, have drunk wine in them; and thou hast praised the gods of silver, and gold, of brass, iron, wood, and stone, which see not, nor hear, nor know: and the God in whose hand thy breath is, and whose are all thy ways, hast thou not glorified: Then was the part of the hand sent from him; and this writing was written. And this is the writing that was written, MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN. This is the

interpretation of the thing: MENE; God hath numbered thy kingdom, and finished it. TEKEL; Thou art weighed in the balances, and art found wanting. PERES; Thy kingdom is divided, and given to the Medes and the Persians. Then commanded Belshazzar, and they clothed Daniel with scarlet, and put a chain of gold about his neck, and made a proclamation concerning him, that he should be the third ruler in the kingdom. In that night was Belshazzar the king of the Chaldeans slain. And Darius the Median took the kingdom, being about threescore and two years old.”

This event has been dated to 536 BC, and a comparison with the first subjugation and captivity of Judah by Babylon in 606 BC reveals that the 70 year prophecy of Jeremiah was fulfilled, and strongly suggests that the idol worship that brought down Judah also brought down Babylon. Although the details of what the lifting up of Coniah did to initiate the downfall of Babylon, the influence of this event is evident, as in just over 25 years the kingdom deteriorated and was conquered.

May you keep trusting in the God who keeps his word, and his son, Jesus our Yeshua. Have a blessed month.