A Complete Guide to the Expansive Geography of Biblical History

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Thomas V. Brisco

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Chapter Eleven

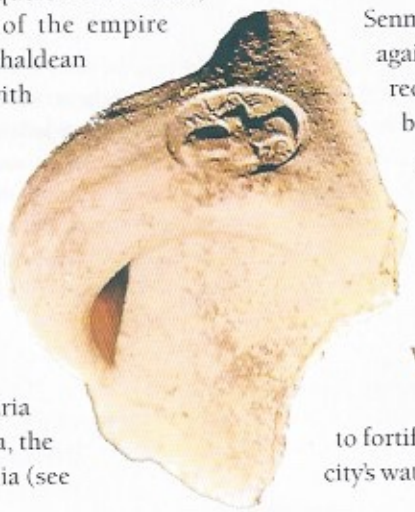
JUDAH ALONE AMID INTERNATIONAL POWERS

The Assyrian Threat

The century following the fall of Israel in 722 B.C. was the high-water mark for the Assyrian Empire. Assyria reached the zenith of power during the reigns of Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) and Ashurbanipal (669–627 B.C.) before experiencing a rapid collapse in the late seventh century. On their own, the vassal states of Syria and Palestine were ill-equipped to resist Assyrian might during this era; however, Egypt, under the new, more aggressive Twenty-fifth Dynasty (725–664 B.C.) of Nubian origin, promised aid. Chaldean and Elamite elements created unrest in Babylonia. These actions prompted rebellions against Assyria among certain kings of Palestine and Syria, usually with predictably calamitous results.

In the days of Ahaz (735–715 B.C.) Judah remained a loyal Assyrian vassal. Judah paid a terrible price for Assyrian overlordship, since Ahaz permitted pagan practices to flourish in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 16:10–18). The same social evils characteristic of Israel's final days crept into Judean life as well (Mic. 2:1–5; 3:1–3; Isa. 5:8–23).

Sargon II (722–705 B.C.), the conqueror of Samaria, encountered rebellion in various parts of the empire throughout much of his reign. The pesky Chaldean chieftain Merodach-baladan, in alliance with Elam, claimed the throne in Babylon in 721 B.C., a military threat to Assyria requiring Sargon's immediate attention. These events sparked rebellion against Assyria in Syria and Gaza, the latter inspired by Egyptian promises of aid. Assyrian forces crushed both uprisings. Samaria, too, was implicated in the disorders, prompting the Assyrians to deport inhabitants of Samaria to cities in Gozan in northwest Mesopotamia, the area around Nineveh, and as far east as Media (see above, p. 139). In 714 B.C. Urartian pressure on Assyrian supply lines forced Sargon to lead a major northern campaign against the main Urartian army. Chronic Chaldean and Elamite pressure on Babylon combined with the Urartian problem gave vassals in the west opportunity to seek independence from Assyria, especially with the possibility of Egyptian assistance.



A jar handle bearing the Hebrew inscription *l'melek* ("belonging to the king").

Hezekiah's Independence Movement

HEZEKIAH'S REFORM

Hezekiah came to the throne of Judah in these turbulent times. The date Hezekiah became king is disputed; certain biblical statements permit a date as early as 729 or as late as 715 B.C.; the later date is traditionally preferred (715–687 B.C.). Unlike his father, Ahaz, Hezekiah steered a course of religious reform and political freedom (2 Chr. 29–31). As early as 712 B.C. he contemplated joining a revolt against Assyria led by Ashdod and supported by Shabako of Egypt; however, along with Edom and Moab, Hezekiah pulled back, perhaps cautioned by Isaiah's warnings against depending upon Egyptian help (Isa. 20).

Gradually Hezekiah strengthened his position by extending his control over cities in the Philistine Plain (2 Kgs. 18:8). Next, he carried out a series of religious reforms that eliminated the pagan practices permitted by Ahaz. Hezekiah ordered the destruction of high places with their idolatrous symbols (sacred pillars and Asherim [wooden objects sacred to Asherah]), cleansed the Jerusalem temple, and celebrated a great Passover (2 Chr. 29–31). Under Hezekiah, Judah became the strongest state in the southern Levant.

HEZEKIAH'S OPPORTUNITY FOR REVOLT

When Sargon II died in 705 B.C., his successor Sennacherib (705–681 B.C.), faced revolt in Babylon, once again led by Merodach-baladan. At some point Hezekiah received in Jerusalem envoys sent from Merodach-baladan, an act intimating an anti-Assyrian conspiracy (2 Kgs. 20:12–15). That Hezekiah intended rebellion seems clear from the biblical descriptions of the strengthening of his country's defenses.

HEZEKIAH'S PREPARATION FOR WAR

In Jerusalem, Hezekiah built a massive new wall to fortify the western suburbs of the city, and he secured the city's water supply by diverting the waters of the Gihon Spring through a 1,700-foot tunnel that led to a pool within the city fortifications (Isa. 22:8–11; 2 Kgs. 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:30). Hezekiah strength-

CHART 12. JUDAH ALONE 722–586 B.C.

Date (B.C.)	Judah	Prophets	Egypt	Assyria	Medes	Babylon
722	Ahaz (735–715): Vassal of Assyria	Isaiah Micah		Sargon II (722–705)		
715	Hezekiah (715–687) Hezekiah's rebellion against Assyria			Sennacherib (705–681) Campaign against Judah		Chaldean chieftain Merodach-baladan
700	Sennacherib's campaign (701) Manasseh (687–642)		Tirhakah (690–664)	Sennacherib destroys Babylon Esarhaddon (681–669) attacks Egypt		
675	Corruption and pagan practices promoted by Manasseh grip Judah		Psammeticus (664–610)	Ashurbanipal II (669–627); sack of Thebes (663)		
650	Josiah (640–609)	Jeremiah (627–582)		Death of Ashurbanipal II (627)		Nabopolassar seized throne of Babylon (626)
625	Josianic reform "Book of the Law" (621)	Nahum		Sin-shar-ushkun	Cyaxares (623–584)	
615	Death of Josiah (609) Jehoiakim (609–598)	Zephaniah Habbakuk	Neco II (610–594)	Asshur sacked (614) Ashur-uballit II; Nineveh destroyed (612) Haran falls (610)		Nebuchadnezzar (605–562) Battle of Carchemish
605	Rebellion against Babylon					
600						
598/97	1st siege of Jerusalem and deportation (Jehoiachin 598–597)	Ezekiel	Apries (Hophra) (589–570)			1st campaign against Judah
587/86	2nd siege of Jerusalem; destruction of temple					2nd campaign against Judah; destruction of Jerusalem and the temple

ened the army and apparently provided a supply system of stored goods designed to withstand Assyrian siege.

Numerous storage-jar fragments stamped with a royal seal, inscribed "belonging (or for) the king" (*Lmelek* in Hebrew), found in excavations in Judah bear four names: Ziph, Socoh, Hebron, and the enigmatic *mmsht*. The first three are Judean towns, while the latter may refer to the governmental offices at Jerusalem. Perhaps these four names designated regional collection-distribution centers of essential goods—oil, wine, etc. Goods would be collected in the form of taxes in kind, stored, and then redistributed as needed (see photo on p. 142).

HEZEKIAH'S REBELLION

With his kingdom properly prepared, Hezekiah rebelled against Sennacherib, provoking an Assyrian response in 701 B.C. Hezekiah's actions were part of a larger anti-Assyrian insurrection that included Sidon, Ashkelon, and the citizens of Ekron, who turned their king, Padi, over to Hezekiah. Sennacherib's campaign to crush the rebellious vassals is well documented both in biblical and Assyrian texts (2 Kgs. 18:13–19:35; Isa. 36–37; 2 Chr. 32:1–23; five whole or fragmentary copies of Sennacherib's Annals mention the campaign).

ASSYRIAN ATTACKS ON JUDAH

First, Sennacherib moved against Sidon, replacing its rebellious kings and receiving tribute from subjugated Phoenician cities. Next, Sennacherib moved south against Ashkelon and removed its king, Sidqia. He subdued cities in the northern Philistine Plain (Joppa, Bene-berak, Azor, and Beth-dagon) formerly controlled by Sidqia and then proceeded into the Shephelah. Sennacherib's annals mention the capture of Ekron and Timnah, both located in the strategic Sorek Valley. Assyrian pressure forced Hezekiah to release Padi, who was reinstated as king of Ekron.

The villages and towns of the Shephelah were particularly hard hit by the Assyrian invasion. Friezes from Sennacherib's palace at Nineveh depict in graphic detail the siege of Lachish, a key Judean fortress in the Shephelah protecting the approaches to Jerusalem. Micah 1:10–16 undoubtedly refers to other towns that suffered a similar fate (Moresheth-gath, Achzib, Gath, and Adullam); Libnah is mentioned in the account of the Rabshakeh's warnings to the citizens of Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 19:8). An oracle of Isaiah suggests a northern approach to Jerusalem by elements of the Assyrian army, which threatened the towns and villages of Benjamin (Isa. 10:28–34). Altogether, Sennacherib claims to have destroyed forty-six Judean cities, a boast adequately supported by the numerous destruction levels found in the excavation of Judean sites datable close to 700 B.C. (see also "Assyrian Warfare," pp. 148–49).

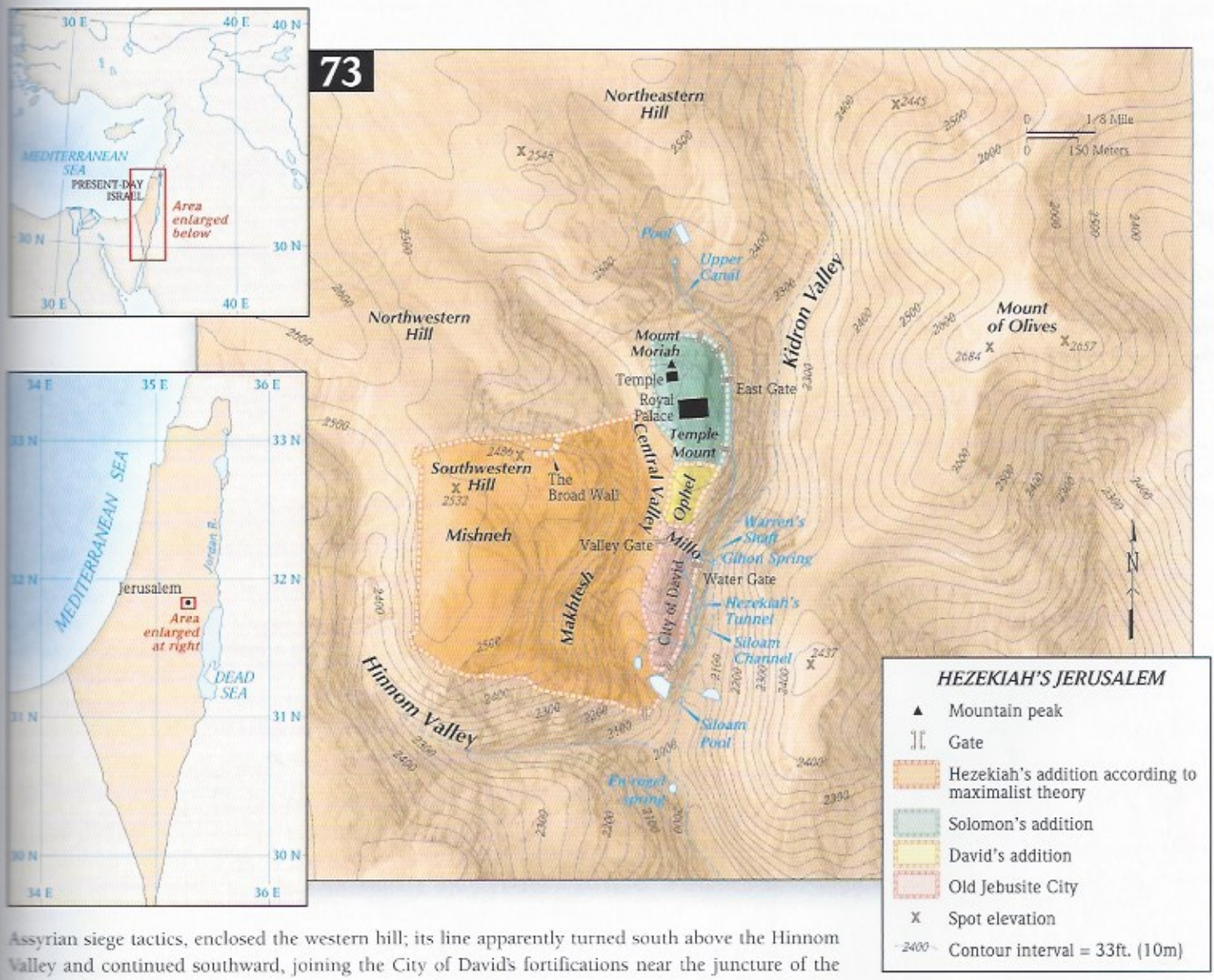
HEZEKIAH'S PREPARATION FOR REVOLT

2 KGS. 18:1–8; 20:12–20
1 CHR. 4:39–42
2 CHR. 32:1–8; 27–31

- City
- City (modern name)
- Gath L'melek City
- City (fortified)
- Royal collection/ distribution center?
- Hezekiah's activities

JERUSALEM FROM HEZEKIAH TO THE DESTRUCTION IN 586 B.C.

Recent archaeological excavations have confirmed a western expansion of Jerusalem dating from the reign of Hezekiah (715–687 B.C.). Archaeologists speculate that a population influx, in part of Israelite refugees fleeing the Assyrian invasions, made the expansion necessary. Clear evidence indicates the southwestern hill was now incorporated into Jerusalem's defenses. A segment of a "broad wall" sixty-five meters long and seven meters wide, south of the Transversal Valley, has been unearthed by Nahman Avigad. Avigad attributed the wall to Hezekiah, who "counted the houses of Jerusalem, and . . . broke down the houses to fortify the wall" (Isa. 22:10). Indeed, Hezekiah's wall was built on top of the foundations of houses visible under the outer edge of Avigad's wall. This massive wall, made to withstand



Assyrian siege tactics, enclosed the western hill; its line apparently turned south above the Hinnom Valley and continued southward, joining the City of David's fortifications near the juncture of the Hinnom and Kidron Valleys.

The "broad wall" enclosed an additional ninety acres of land, making the total fortified area of Jerusalem approximately one hundred and fifty acres. The area taken in included the *mishneh*—"Second Quarter," where the prophet Huldah lived (2 Kgs. 22:14)—and the *maktesh* (the Mortar), probably a reference to the depression between the western and eastern slope (Zech. 1:11). Population estimates for the city at this time range from fifteen to twenty-five thousand.

THE WATER SYSTEMS

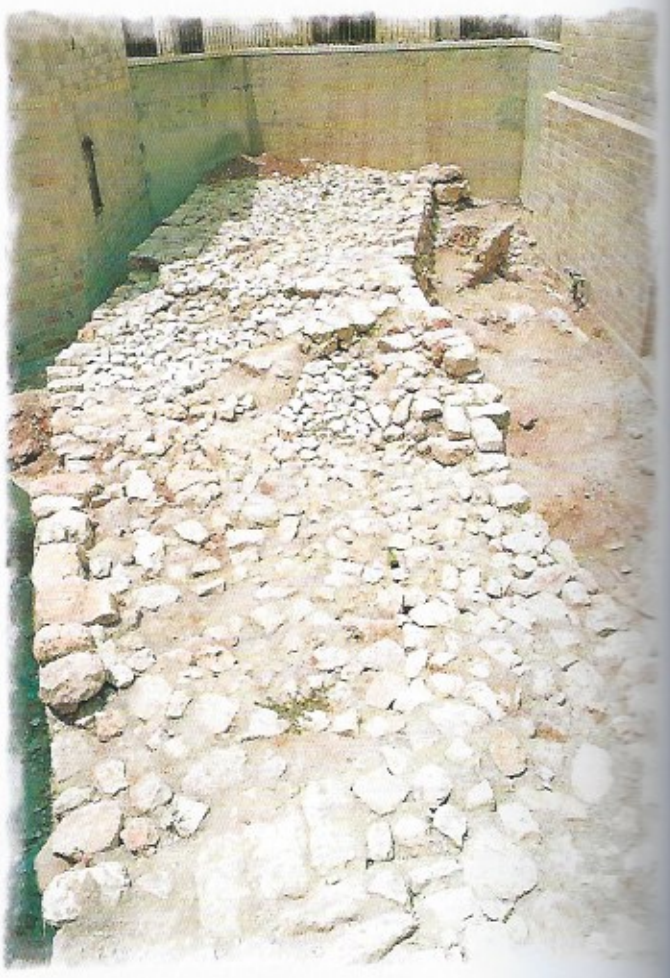
By about 700 B.C. Jerusalem benefited from three water systems. In addition to Warren's Shaft, which gave vertical access to the Gihon Spring, two other systems channeled the water of the spring to various parts of the city. The Siloam Channel extends four hundred meters from the Gihon Spring southward to a pool at the southern end of the eastern ridge. The channel lies outside the protective walls of the city. It was composed of both a narrow tunnel and a covered channel capped by stone. The channel not only brought water to a reservoir, but was used as an irrigation system as well. Apertures in the east side of the channel could be opened to water fields located in the Kidron Valley.

Hezekiah's most impressive engineering feat was a tunnel excavated through the eastern ridge and was used to bring the waters of the Gihon Spring inside Jerusalem. Two teams of workmen starting from opposite sides carved a 533-meter-long tunnel through the southeastern hill. The tunnel emerges in the southern Tyropoeon Valley and empties into the Pool of Siloam. An overflow channel continues southward from the pool. This system gave Jerusalem a protected water supply in times of siege, an expedient measure taken by Hezekiah as he steered Judah along a course of independence against Assyrian control (Isa. 22:10–11; 2 Kgs. 20:20; 2 Chr. 32:34).

JERUSALEM IN THE LAST YEARS OF THE MONARCHY

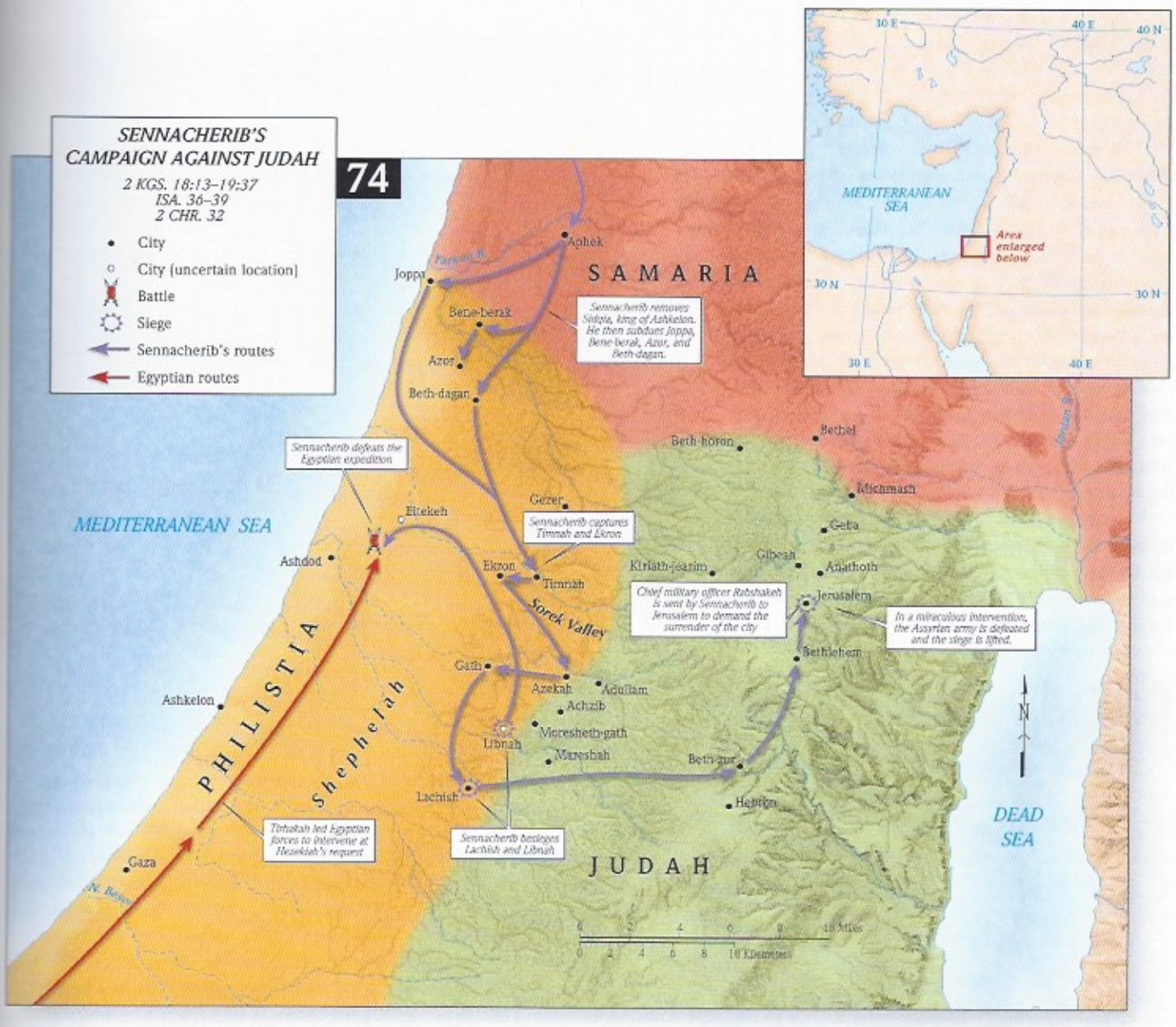
Remarkable finds illuminating Jerusalem between about 700 to 587 B.C. come from the east slope of the southeastern ridge. A series of terraces descending along the slope supported numerous public and domestic structures clinging to the slope. Some are large stone buildings (ashlar masonry) that probably served some public function. Other structures were more modest private dwellings patterned after a typical four-room plan known from other sites. The "House of Ahiel," so-called because of a name found in the ruins, is more typical of these dwellings. Narrow alleyways and steps interconnected the various units along the slope. One partially excavated building yielded fifty-one clay sealings called *bullae* used as seals on documents. The bullae mention names including two that may have biblical connections. One bulla mentions Gemariah ben Shaphan, possibly the royal official mentioned several times in Jeremiah (36:9–12, 25–26). Azariah ben Hilkiah is mentioned on another bulla, likely a priest named in priestly genealogical lists (1 Chr. 9:10–11; cf. Ezra 7:1).

Additional finds from the houses of the eastern slope include weights, zoomorphic figurines, fragments of carved wood, and fertility figurines. The latter testify to the pagan worship practices tolerated and promoted by Manasseh and other Judean kings. Prophetic warnings failed to root out these practices that brought God's judgment upon the city when Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon, sacked Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Archaeologists have found abundant evidence in many excavated areas of the city of the final assault inflicted upon Jerusalem and the conflagration that consumed parts of the city. After 586 B.C. Jerusalem languished in ruins until exiles began the long process of rebuilding in the post-exilic period.



The foundations of the Broad Wall in Jerusalem attributed to the building activities of Hezekiah as he prepared his city for revolt against the Assyrians.

The tunnel of Hezekiah that leads from the Gihon Spring to the safety of a pool within the city's defenses.



THE SIEGE OF JERUSALEM

While besieging Libnah and Lachish, Sennacherib sent a high military officer—the Rabshakeh—to Jerusalem to demand the surrender of the city. The Assyrian forces surrounded the city and built an earthen embankment around it to prevent any escape. Sennacherib boasted that he made Hezekiah a prisoner in Jerusalem "like a bird in a cage." At some point, an Egyptian force led by Tirhakah intervened in response to Hezekiah's desperate appeals, but Sennacherib defeated the expedition near Eltekeh.

The Rabshakeh taunted the Jerusalem citizenry for relying on Egypt, "that broken reed of a staff, which will pierce the hand of any man who leans on it" (2 Kgs. 18:21). The situation appeared hopeless, and Hezekiah, cut off from all help, despaired for the city. Isaiah encouraged the king and gave assurance to Hezekiah that Jerusalem would not fall. Subsequently, in a miraculous intervention, the besieging Assyrian army lost 185,000 men, and the siege was lifted (2 Kgs. 19:35–36).

An interesting incident reported by the Greek historian Herodotus recalls that the Assyrian army met defeat near Pelusium when a plague of mice stripped the weapons of the Assyrian troops. What, if any, relationship exists between the two accounts of an Assyrian defeat in the southern Levant cannot be determined for certain. Nonetheless, Jerusalem was spared destruction, although Hezekiah paid a great price for his rebellion. In addition to the destruction of numerous Judean cities, Hezekiah paid a large tribute to Sennacherib and lost control of Philistine territory previously under his control.

ASSYRIAN WARFARE

The Assyrian army marched with a reputation for unbridled cruelty and professional efficiency. Nahum's graphic descriptions of Assyrian chariotry capture the chaotic terror the Assyrian military could inflict (Nah. 3:1–3). Indeed, the Neo-Assyrian Empire gathered together a finely tuned military machine and employed it judiciously to maintain and expand Assyrian economic and political objectives. Far from being sadistic brutes, the Assyrians used cruelty selectively against chronically rebellious peoples to prevent further sedition. In effect, Assyrian battle tactics served propaganda purposes by clearly demonstrating the consequences of rebellion. The numerous reliefs in Assyrian palaces depicting torture and mutilations of captured leaders were grim reminders to visiting provincial officials of the penalties for rebellion.

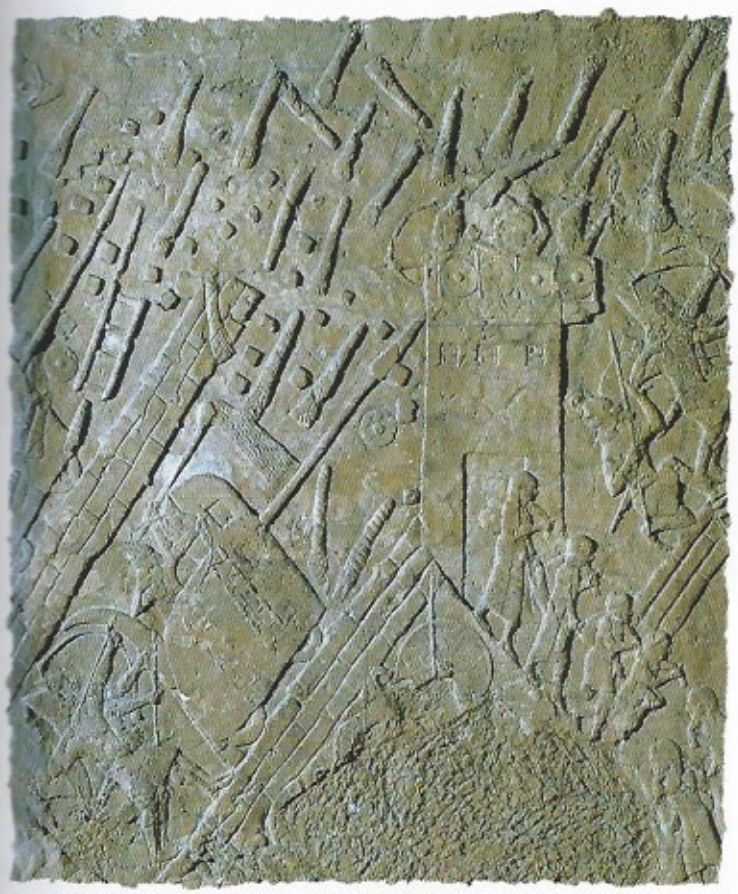
Assyrian kings commanded armies that could number in the hundreds of thousands. The nature of the terrain and the military objectives determined the size of the force. A standing army provided protection for the king, permanent garrison personnel, and immediately available troops. These men were professionals, conscripted from both native Assyrian and provincial territories. Provinces were required to provide a certain levy of troops for the army. Other troops could be conscripted quickly in time of national need. Major Assyrian cities—Nineveh, Calah, and Khorsabad—had large royal arsenals where troops could be marshaled, equipped, reviewed, and dispatched. These arsenals consisted of storage facilities, workshops, and official accommodations surrounding large courtyards. "Fort Shalmaneser" at Calah is a good example of these military bases.

An Assyrian relief from the palace of Tiglath-pileser III at Nineveh showing an Assyrian battering ram at work.

A grain storage silo at Megiddo.

The Assyrian army consisted of many different kinds of troops. The infantry contained slingmen, spearmen, and archers. They were used both in pitched battles in open terrain as well as in siege warfare. The archers, with their strong and accurate composite bows, were the backbone of the infantry. From the eighth century onward the Assyrians used slingmen, whose deadly projectiles proved especially useful in providing cover fire when besieging fortified cities. The cavalry consisted of mounted archers and spearmen, valuable in open terrain but seldom used in siege warfare.

The Assyrian chariot corps was among the most feared elements in the army. Reliefs depict chariots pulled by two or four horses manned by two, three, and even four crewmen. The two-man crew consisted of a driver and an archer. Later, one and then two shield bearers were added. The driver also wielded a spear in battle, and all crewmen possessed swords. In addition to these battle troops, the army carried transport wagons and supply personnel; engineers who cut roads, built bridges, constructed ramps, and built siege machines; intelligence operatives (spies and interpreters); scribes who recorded the campaign and provided lists of the booty taken; and cultic personnel who offered sacrifices and divined omens. Normally, the army campaigned in the summer months, avoiding the agricultural season and the bad winter weather. In friendly territory, local vassals supplied provisions, but in hostile regions the army lived off the land.



Detail of the siege of Lachish recorded on the walls of the palace of Sennacherib at Nineveh. Assyrian battering rams attack the desperate defenders of the Judean city who attempt to counteract the assault by hurling flaming torches toward the battering rams. At the right captives stream out of the doomed city. (Courtesy of the British Museum.)

The Assyrian army engaged in guerilla warfare (especially in the northern mountain regions), pitched battles in open terrain, and siege warfare. The Battle of Qarqar in 853 B.C. between a coalition involving Ahab of Israel and Shalmaneser III is typical of pitched battles. Armies took a horrific mauling, and much loss of life could be expected, even in victory. The people of Israel and Judah were, unfortunately, more familiar with siege warfare. The Assyrians often surrounded a city with the intent of taking the city by assault or starving the city into submission.

The keys to resisting a siege successfully were threefold: (1) strong fortifications, (2) a secure water supply, and (3) adequate food supplies. The archaeology of many cities of Israel and Judah during the Assyrian period shows a preoccupation with these matters (see "The Omrides' Building Achievements" pp. 127–29).

Assyrian reliefs contain many scenes displaying their siege strategies. The "Lachish Frieze" is especially pertinent, since it depicts Sennacherib's siege of Lachish in his campaign aimed at Jerusalem in 701 B.C. Typically, the Assyrians encamped near their target and established a perimeter around the city, ensuring no escape for the defenders. Assyrian siege machinery, including battering rams with mobile siege towers, were maneuvered into position along ramparts of earth and stones constructed by engineers. The battering rams were used to attack gates and weak points in walls (see Ezek. 4:2; 21:22). Crews inside operated the ram, while from above archers gave protecting fire. Rams even carried firemen whose mission was to thwart any attempt by defenders to set the siege machines on fire. Assault troops used scaling ladders to reach the upper walls of a city, while sappers tunneled beneath the fortifications or attempted to breach walls at weak points.

Archers and slingmen provided covering fire to the assault forces from the periphery. This coordinated attack involving different elements placed maximum pressure upon the defenders, whose hopes rested on hurling projectiles at the attackers while attempting to set the siege machines on fire. If resistance proved too costly to the attackers or if the siege could be prolonged until help came or the enemy simply gave up, the city might be spared.

Often cities suffered severe famine during a siege; inhabitants occasionally resorted to cannibalism to relieve their desperate plight (2 Kgs. 6:24–30). The Assyrians employed a type of psychological warfare to break the resistance of a city. During Sennacherib's campaign against Judah, he sent military officials (the Rabshakeh, Tartan, and Rabsaris) to Jerusalem along with a military contingent to threaten Hezekiah (2 Kgs. 18–19). The Rabshakeh addressed the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the Hebrew language as he warned them of the futility of resistance. He seems to have been well informed of Hezekiah's reform efforts and used his information to suggest that Hezekiah had offended the God of Israel (2 Kgs. 18:22). The Rabshakeh also taunted Hezekiah for trusting in Egyptian help and his own military preparations. The Assyrian intelligence system provided reliable information, a fact demonstrated often in other Assyrian documents.

When the city surrendered or was taken by assault, various fates awaited the survivors. Many were killed, especially the leaders. Their mutilated bodies were often displayed on Assyrian reliefs. This was especially true of chronically rebellious territories. More often, the Assyrians gathered groups of survivors and deported them to other parts of the Assyrian Empire. The Assyrians chose areas similar to the deportee's homeland when possible. These people were important sources of labor and could be used to make agriculturally unproductive lands valuable again. Families were not broken up, and some effort was expended to make the transition successful. The experience must have been traumatic, although interestingly, the Israelite deportees must have quickly assimilated to their new surroundings and did not retain their identity as those of their later kindred in the Babylonian captivity.

Manasseh's Long Rule

The later years of Hezekiah's reign passed unnoticed by the biblical writers. Presumably, he caused no further trouble for Assyria. His son Manasseh succeeded him in 687 B.C. and ruled fifty-five years. Like his grandfather Ahaz, Manasseh returned to pagan ways, permitting idolatrous practices and abominations to flourish. Altars to astral deities appeared in the court of the temple, while the high places dedicated to Baal were rebuilt. The practice of human sacrifice returned to Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 21:1–17; 2 Chr. 33:1–21). The writer of Chronicles noted that Manasseh repented in later years and includes a description of some building activities in Jerusalem, but Manasseh had little practical political recourse other than to play the loyal vassal of Assyria.

Against the background of Assyrian dominance, Manasseh's course seemed logical. Assyrian kings reached the height of their power shortly after 700 B.C. Sennacherib dealt with perennial Babylonian rebellion by sacking the city in 689 B.C. The image of Marduk was taken to Assyria, and Sennacherib took the ancient title of "King of Sumer and Akkad." His death in 681 B.C. at the hands of one of his own sons produced a momentary shudder in the Assyrian juggernaut, but another son—Esarhaddon—quickly gained control.

Assyrian Supremacy under Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal II

ESARHADDON

Esarhaddon (681–669 B.C.) healed the breach with Babylon by rebuilding the city. He gave the Medes military assistance in order to check Elamite advances and as a buffer against the invading Cimmerians (the Gomer of the Bible) and the Scythians (biblical Ashkenaz). In the west, Esarhaddon quelled revolts in Tyre and Sidon and received tribute from various Syro-Palestinian kings, including Manasseh, who is mentioned in a tribute list. The Egyptian king Tirhakah (690–664 B.C.) stirred up problems to the south, eventually requiring an Assyrian response. In 671 B.C. Esarhaddon attacked Tirhakah, took Memphis, and received tribute from the native princes of the Egyptian Delta. Tirhakah escaped, only to return later to retake Memphis, provoking a second Assyrian campaign. Esarhaddon died, however, before he reached his objective.

ASHURBANIPAL II

In 669 B.C. Ashurbanipal II (669–627 B.C.) succeeded Esarhaddon as king of Assyria, and his brother Shamash-shum-ukin became king of Babylon. This division of power was according to the will of Esarhaddon, who sought to ensure an orderly succession.

VICTORY OVER EGYPT

Ashurbanipal completed the conquest of Egypt by marching against Tirhakah in 667 B.C. and defeating him; Memphis again was captured, but Tirhakah escaped. His successor Tanuatamun retook the Delta, but Ashurbanipal dealt him a crushing blow and pursued his army as far south as Thebes (biblical No-amon), sacking the city in 663 B.C. (Nah. 3:8–10 mentions the sack of Thebes). Assyrian power had now reached its zenith despite the fact that Ashurbanipal was not particularly adept either as a soldier or statesman.

THREATS TO THE ASSYRIAN EMPIRE

The Assyrian Empire was already on the verge of serious trouble during the reign of Ashurbanipal. Restless tribes threatened Assyrian interests in many directions. Cimmerians and Scythians bore down in areas north and west of the Assyrian heartland, while Medes and Persians entrenched themselves in various parts of the Iranian plateau. Ashurbanipal fought a lengthy, bloody war against Elam from 655 to 642 B.C., during which the Elamite capital, Susa, was destroyed.

Babylon became a serious problem for Assyria. Ashurbanipal's brother, Shamash-shum-ukin, revolted with Elamite and Chaldean support in 652 B.C. A long and cruel Assyrian siege of Babylon ended in 648 B.C. with the suicide of Shamash-shum-ukin as the Babylonian defense failed. Egypt proved troublesome for Assyria also. Though generally on cooperative terms with Assyria, kings of the Twenty-sixth Dynasty of Sais expelled Assyrian garrisons with the help of Lydian mercenaries. During these tumultuous years, Ashurbanipal proved to be ineffective as serious cracks appeared in the Assyrian Empire.

Assyria's Fall

The death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C. marked the beginning of the end for Assyria. Already weakened by decades of external conflict and increasing social unrest, Assyria suffered a four-year civil war between two sons of Ashurbanipal: Ashur-etil-ilani and Sin-shar-iskin. Neither provided adequate leadership, although the latter secured the throne in 623 B.C. and ruled until 612 B.C. The domestic turmoil invited disaster since powerful enemies of Assyria waited in the wings.

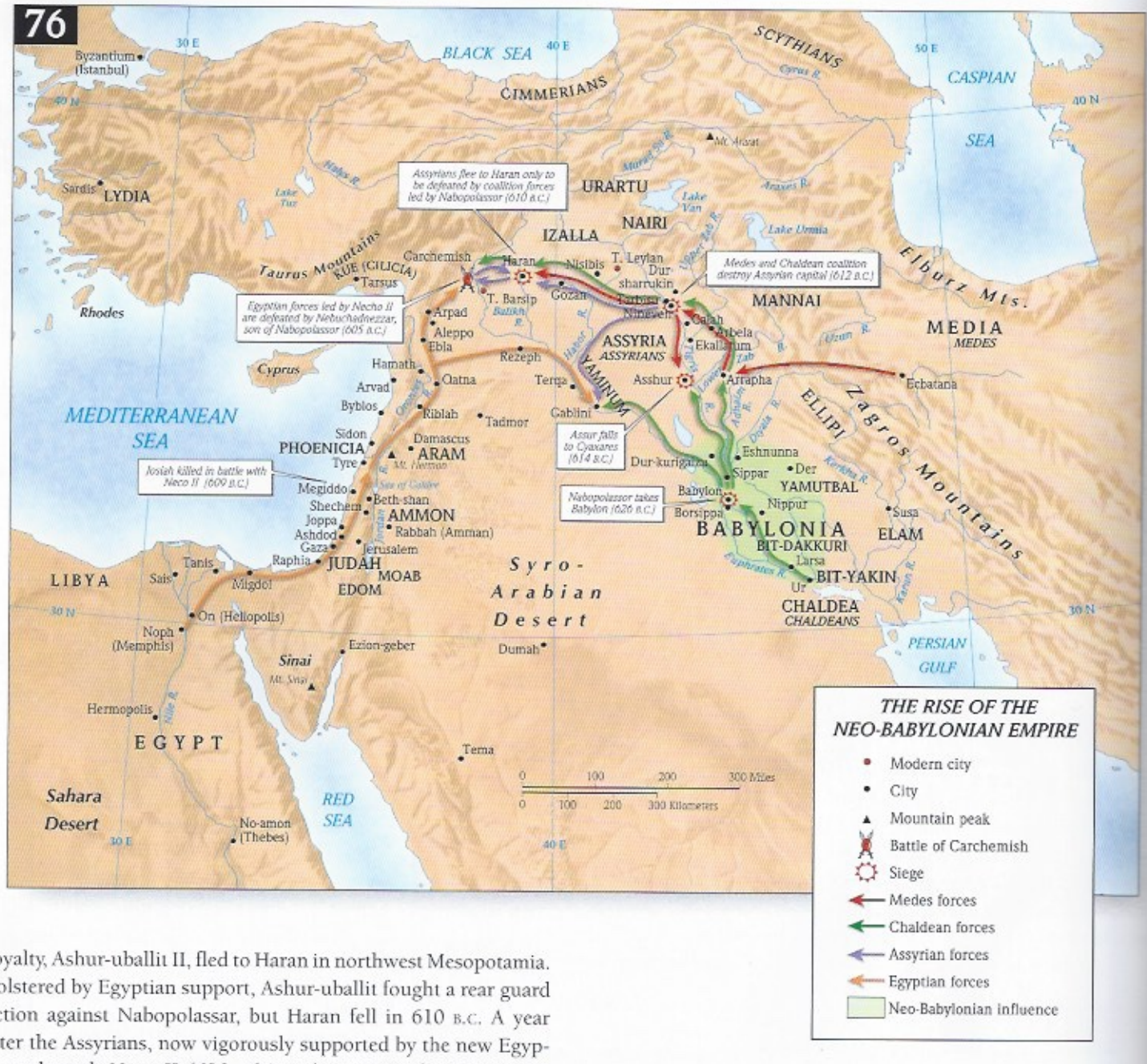
THE RIVAL POWERS AND ASSYRIA'S FINAL DAYS

In 626 B.C. Nabopolassar, the last in a long line of Chaldean troublemakers for Assyria, seized the throne of Babylon.

From northwestern Iran, the Medes began to attack Assyrian territories, first led by Phraortes (647–624 B.C.) and then more vigorously under Cyaxares (623–584 B.C.). Psammeticus I (664–610 B.C.) of Egypt came to the aid of Assyria, apparently more fearful of a strong Medo-Chaldean alliance controlling Mesopotamia and threatening the Levant than of the status quo with Assyria. Psammeticus also was undoubtedly reasserting traditional Egyptian claims on Syria and Palestine, seeking to control the vital trade routes of that region.

The end for Assyria came rapidly during the final two decades of the seventh century. Nabopolassar attacked Assyria from the south, while Cyaxares slashed at the Assyrian heartland from the east. In 614 B.C. Ashur, the ancient Assyrian capital and namesake of the great god of Assyria, fell to Median forces commanded by Cyaxares. Shortly thereafter, Cyaxares and Nabopolassar joined against Assyria in a formal alliance sealed by marriage. Nineveh fell in 612 B.C. to the coalition. Sin-shar-iskin perished, and the capital of Assyria was destroyed.

The prophet Nahum exulted in the destruction wreaked upon once-powerful Nineveh (Nah. 1:15–3:19). The remnants of the Assyrian army, led by a surviving member of the Assyrian



royalty, Ashur-uballit II, fled to Haran in northwest Mesopotamia. Bolstered by Egyptian support, Ashur-uballit fought a rear guard action against Nabopolassar, but Haran fell in 610 B.C. A year later the Assyrians, now vigorously supported by the new Egyptian pharaoh Neco II (610–594 B.C.), attempted to gain back Haran, but the attempt was unsuccessful. For all practical purposes, Assyria ceased to exist. The only question remaining was whether Neco II could retain any control of Syria-Palestine in the face of the Chaldean (Babylonian) advance.

Egyptian Ambitions

Egypt retained control of the International Coastal Highway and had substantial garrisons at Riblah in central Syria and Carchemish on the west bank of the Euphrates River. In addition, the Egyptians controlled the cities of the Philistine Plain (Jer. 47:1) and other key sites on the International Coastal Highway, likely including Megiddo, near where Josiah died fighting Neco in 609 B.C. (2 Kgs. 23:28–30; see Josiah's death, p. 154).

The final showdown between Egypt and Babylonia occurred in 605 B.C. at Carchemish. Nebuchadnezzar, son of Nabopolassar, led the Chaldean troops that day in a great struggle, graphically recalled by an oracle in Jeremiah (Jer. 46). Of Egypt, the prophet says:

> The swift cannot flee away,
> nor the warrior escape;
> in the north by the river Euphrates
> they have stumbled and fallen. . .

That day is the day of the
Lord GOD of hosts,
a day of vengeance,
to avenge himself on his
foes.
The sword shall devour and
be sated,
and drink its fill of their
blood.
For the Lord GOD of hosts
holds a sacrifice
in the north country by the
river Euphrates.
(Jer. 46:6, 10)

Though fiercely contested, the battle of Carchemish was won by Nebuchadnezzar. In that same year, 605 B.C., Nebuchadnezzar took the throne of Babylon upon the death of his father—an event that, as much as any other, marked the beginning of a new empire: the Neo-Babylonian Empire. In the process, the fate of Palestine had been sealed.

The Kingdom of Josiah

The rapid decline of Assyrian power created an opening for an opportunist like Josiah to steer Judah along a new course of reform and independence. Admittedly, the resurgence of Egyptian might in the Levant under the Twenty-sixth Dynasty somewhat restricted Josiah's ambitions; but it appears that the Egyptians primarily were concerned with supply lines and garrisons along the main trunk route (the International Coastal Highway) critical to Egyptian support of Assyrian forces in northern Syria. This left Josiah considerable ma-

neuvering room, especially in the last two decades of his thirty-one-year reign.

Josiah came to the throne as an eight-year-old boy. Unlike his father and grandfather, Josiah demonstrated a godly character, and his reign was most remembered for a thorough purge of pagan practices that had proliferated under Manasseh and Amon. The precise chronology of the Josianic reform is unclear. According to Chronicles, it may have begun as early as his eighth regnal year (ca. 633/32 B.C.), but it is more likely that upon reaching manhood in his twelfth year (628/27 B.C.) Josiah began the activity of reforming the cult. If so, this would roughly correspond to the death of Ashurbanipal in 627 B.C., a momentous event in the Assyrian decline.

BOOK OF THE LAW FOUND

In 622 B.C. the recovery of "the book of the law" in the temple, generally regarded as some form of Deuteronomy, gave a great boost to Josiah's efforts (2 Kgs. 22:8–20). The Bible describes a variety of pagan elements within both Jerusalem and Judah that Josiah dismantled or destroyed: high places of Baal, symbols of Asherah, horses and chariots dedicated to the sun, vessels used in the worship of the "host of heaven" (astral deities), and the places of human sacrifice in the Valley of Ben-hinnom (2 Kgs. 23:4–20; 2 Chr. 34:1–7). He also removed idolatrous priests and attempted to centralize worship practices in Jerusalem. These actions undoubtedly isolated key elements of Judean society, especially those who favored a policy of pacification with Assyria and, of course, any displaced or banished priests. Yet Josiah's efforts had sufficient backing to last throughout his reign. Moreover, these reforms clearly signaled a new nationalistic policy designed to reestablish Judean autonomy as much as possible in the rapidly changing international scene.

JOSIAH'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

To what degree Josiah reached his nationalistic goal is not clear. Certainly, the Egyptian king Psammeticus I was not unaware of Josiah's ambitions. However, historically the Egyptians preferred to maintain control of the coastal routes of Palestine and the major cities inland along the International Coastal Highway. What Josiah did in the mountainous hinterlands was of less concern. Certain biblical texts suggest that Josiah did quite a lot. He received moneys from towns in Manasseh and Ephraim and carried out purges in those territories and as far north as Naphtali (2 Chr. 34:6, 9). This strongly suggests that Josiah was claiming the northern territories of old Israel.

The writer of Kings records that Josiah dismantled the high place at Bethel built by Jeroboam I and carried out additional cleansings in Samaria (2 Kgs. 23:15–20). In Judah the reform effort extended from "Geba to Beer-sheba" (2 Kgs. 23:8). Taken together it is tempting to propose that Josiah had in mind nothing short of a restoration of the old Davidic kingdom. Whether Josiah pursued this goal as at least a nominal vassal of Egypt or whether he acted completely independently cannot be determined.

JOSIAH'S DEATH

What is clear is that in 609 B.C. Josiah met his death in battle with the Egyptian king Neco II (610–594 B.C.). Neco was leading an Egyptian force northward to support a final Assyrian effort to recapture Haran. Josiah intercepted Neco near Megiddo, was mortally wounded, and eventually was buried in Jerusalem (2 Kgs. 23:28–30; 2 Chr. 35:20–27). Josiah's motives for attacking Neco are unclear; perhaps he sensed the ultimate victory of Babylon over Egypt, or maybe he feared further Egyptian interference in his kingdom. The result was not only the loss of a great king, but also the end of the religious reforms and the reduction of any territories outside of Judah (except Bethel) over which Josiah had gained control.

The Neo-Babylonian Empire and the Last Kings of Judah

The consolidation of the Chaldean Dynasty at Babylon was complete by 609 B.C. The victories of Nabopolassar over

CHART 13. KINGS OF THE NEO-BABYLONIAN EMPIRE 626–539 B.C.

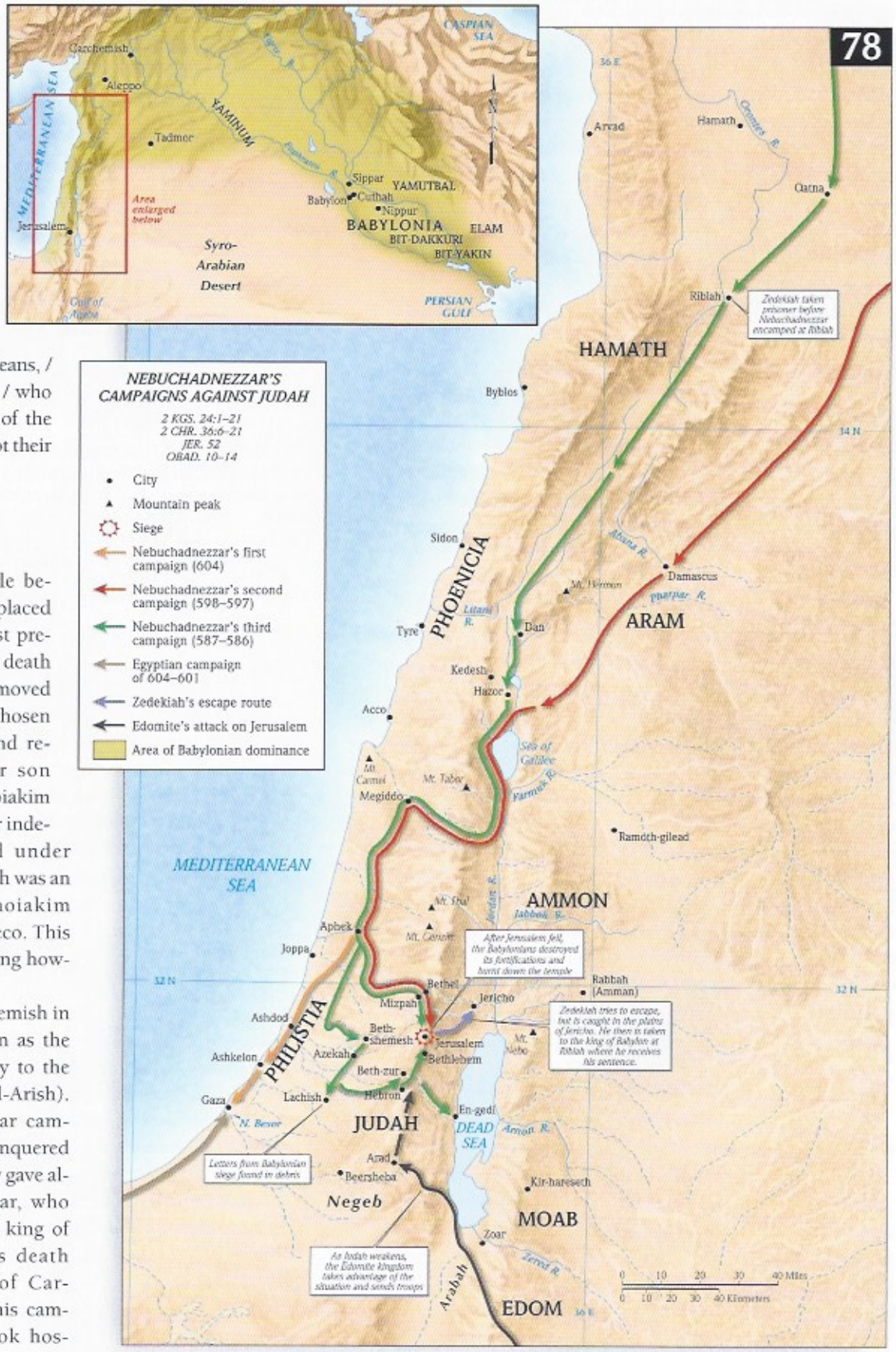
Name	Dates (B.C.)	Significant Events
Nabopolassar	626–605	Chaldean chieftain who seized Babylon in 626; established an alliance with Cyaxares the Mede; conquered Nineveh in 612.
Nebuchadnezzar	605–562	Defeated Egypt at Battle of Carchemish in 605; twice besieged Jerusalem (698/97; 587/86).
Evil Merodach (Amel-marduk)	562–560	Son of Nebuchadnezzar; freed Jehoiachin, king of Judah (2 Kgs. 25:27–30).
Neriglissar	560–556	Son-in-law of Nebuchadnezzar; likely the Nergal-sharezer who was present at the final siege of Jerusalem (Jer. 39:3).
Labashi-marduk	556 (3-month reign)	Son of Neriglissar; removed by Nabonidus.
Nabonidus	556–539	Spent considerable time outside of Babylon; Belshazzar served as regent in his absence; Babylon surrendered to Cyrus the Great in 539.

Assyrian and Egyptian armies made Babylon the master of Mesopotamia and placed Babylonian armies in position to thrust southward into Syria and Palestine. Only Egypt, now ruled by Neco II, could put up an effective resistance to the Babylonian advance. The prophet Habbakuk foresaw these events, declaring that God was "rousing the Chaldeans, / that bitter and hasty nation, / who march through the breadth of the earth, / to seize habitations not their own" (Hab. 1:6).

JUDAH'S DILEMMA

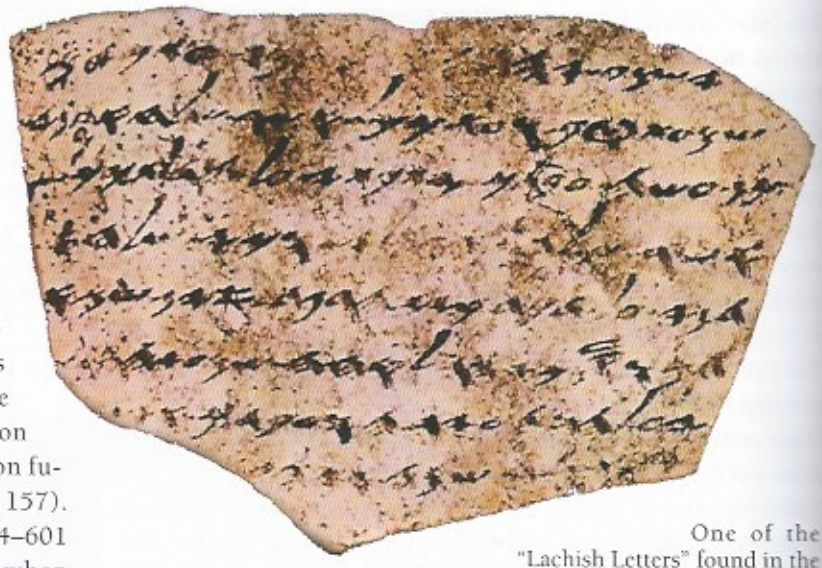
The power struggle between Babylonia and Egypt placed the kings of Judah in a most precarious situation. After the death of Josiah in 609 B.C., Neco removed Jehoahaz, a son of Josiah chosen by the people of Judah, and replaced him with another son whose throne name was Jehoiakim (2 Kgs. 23:30–35). Whatever independence Judah enjoyed under Josiah clearly was gone; Judah was an Egyptian vassal, and Jehoiakim reigned at the pleasure of Neco. This state of affairs did not last long however.

The Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. established Babylon as the dominant power all the way to the border of Egypt (the Wadi el-Arish). In 604 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar campaigned in Palestine and conquered Ashkelon. Jehoiakim quickly gave allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar, who had recently been crowned king of Babylon after his father's death shortly after the Battle of Carchemish. Perhaps during this campaign Nebuchadnezzar took hostages, including Daniel and his three



companions Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah, and carried them captive to Babylon (Dan. 1:1–7).

Judah now was caught between two unequal superpowers, Egypt and Babylon. Babylon controlled the Levant; Egypt, however, resented the loss of prestige and the loss of Phoenician ports, important links in maritime trade. Consequently, Egypt constantly promoted rebellion against Babylon among the states of the southern Levant by promising support. Moreover, Jehoiakim, who owed his throne to Neco, was pro-Egyptian in his politics. He had considerable backing for his position within the leadership of Judah, despite Jeremiah's repeated warnings that God was using Babylon to punish Judah's sins, thus making resistance to Babylon futile (see "The Prophets of the Seventh Century," p. 157). Jehoiakim paid tribute to Babylon for three years (604–601 B.C.), but then withheld his pledge late in 601 B.C. when Nebuchadnezzar suffered a temporary setback as Neco thwarted his attempt to invade Egypt. Judah, with Egyptian support, now was in open rebellion against Babylon.



One of the "Lachish Letters" found in the ruins of the city of Lachish destroyed by Nebuchadnezzar. The letter contains a report of a junior military officer to his superior indicating his compliance with orders received by means of a fire signal. The text reads: "Know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish according to all the indications that my lord has given, for we cannot see the signal of Azekah."

THE FIRST CAMPAIGN AGAINST JERUSALEM

Nebuchadnezzar delayed his response to Judah's rebellion for a short time, preferring to harass Jehoiakim with auxiliary troops (2 Kgs. 24:2). Bands of Ammonites, Moabites, and Arameans attacked Judah. Edomites took advantage of the deteriorating situation by attacking Judah from the south, pillaging as opportunity permitted (2 Kgs. 24:1–2; Ps. 137:7; Lam. 4:21–22; Obad. 10–14). In 598 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar led the Babylonian army against Jehoiakim. Jerusalem was besieged and finally surrendered on March 16, 597 B.C. Jehoiakim apparently died during the siege (see 2 Kgs. 24:6, but compare 2 Chr. 36:6) and was replaced by Jehoiachin, who surrendered the city. The Babylonians plundered Jerusalem, including the temple treasures, and deported Jehoiachin and his family to Babylon along with other Jewish leaders (2 Kgs. 24:13–16). This first deportation in 597 included the prophet Ezekiel.

THE END OF JUDAH AND JERUSALEM

After the surrender of Jerusalem in 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Mattaniah, the young uncle of Jehoiachin, as king of Judah and changed his name to Zedekiah. Zedekiah's reign of eleven years was marked by anti-Babylonian conspiracy despite strong condemnation of this policy by Jeremiah (Jer. 27–29). Zedekiah ignored these warnings, perhaps inspired by recent Egyptian advances against Babylon by Psammeticus II (595–589 B.C.) and Hophra (Apries, 589–570 B.C.). The latter campaigned in 588 B.C. against Tyre and Sidon.

In the same year Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah in response to Zedekiah's rebellion. The cities of Judah suffered grievously, a fact attested by destruction levels at various sites. The evidence from Lachish is particularly gripping. Lachish again fell to foreign troops, as it had in 701 B.C. Eighteen ostraca—the "Lachish Letters"—found in the destruction of level II contain grim testimony to the hopeless circumstance. One letter mentions how officials watched for fire signals from Lachish because they no longer could see the beacons from nearby Azekah. Likely, Azekah already had fallen to Babylonian forces.

Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged Jerusalem for two years (588–586 B.C.). Cut off from any possible hope and with food supplies depleted, Jerusalem fell in July of 586 B.C. The Babylonians destroyed the city, breaking down the fortifications and burning the temple, palaces, and houses (2 Kgs. 25:8–21; Jer. 39:1–10). Burnt debris excavated in several places in Jerusalem gives evidence of the ferocity of the attack and aftermath. Zedekiah fled Jerusalem to the east but was captured near Jericho. Taken before Nebuchadnezzar, who was at Riblah in central Syria, Zedekiah was forced to witness the execution of his sons before being blinded and led away to Babylon in chains. An additional deportation of Jews further depleted the leadership of the kingdom (Jer. 52:29; 2 Kgs. 25:11). Judah and Jerusalem lay defenseless, open to attack, with few material resources and little hope for the immediate future. The days of exile predicted by Jeremiah had become reality.

THE PROPHETS OF THE SEVENTH CENTURY

The crisis prompted by the demise of the Neo-Assyrian Empire and the rapid rise of a Neo-Babylonian Dynasty produced another series of prophetic spokesmen. These prophets addressed Judah during the dying days of the kingdom. Some of them preached only briefly, while the ministry of others extended beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C.

NAHUM

Little is known of the prophet Nahum. Even the location of his home village, Elkosh, is uncertain. Most probably it was in Judah, but late traditions place the village in Galilee. Nahum delivered his oracles against the destruction of the Neo-Assyrian Empire. He was aware of the high tide of Assyrian supremacy in the mid-seventh century B.C. He mentioned the destruction of Thebes (No-amon) by Ashurbanipal II in 663 B.C. (Nah. 3:8), but he exulted in the impending destruction of Nineveh, finally accomplished in 612 B.C. He did not address Judah at all, but confined his oracles to the overthrow of the Assyrian Empire, whose sinful days had been completed.

ZEPHANIAH

Zephaniah reveals very little of himself in his prophecy; not even his birthplace is given. If the Hezekiah mentioned in 1:1 is a reference to the former king of Judah—an interpretation by no means certain—then Zephaniah was related to Judean royalty and presumably lived in Jerusalem. He delivered oracles of judgment against Jerusalem in the time of Josiah.

Zephaniah declared the imminent punishment of Judah and Jerusalem because of the magnitude of their sin (1:4, 12–13; 3:1–4). Echoing themes voiced by Amos and Isaiah a century earlier, Zephaniah described the "day of the Lord" as a time of divine affliction upon Judah (1:14–18), but promised new blessings for the remnant that remained after judgment (2:7, 9; 3:12–13). Zephaniah did not clearly specify the enemy of destruction. Some scholars think he meant the Scythians, who were pushing southward from the steppes of southern Russia, while others believe Zephaniah was thinking of the Assyrians or even the Chaldeans.

HABAKKUK

Habakkuk was troubled by the intriguing question of how God could use a less righteous nation to punish a more righteous people (1:12–13). His dilemma arose with his awareness that God was raising up the Chaldeans, "that bitter and hasty nation" (1:6), as a means of punishing Judah. At a deeper level, Habakkuk was troubled by the seeming inactivity of God in permitting evil to go unpunished in a time when right and wrong seemed turned upside down. Habakkuk took a position as a watchman upon a watchtower and awaited God's answer to his questions (2:1). Ultimately God answered by declaring that the righteous live by faith, that unrighteousness has within it the seed of inevitable destruction (2:2–5).

God would ensure that justice ultimately triumphed, and even though Habakkuk perhaps could not see the outcome, faith always produced life. Habakkuk faced his dilemma and delivered his messages as the Chaldean onslaught gained supremacy between 616 and 600 B.C. Perhaps the great victory of Nebuchadnezzar over Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C. intensified his questions.

JEREMIAH

Jeremiah addressed his countrymen in Jerusalem throughout the final decades of Judah's existence. We know more about Jeremiah than any other Old Testament prophet since he reveals much of his personal spiritual odyssey within his oracles. Born in Anathoth, a Benjamite village two miles northeast of Jerusalem, Jeremiah was of priestly stock. He ministered in Judah from the thirteenth year of Josiah's reign (627/26 B.C.) to beyond the fall of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. He thus witnessed the great reform of Josiah, the fall of Assyria, the rise of the Neo-Babylonian Empire, the first siege of Jerusalem (598/97 B.C.) and the destruction of his nation in 586 B.C. He finally was spirited off to Egypt against his will, where he presumably died (Jer. 43:1–7).

Jeremiah's relationship to Josiah and his reform remains unclear. Relatively few of his oracles can be dated with certainty to the time of Josiah (Chapters 1–6 are best placed in the time of Josiah). Much of his preaching was directed against the disastrous policies of Jehoiakim and Zedekiah, both of whom rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah believed that Babylon was the instrument of divine judgment upon Judah for her chronic sins. Resistance against Babylon was hopeless. Jeremiah counseled surrender to the Babylonian "yoke" (Jer. 27). He was branded a traitor for his words and suffered loss of face and imprisonment.

Jeremiah preached some of his harshest words against Judah's folly in the temple precincts, where he forecast the destruction of Judah and Jerusalem, and Babylonian exile (Jer. 7; 26). In the dark days of the final siege of Jerusalem, Jeremiah spoke some of his greatest words of hope and encouragement (Jer. 30–33). He envisioned a restoration of Israel (Jer. 30:18–22) and a new covenant written on the hearts of a redeemed community (Jer. 31:31–34). To symbolize his hope, Jeremiah exercised his right to redeem ancestral land in Anathoth at a time when the armies of Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem (Jer. 32). Jeremiah also believed that the exile, though longer than the false prophets expected, would nonetheless be temporary.

Jeremiah's hope was placed in a God who loves with an "everlasting love," the source of God's great faithfulness (Jer. 31:3).

Chapter Twelve

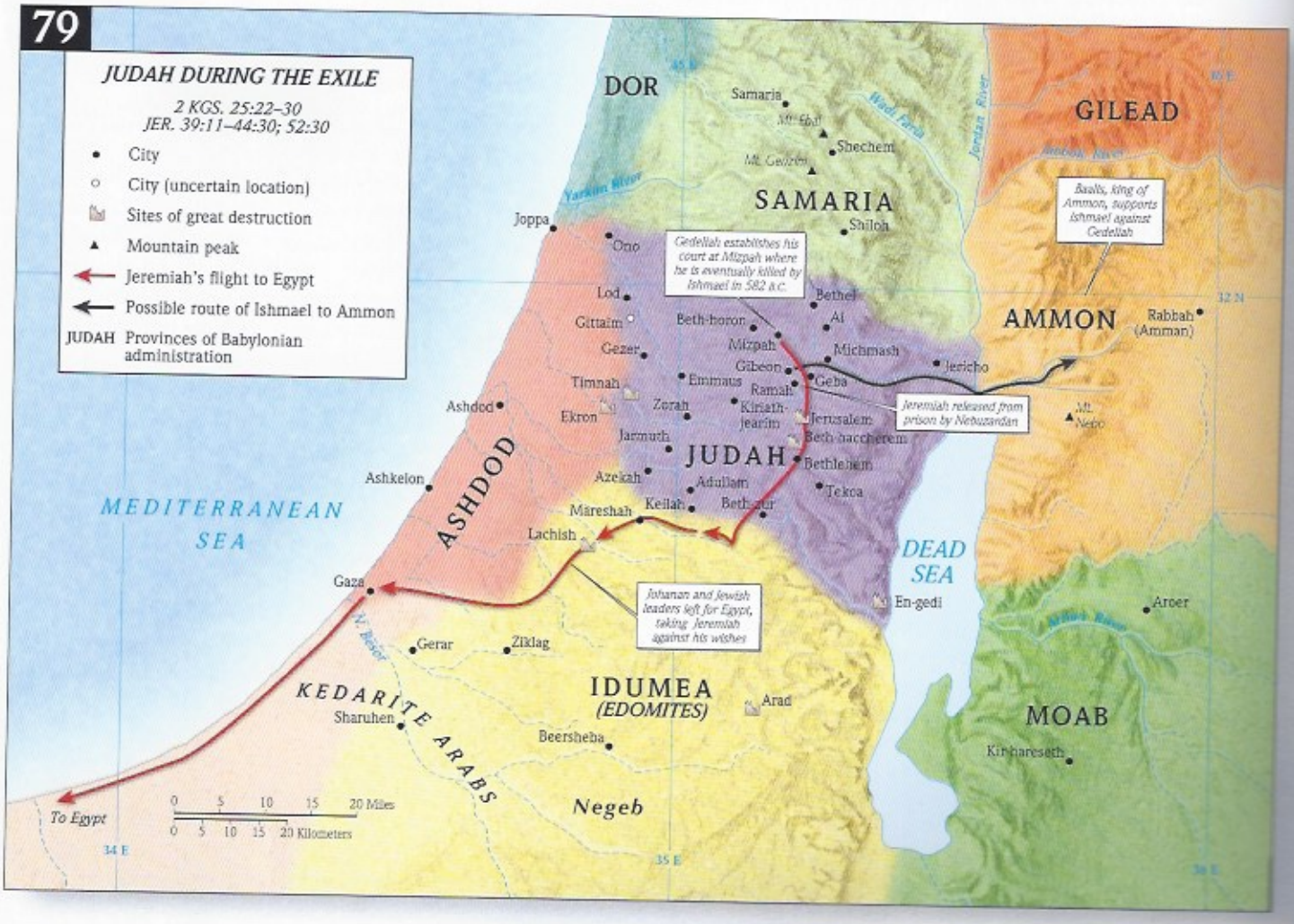
THE EXILE

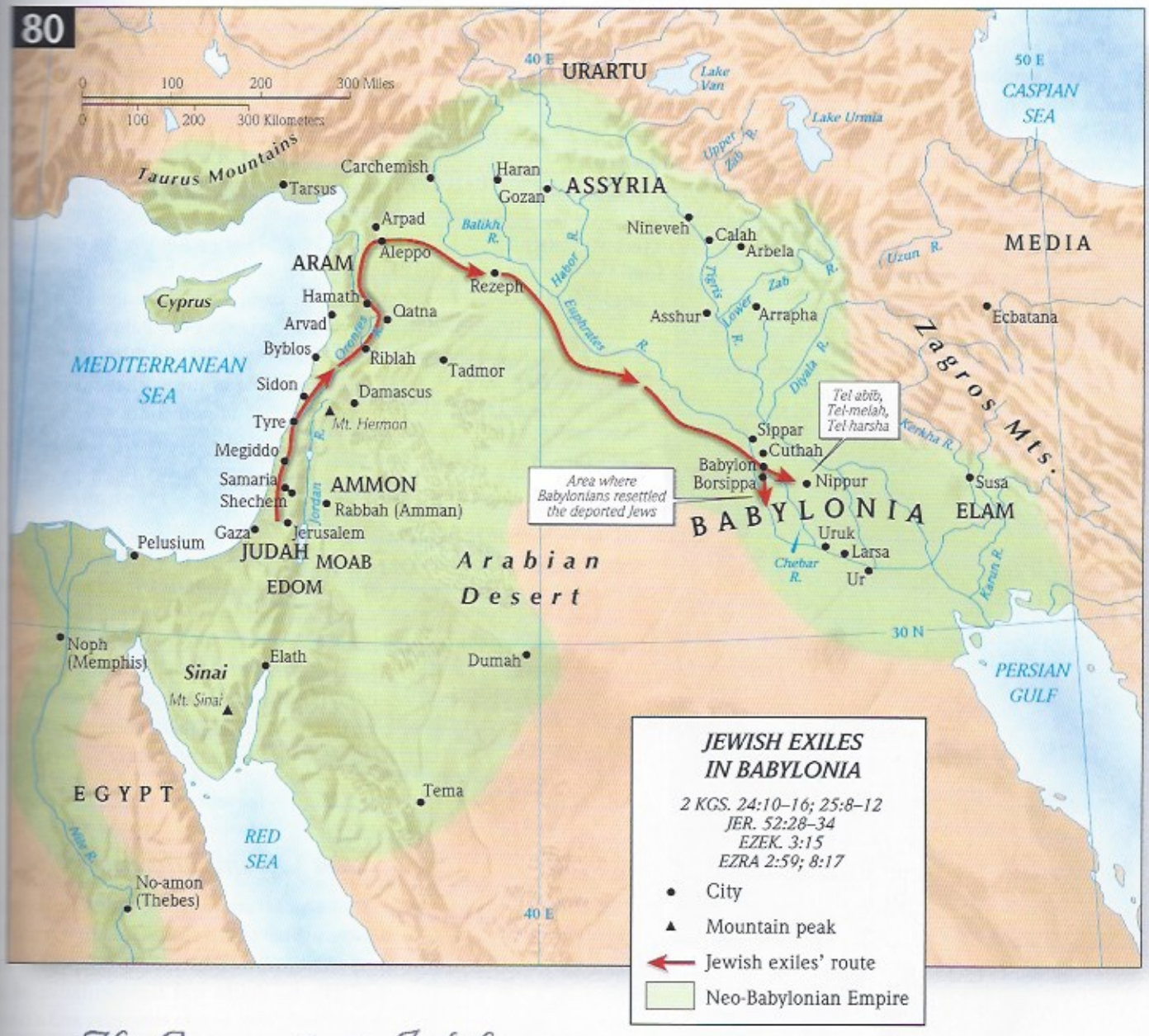
Introduction

The destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. marks a great watershed in Jewish history. The loss of independence, deportations of significant segments of the population, and the apparent end of the Davidic Dynasty provoked an unprecedented crisis. What now was the relationship between God and His people? What did the destruction of Jerusalem with its temple mean for the physical and spiritual destiny of the Jews? These and other profound questions necessitated a radical rethinking of God's purposes with and for the Jewish community.

We know very little about this pivotal period. Jeremiah provides some insight about the years from 586 to 582 B.C. (Jer. 39–44), while Ezekiel supplies additional information about those taken into captivity (see also Jer. 29). Many scholars believe Isaiah 40–55 reflects this same era, thus providing additional insight into the plight of those Jews taken to Babylon. Further glimpses of exilic life come from Babylonian sources. Mention is made of King Jehoiachin in exile. Aramaic legal documents from a business firm operated by the Murushu family near Nippur mentions several Jewish names, perhaps descendants of Jewish exiles. Although dating from a later period (440–416 B.C.), these materials shed valuable light on living conditions in the exilic community.

Two different Jewish communities must be considered: those who remained in the land of Judah and those who were sent or escaped from Judah—the Diaspora Jews.





The Community in Judah

Conditions in Judah must have been severe, for many Judean cities suffered during the Babylonian invasions. Arad, Lachish, Ramat Rahel, En-gedi, Timnah, Ekron, and Jerusalem are among the excavated sites showing evidence of destruction at this time. Only the region north of Jerusalem appears to have escaped relatively unscathed.

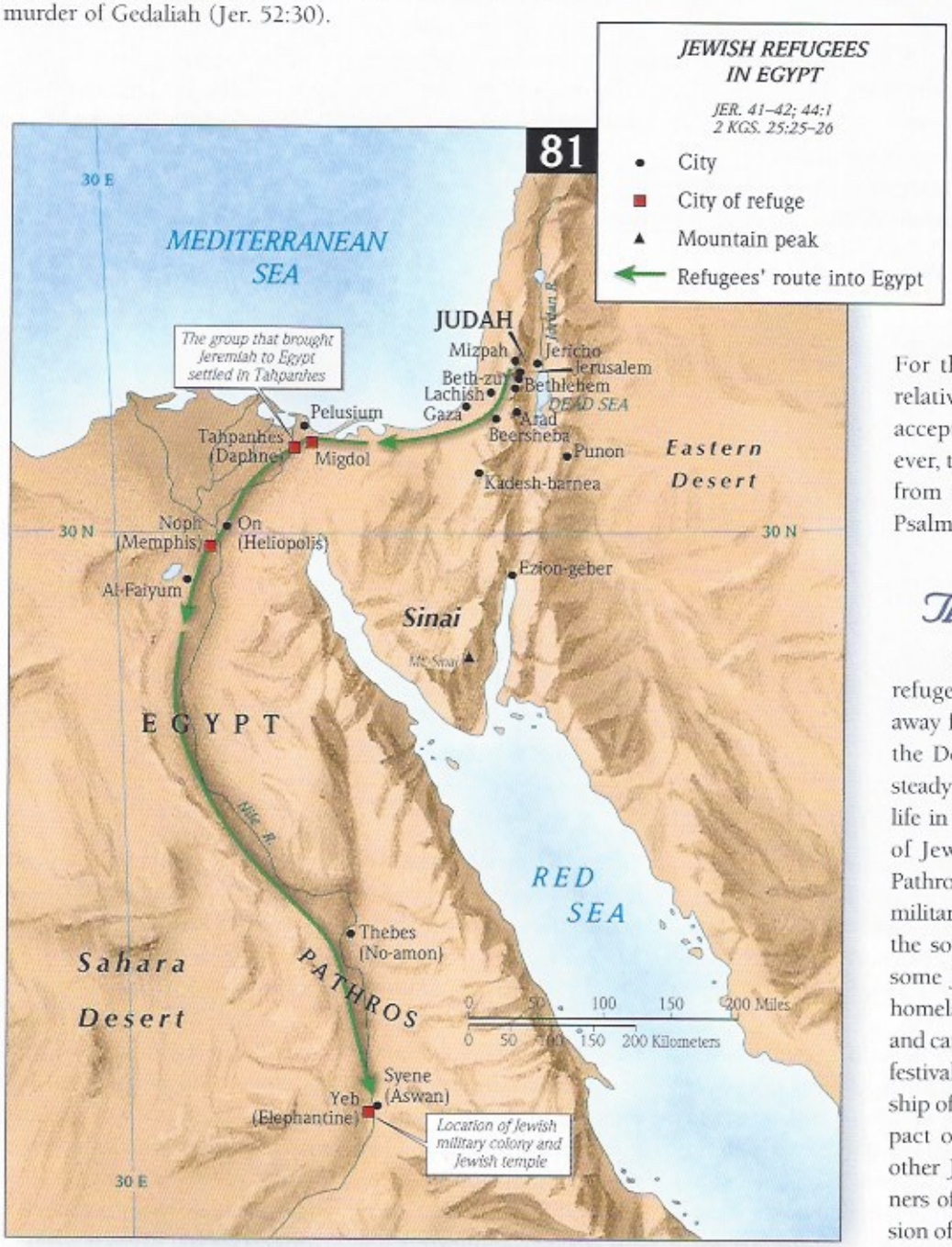
The political status of Judah in this period remains somewhat unclear. Nebuchadnezzar appointed Gedeliah as ruler over Judah, but his title is uncertain. He may have been appointed as a king (see Jer. 41:1, 10); if so, then Judah remained separate from the Babylonian provincial system until at least 582 B.C. Perhaps Gedeliah was appointed as a governor, in which case the kingdom of Judah was converted to a Babylonian province immediately after 586 B.C.

Gedeliah, though not of royal lineage, nonetheless came from an important Jerusalemite family. His father, Ahiakim, and grandfather, Shaphan, both had served in Josiah's court (2 Kgs. 22:12–14).

Gedeliah established his court at Mizpah, a town in Benjamin with ancient tribal traditions. From Mizpah he administered the affairs of a thoroughly devastated region, devoid of adequate leadership and material resources. Babylonian officials attempted to ease the burden. Nebuzaradan, captain of the royal guard, redistributed the land among the poor who remained in the land and supplied a contingent of troops to assist Gedeliah (Jer. 39:10; 40:10–12). Some religious rituals were continued at the altar of the ruined temple at Jerusalem (Jer. 41:4–5). Overall, the situation must have been grim; the plaintive laments recorded

in the Book of Lamentations present testimonies of the pain those who remained in Judah endured.

Ishmael, a military officer of royal Judean blood, backed by the Ammonite king Baalis, led a coup attempt, assassinating Gedaliah in 582 B.C. (Jer. 41:1–10). The coup failed when other military elements, led by Johanan ben Kereah, interceded. Ishmael and a handful of his supporters fled to Ammon. Fearing Babylonian reprisals, Johanan and Jewish leaders sought refuge in Egypt, taking Jeremiah with them against his wishes (Jer. 41:16–43:8). Subsequently, the Babylonians deported an additional group of Jews, perhaps as punishment for the murder of Gedaliah (Jer. 52:30).



The Community in Babylon

The lot of those taken into exile was, on the whole, better than their kinsmen who remained in Judah. Jeremiah urged the exiles to build houses, plant gardens, and establish normal social relationships in their new land of residence (Jer. 29:4–7).

The Babylonians resettled their deported captives in villages and towns near Babylon and Nippur along the river Chebar (Ezek. 1:1; 3:15; Ezra 2:59). Several sites settled by the deportees bear the name "Tel" (Tel-abib, Tel-melah, Tel-harsha), a term designating an abandoned ruin. This suggests that the Babylonians may have selected abandoned villages for some of the settlements.

In administrative documents excavated at Babylon, King Jehoiachin, taken captive in 597 B.C., and his sons are mentioned. The Babylonian king, Evil-merodach (562–560 B.C.), released Jehoiachin from prison and gave him a place at the royal court (2 Kgs. 25:27–30). For the most part, the physical safety and relative security of the exiles must have been acceptable; life was not unduly harsh. However, the spiritual anguish of being separated from their homeland is clearly reflected in Psalm 137.

The Community in Egypt

Egypt became a haven for other Jewish refugees. The group that spirited Jeremiah away from Judah and settled at Tahpanhes in the Delta no doubt was representative of a steady trickle who sought sanctuary and a new life in Egypt (Jer. 43:1–7). Additional groups of Jews settled in Migdol, Memphis, and Pathros (Jer. 44:1). Later evidence of a Jewish military colony at Elephantine (Yeb), deep in the south of Egypt, demonstrates how fully some Jewish refugees adapted to their new homeland. They built a temple at Elephantine and carried on a complete system of rituals and festivals, although evidence of syncretistic worship of Yahweh and other gods betrays the impact of their new environment. These and other Jewish communities were the forerunners of the Diaspora—the widespread dispersion of Jews so important in the later spread of Christianity.

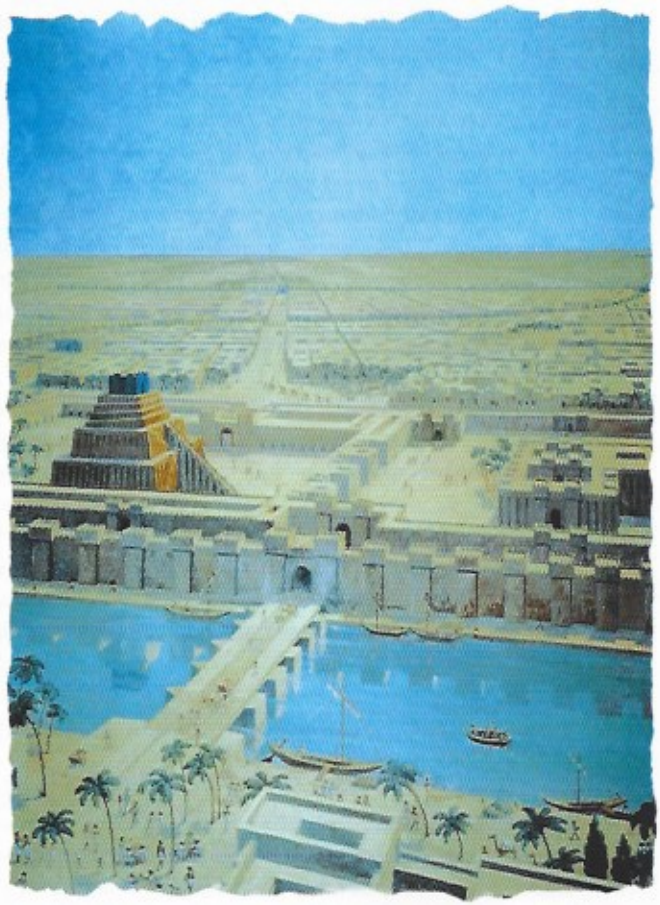
BABYLON: HEART OF AN EMPIRE

Mighty Babylon reached its zenith shortly after 600 B.C. under the generous patronage of the Neo-Babylonian kings. Having suffered devastation in 689 B.C. at the hands of Sennacherib, Babylon began to rise again. The Chaldean kings Nabopolassar and Nebuchadnezzar endowed the city with monuments worthy of the capital of a glorious empire. About 450 B.C. the Greek historian Herodotus wrote that Babylon "was adorned in a manner surpassing any city we are acquainted with" (*Histories*, Book I).

Babylon's strategic location on the Euphrates River gave the city control of important converging caravan routes as well as the river traffic. The river ran through Babylon, bisecting the city into two unequal parts. The heart of the ancient city lay on the eastern bank where the most important civic buildings were located. Nebuchadnezzar annexed the west bank, which was mostly residential. A massive bridge mounted on great boat-shaped piers spanned the Euphrates to connect the two sectors. A grid of streets and canals gave access to all parts of the city.

Herodotus was especially impressed with the fortifications of Babylon. Excavations have generally confirmed the description of Herodotus. A double wall composed of mud brick encircled the eastern and western sectors to form a rough rectangle enclosing approximately four square miles. The inner wall was 6.5 meters thick and stood higher than the outer wall, which was 3.7 meters thick. A space between the two walls perhaps could have been used to move troops and chariots as implied in Herodotus' description. Numerous towers protruded from the wall at regular intervals of sixty-five feet. Twenty meters beyond the outer wall stood a moat drawing water from the Euphrates.

Nebuchadnezzar erected another fortification on the eastern bank to give additional protection to his capital. The wall began in the north near the "Summer Palace" and extended east and south of the inner city, where it met the Euphrates. Nine gates pierced the double wall, giving access to the inner city. The gates were named after various gods and goddesses sacred to Babylon (Ishtar, Marduk, Sin, Enlil, Urash, Shamash, Adad, Zababa, and Lugalgirra). The ancient city center lay on the east bank in an area covering slightly less than a square mile. Here the venerable temples of ancient Babylon and the great palaces of her kings all were located.



An artist's reconstruction of Babylon as it would have appeared in the sixth century B.C. (Courtesy of the University of Chicago.)

Relief figure of a dragon from the facade of the Ishtar Gate at Babylon.

The famous Ishtar Gate, now reconstructed in the Berlin Museum, allowed entrance to the city from the north along the royal "Processional Street." Over sixty feet in width in some places, this street was used during the all-important New Year's festival and passed by the major civic building of the inner city. The Ishtar Gate consisted of two pairs of flanking towers covered with deep-blue glazed bricks. Brightly colored brick reliefs depicting dragons and bulls decorated the facade of the gate. In addition, the facades of the buildings fronting the "Processional Street" were similarly decorated with great lions.

The main palace of the Neo-Babylonian kings stood just inside the Ishtar Gate on the west. This sprawling complex (approximately thirteen acres) begun by Nebuchadnezzar included state rooms, royal quarters, garrisons for the royal bodyguard, storage rooms, and administrative workplaces. The palace consisted of five sections, with each section grouped around a courtyard. The third courtyard was the largest (218 x 180 feet) and stood in the center of the complex. South of this

court, the excavators discovered an adjoining throne room (170 x 56 feet) entered through three portals. Fragmentary walls and columns along with a multitude of broken tiles give glimpses of royal splendor. Glazed bricks of blues, browns, yellows, and black adorned the great hall.

The architects used many motifs—serpents, scorpions, rosettes, and lions—for decoration. This room, or possibly one of the other state rooms, perhaps was the scene where Belshazzar witnessed the mysterious writing on the wall that announced the fate of the Babylonian Empire (Dan. 5).

The Babylonians built many temples to their gods and goddesses; over forty are known from Babylonian texts, but only a few have been excavated. A temple to Ninmahk, the goddess of the underworld, stood inside the Ishtar Gate across from the palace. The temple of Ishtar of Agade and a shrine to Ninurta also have been recovered. The most important temple in Babylon was the temple of Marduk, known as Esagila ("House of the Uplifted Head"). Excavations have reached only portions of the temple, whose ruins lie buried deep within one of the mounds of the ancient city. A double wall surrounded the temple, marking off the sacred territory of the god. Ancilliary buildings for the priests and functionaries as well as smaller shrines to other deities were found within the enclosure. Nebuchadnezzar boasted that he covered the walls of Marduk's shrine with gold, inset with precious stones. Herodotus states that two golden statues of Marduk—one seated and another standing—were kept in this temple, though he did not see them.

Undoubtedly the most imposing structure in Babylon was the ziggurat known as Etemenanki—"Building of the foundation of Heaven and Earth." Ziggurats or "temple-towers" were a feature of Mesopotamian cities as far back as the third millennium. The ziggurat stood within its own large sacred enclosure north of Esagila. Virtually nothing survives of the structure made of sun-dried and baked bricks, and scholars must depend primarily on ancient descriptions to reconstruct this famous landmark. The ziggurat consisted of a square base (three hundred feet to each side) supporting a series of six levels, each level an increasingly smaller square. Each level may have been a different color.

A temple to Marduk crowned the top of the ziggurat, with at least one flight of stairs giving access to the sanctuary. The total height was slightly less than three hundred feet. Ancilliary buildings around the ziggurat provided living quarters, storage rooms, and administrative space necessary for the cult. Nothing survives of the famous "Hanging Gardens" of Babylon, one of the wonders of the ancient world.

The impressive remains excavated thus far reveal evidence of the power and opulence of Nabopolassar and his successors. The capture of Babylon by Cyrus in 539 B.C., however, began a long period of decline. Xerxes destroyed the ziggurat and removed the great statue of Marduk in response to rebellion in 482 B.C. Alexander the Great tried to restore the Esagila, but his death cut short other projects. Under the Ptolemies, Babylon's economic fortunes declined, though the city remained important as a religious center. New Testament writers use the name Babylon as a symbol for forces opposed to God's kingdom (Rev. 14:8). By the early Christian era the site of Babylon lay deserted.

PROPHETS OF THE EXILE AND RETURN TO THE LAND OF JUDAH

The spiritual crisis created by the Exile and the subsequent return to the land challenged the very core of Israel's faith. Crucial questions begged answers. Why had God sent the Jews into exile? Was God finished with the Jewish people? Was the covenant between God and Israel nullified? Would the Jews return to their homeland and, if so, what could they expect? To provide answers to these questions, encouragement to the exiles, and guidance to those exiles who returned to Judah was the mission of the exilic and post-exilic prophets who preached in the sixth and fifth centuries.

EZEKIEL

Ezekiel ("God Strengthens") was the son of Buzi, a Zadokite priest. A resident of Jerusalem, Ezekiel was married, although his wife died shortly before the final destruction of Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar in 586 B.C. Ezekiel was among the Jews deported from Jerusalem in 597 B.C. (2 Kgs. 24:8–17). He lived among the captives in Tel-abib (Ezek. 3:15), one of the sites assigned to the Jewish deportees near the river Chebar in Babylonia (Ezek. 1:1). Ezekiel received his prophetic commission to preach to the exiles in the fifth year of Jehoiachin's exile (593 B.C.) and continued to preach for at least twenty years thereafter (Ezek. 40:1).

Ezekiel's message of judgement and hope was delivered primarily to the exiles, but also reached out to the Jews living in Jerusalem until 586 B.C. As a watchman over Israel (Ezek. 3:17, cf. chap. 33), Ezekiel warned of Jerusalem's impending doom as God's just punishment

for the nation's sins. A complex and compelling figure, Ezekiel used several odd symbolic acts and visionary experiences to deliver his message (Ezek. 1–24). He mimicked the siege of Jerusalem utilizing a brick, and lay on his side for a specific number of days to symbolize the sin and punishment of Judah and Israel (Ezek. 4:1–8). Later he tunneled out through a city wall carrying his baggage as a sign of what soon would befall the residents of Jerusalem, especially King Zedekiah, during the final stages of Jerusalem's destruction (Ezek. 12). In a dramatic and powerful series of visions, Ezekiel saw the departure of God's glory from the Holy temple, now profaned by Israel's sins (Ezek. 8–11). By these actions Ezekiel drove home the message that God had abandoned His Holy Place and delivered a rebellious people over to the hands of Babylon.

Ezekiel 25–32 contains a series of oracles delivered against the nations that surround Judah. Egypt and the wealthy Phoenician city of Tyre are given special attention.

After the destruction of Jerusalem, God used Ezekiel to convey a message of hope and future restoration to the exiles. Ezekiel's portrayal of God as a good shepherd who would restore His flock (Ezek. 34:11–31) foreshadows the New Testament motif of Christ as the Good Shepherd (John 10). Ezekiel's famous vision of a valley filled with bones that came to life at God's command (Ezek. 37) promised restoration and life to the shattered Jewish people. Ezekiel foresaw a new day when God would again dwell among a purified remnant: "My dwelling place shall be with them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people" (Ezek. 37:27). Ezekiel concluded his message of hope with a series of visions depicting a new temple with blessings flowing symbolically like a river that brings life into the deserts (Ezek. 40–48).

HAGGAI AND ZECHARIAH

Haggai and Zechariah preached in Jerusalem in 520 B.C., the second year of the Persian king Darius I (Hag. 1:1; Zech. 1:1). Darius secured his claim to the Persian throne in the tumult following the death of Cambyses in 522 B.C. Together the two prophets urged the Jews to rebuild the temple in Jerusalem. The Jewish exiles returning to Judah after the edict of Cyrus (538 B.C.) found Jerusalem devastated. Under the leadership first of Sheshbazzar (ca. 537 B.C.) and then Zerubbabel, attempts were made to rebuild the temple, but the task had not been finished by 520 B.C.(Ezra 5:16). Haggai and Zechariah challenged the people to complete the project as an outward sign of their commitment to God. Zerubbabel was the governor of Judah at the time, while Joshua, son of Jehozadak, served as high priest.

Haggai, whose name comes from the Hebrew word for "feast" or "festival," perhaps was an older man who may have been one of the Jews who remained in the land after the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. If so, he would have remembered the glory of Solomon's temple (cf. Hag. 2:2). Haggai preached just over three months (August to December, 520 B.C.), briefly overlapping the ministry of Zechariah (Ezra 5:1).

Haggai chastened the returning exiles for concentrating on rebuilding their own houses while neglecting to work on the temple (Hag. 1:1–15). He encouraged the people by promising that the second temple would be greater than the first, despite outward appearance (2:19), and foretold a time of blessing for the nation (2:10–19).

Zechariah ("Yahweh remembers," a very common name in the Old Testament) was from a priestly lineage, assuming that the Iddo mentioned in Zechariah 1:1 is identified with the Iddo who returned with Zerubbabel from exile (Neh. 12:4, 16). Zechariah's ministry lasted at least two years, beginning in 520 B.C. (Zech. 1:1; 7:1). Like Haggai, Zechariah urged the people to rebuild the temple (Zech. 1:16; 4:9; 6:12–15), a task that was completed by 515 B.C. (Ezra 6:16–22; cf. 5:1–5). Zechariah received a series of night visions anticipating a forgiven, restored people in a land of peace and blessing (Zech. 1–8). He believed the high priest Joshua, son of Jehozadak, was a special instrument in God's plan for a glorious future (Zech. 6:9–10). Emphasizing God's ultimate triumph over the nations that oppose His will, Zechariah envisioned the universal reign of God (Zech. 12–14).

MALACHI

Malachi—"my messenger"—was the last of the "writing" prophets. He addressed the Jews of Judah sometime between the dedication of the new temple (515 B.C.) and Ezra's return to Jerusalem in 458 B.C. During Malachi's time the people of Judah were gripped by spiritual lethargy and threatened by assimilation with pagan people. Evidently the bright future anticipated by the preaching of Haggai and Zechariah had not come about as expected, leading to careless worship practices and neglect of spiritual matters (Mal. 1:6–8; 3:8–15). Utilizing a series of six disputations, Malachi condemned the social and religious sins of the people, including divorce and marriage to pagan women (2:10–16), exploitation of the poor (3:5), and the ingratitude expressed by those who refuse God His tithe (3:6–12). Malachi predicted judgment upon an unfaithful people, but promised deliverance upon those who fear the Lord and keep His covenant. Malachi concluded his prophecy with the promise of an Elijah figure before a new day of judgement and deliverance (Mal. 4:4–6).

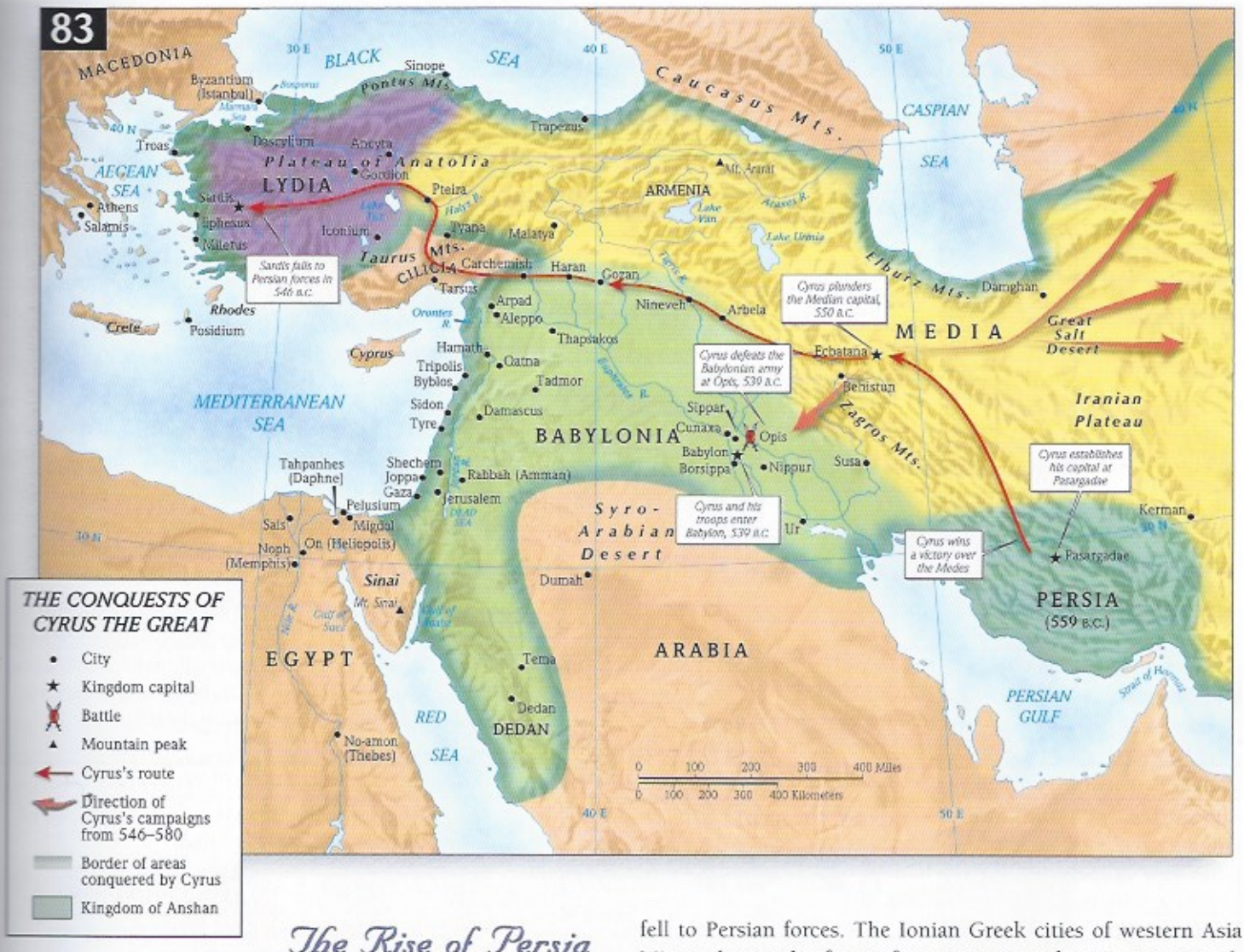
Chapter Thirteen

THE PERSIAN PERIOD

Introduction

The century from 600 to 500 B.C. brought tumultuous changes to the Near East. Four major powers dominated the political landscape at the beginning of the century. The Neo-Babylonian Empire extended across Mesopotamia and the Levant. Under Amasis (570–526 B.C.) Egypt prospered, while continuing to threaten Babylonian interests in the southern Levant. Increasingly, Amasis forged economic and military links with Greek traders and mercenaries who settled in the Delta.

The Medes occupied the territories north of Mesopotamia, governing their empire from their capital at Ecbatana. Median kings extended their holdings westward into the central Anatolian plateau (modern Turkey). Beyond the western limits of the Median Empire lay the kingdom of Lydia, with its capital at Sardis. The Lydian kings Gyges and Croesus built Lydia into a formidable force utilizing the gold retrieved from the Pactolus River. Within decades all four of these powers would be conquered by a new force—the Persians—resulting in the formation of the largest empire the Near East ever produced: the Persian Empire. For the Jews these changes meant an end to the Exile and restoration to their ancestral home.



The Rise of Persia

The Persian peoples migrated (sometime after 900 B.C.) into southwestern Iran, settling inland from the Persian Gulf. By about 700 B.C. a line of rulers claiming descent from Achaemenes eventually governed the region of Anshan, hence the term *Achaemenids* was used to describe the later Persian royal line. Cyrus II ("the Great") was a son of Cambyses I and the Median princess Mandane, daughter of the great Median king Astyages. Thus Cyrus was born to a marriage representing both the Persian and Median royal houses.

CYRUS THE GREAT

Cyrus began his rapid rise to power as the king of Anshan. He overthrew his Median overlord, Astyages, and plundered the Median capital, Ecbatana, in 550 B.C. Cyrus established his capital at Pasargadae, perhaps to commemorate a nearby victory over Median forces. Cyrus then moved against the Lydian king, Croesus, achieving final victory in 546 B.C. when Sardis fell to Persian forces. The Ionian Greek cities of western Asia Minor also, under force of arms, came under Persian control. The subjection of the Ionian's by Cyrus began a period of great tensions between the Greeks and Persians.

THE FALL OF BABYLON

Additional conquests by Cyrus in the east further isolated Babylonia, cutting off vital supply lines. Nabonidus, the last Babylonian king, provoked an internal crisis when he left the city of Babylon for ten years, spending much of this time in the Arabian oasis of Tema. In his absence he appointed his son Belshazzar as coregent during the last few years. During this ten-year period Nabonidus did not participate in the crucial New Year's Festival designed to win the favor of the gods for the coming year. His absence occasioned unrest among the Babylonian people and offended the powerful priests of Marduk. Coupled with shrinking markets and dwindling availability of goods caused by the loss of trade routes to Cyrus, tensions between the people of Babylon and Nabonidus were high.

CHART 14. KINGS OF PERSIA (CA. 559–330 B.C.)			
Persian King	**Dates(B.C.)**	**Biblical Connections**	**Events and Accomplishments**
Cyrus II (the Great)	559–530	Permitted return of the Jews from Exile; facilitated rebuilding of the temple at Jerusalem (Ezra 1:1–4; 6:3–5); the "Anointed One" of Isa. 45:1	King of Anshan, 559 B.C., conquered kingdom of Media (550 B.C.) and Lydian kingdom (546 B.C.); conquered Babylon, 539 B.C.
Cambyses II	530–522	Not mentioned in the Bible	Son of Cyrus the Great; conquered Egypt, 525 B.C.; his death (suicide?) in 522 B.C. led to two years of fighting between rival claimants to the throne
Darius I Hystaspes	522–486	Haggai and Zechariah preached during the second year of Darius I (520 B.C.); temple rebuilt and dedicated 515 B.C., (cf. Ezra 6:13–15)	Member of a collateral royal line; secured the throne ending the unrest following the death of Cambyses; reorganized the Persian Empire into satrapies; established royal postal system; began building Persepolis; invaded Greece and was defeated at Marathon, 490 B.C.; revolt in Egypt
Xerxes I	486–465	Possibly Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther	Son of Darius I; continued building Persepolis; encountered numerous rebellions at the beginning of his reign (Egypt, Babylon); invaded Greece, sacked Athens (480 B.C.), but was defeated by the Greeks in a naval engagement (Salamis, 480 B.C.) and on land (Plataea and Mycale, 479 B.C.); killed in a palace coup in 465 B.C.
Artaxerxes I Longimanus	465–425	Nehemiah, cup bearer to Artaxerxes; came to Judah (444 B.C., compare Neh. 2:1; 13:6); traditional date of Ezra's mission in the seventh year of his reign (458 B.C., cf. Ezra 7:7)	Faced revolt in Egypt; completed major buildings at Persepolis; made peace with the Greeks (Peace of Callias, 449 B.C.); died of natural causes
Xerxes II	423	Not mentioned in the Bible	Ruled less than two months
Darius II Nothus	423–404	Not mentioned in the Bible; Jews in Egypt (Elephantine) appealed to Samaria and Jerusalem for help in rebuilding their temple about 407 B.C.	Peloponnesian War, 431–404 B.C.; Persia recovered several Greek cities in Asia Minor
Artaxerxes II Mnemon	404–359/8	Some scholars place Ezra's mission in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II, about 398 B.C.	Egypt regained freedom from Persia for a time; revolt of the Satraps, 366–360 B.C.
Artaxerxes III Ochus	359/8–338/7	Not mentioned in the Bible	Philip II of Macedon; rises to power about 359 B.C.; Alexander the Great born, 356 B.C.; Persia reclaims Egypt, 342 B.C.
Arses	338/7–336	Not mentioned in the Bible	Unknown
Darius III Codomannus	336–330	Alexander subdues the Levant; Tyre and Gaza besieged, 332 B.C.; conquest of Egypt by Alexander, 332 B.C.	Philip assassinated, 336 B.C.; Alexander the Great invades the Persian Empire, 334 B.C.; Darius III defeated by Alexander at Issus, 333 B.C., and Gaugamela, 331 B.C.; death of Darius, 330 B.C.

The end of the Babylonian Empire came quickly. The Persian army, aided by Babylonian defections, defeated the Babylonian army at Opis on the Tigris River. Although hastily fortified by Nabonidus, Babylon fell shortly thereafter. In late October, 539 B.C., Cyrus entered Babylon, according to his own accounts, as a liberator of the oppressed peoples of the city. The famous "Cyrus Cylinder," found in the ruins of the temple of Marduk, boasts that Cyrus treated the citizens with magnaminity, restored the city, and ordered the restoration of ancient temples. Such pronouncements were typical of conquering kings, who stressed their role as "restorers" of order and often spoke of the return of dispersed peoples.

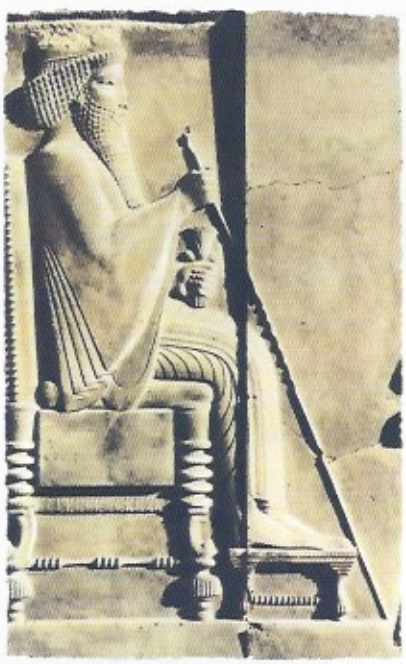
Cyrus died in 530 B.C., fighting in the northeastern areas of his realm. His son Cambyses II succeeded him and ruled for eight years. Cambyses' most notable achievement was the conquest of Egypt in 525 B.C. Unfortunately, Egypt proved to be a most troublesome vassal, frequently rebelling against Persia and often in league with the Greeks. Cambyses' somewhat mys-

nerious death in 522 B.C. left Persia in a state of turmoil for two years, during which time rival claimants fought for the throne. By 520 B.C. Darius I emerged as the victor. His famous inscription known as the Behistun Stone states his claim to be the legitimate king.

The Cyrus Cylinder. The inscription portrays Cyrus as the liberator of Babylon. Cyrus boasts that he allowed displaced peoples to return to their homes and restored the temples neglected under the Babylonians.

DARIUS I

Darius proved to be the ablest administrator of all Persian rulers. He organized the empire into twenty large regions called satrapies, each region governed by a satrap. He established a royal postal service, built a royal road connecting Susa with Sardis, exploited the Red Sea trade, and commenced the building of a new royal residence, Persepolis. However, Darius also launched a crusade against mainland Greece in reprisal for the Ionian Revolt (499 B.C.) inspired by Athens and Sparta. At Marathon, Greek warriors stopped the Persian advance in 490 B.C.; Darius retreated in defeat. At his death in 486 B.C. several provinces, including Egypt, were in revolt.



The Persian king Darius I seated upon his throne.

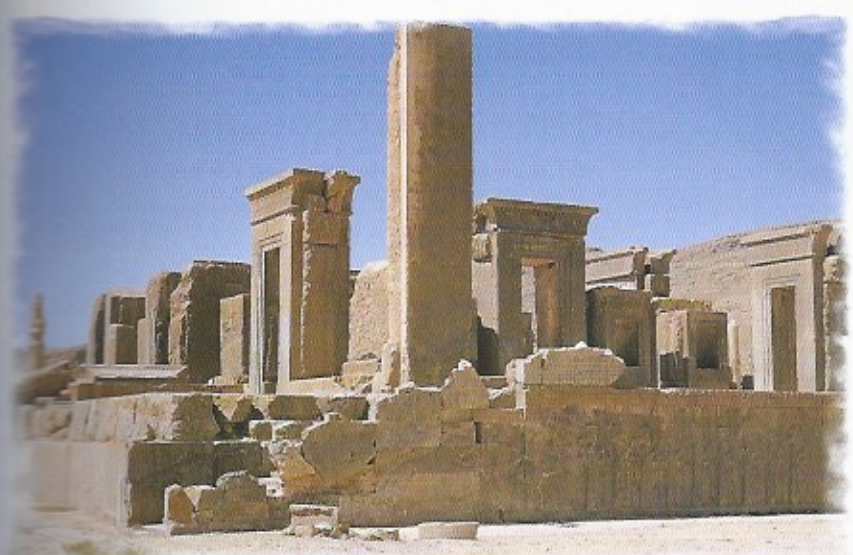
XERXES I

Xerxes I (486–465 B.C.) inherited from his father the Greek problem and various revolts. He, too, suffered defeat at the hands of the Greeks (Salamis, a naval engagement in 480 B.C. was the most crushing).

Xerxes is best known to Bible students as the Persian king Ahasuerus in the Book of Esther. Xerxes did not possess the abilities of his father, and his accomplishments were minimal, though he did manage to crush revolts in Babylon and Egypt. Babylon was sacked by Xerxes in 482 B.C. Although he continued construction of Persepolis, Xerxes later died in a palace coup in 465 B.C.

ARTAXERXES I

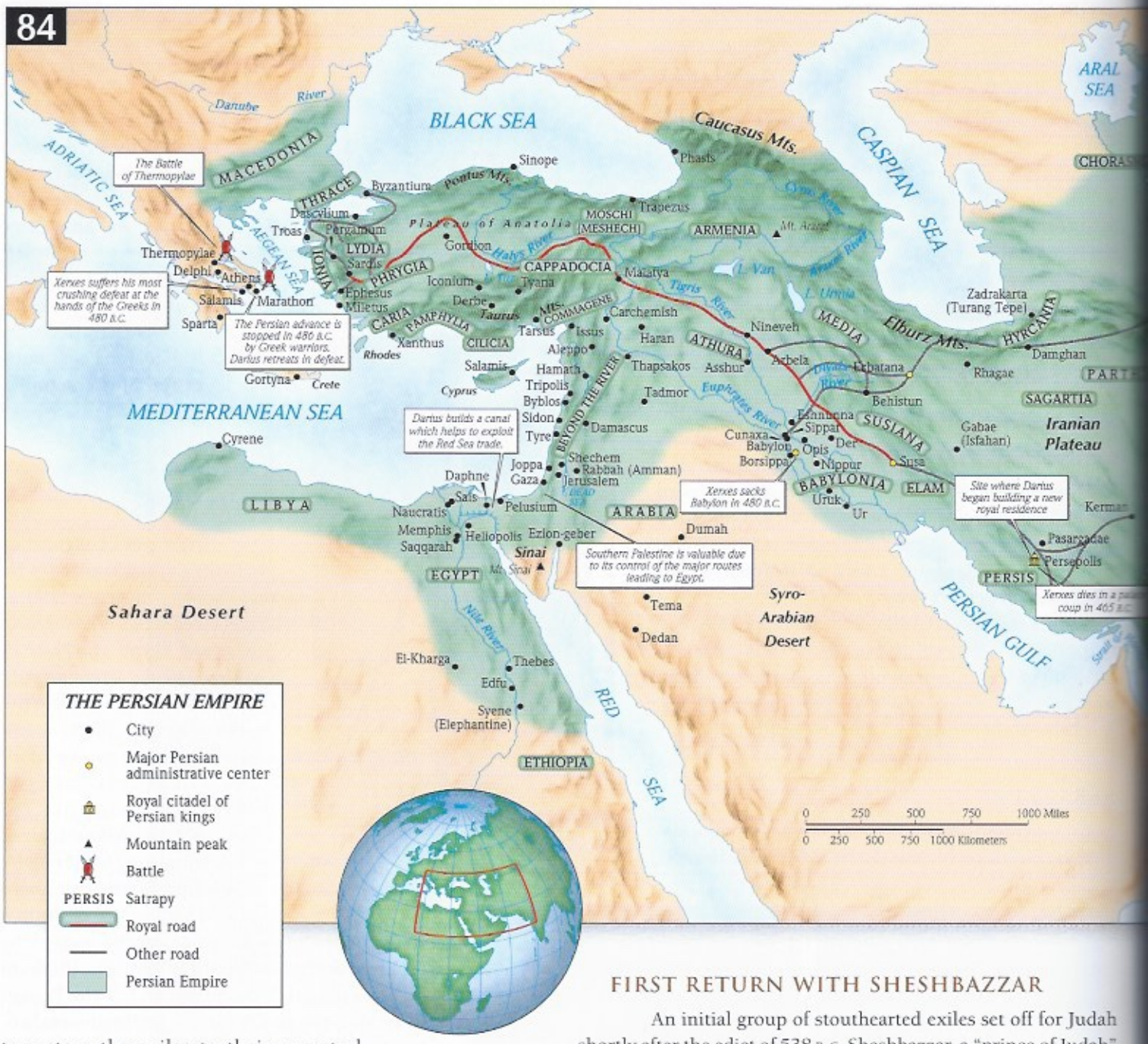
Artaxerxes I Longimanus (465–425 B.C.) succeeded his father, Xerxes, in 465 B.C. Artaxerxes faced serious threats from Athens and Egypt. The Peace of Callias (449 B.C.) temporarily ended the fighting with the Greeks by limiting the two combatants' respective spheres of influence. Artaxerxes was especially concerned with Egypt. The mission of Nehemiah authorized by the Persian king likely reflects the strategic value of southern Palestine and control of the major routes leading to Egypt. Artaxerxes needed the loyalty of the Jews in those troubled days. His death in 425 B.C. likely marked the end of the Persian kings who played roles in the biblical drama, unless the Artaxerxes named in connection with Ezra's mission (Ezra 7:7) was Artaxerxes II (404–358 B.C.). (See p. 172.)



Persepolis, the Persian royal retreat, built principally by Darius I and Xerxes I.

The Return of the Exiles to Judah

The conquest of Babylon by Cyrus the Great in 539 B.C. brought the dawn of a new day for the Jewish exiles. Isaiah called Cyrus the Lord's anointed who would be God's chosen instrument



to restore the exiles to their ancestral homeland (Isa. 45:1, 13). Several times the Bible mentions an edict Cyrus issued in 538 B.C. allowing the Jews two privileges. First, those who so desired could return to Judah. Second, Cyrus commanded that the Jerusalem temple be rebuilt, and directed funds from the royal treasury be given to support the project (Ezra 1:2–4; 6:3–5; 2 Chr. 36:22–23). The stipulations of this edict reflect accurately the general policies of Cyrus known from other royal inscriptions, including the famous "Cyrus Cylinder" located in the British Museum. Cyrus pursued a more beneficent and tolerant policy toward the peoples of his empire than his Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors.

FIRST RETURN WITH SHESHBAZZAR

An initial group of stouthearted exiles set off for Judah shortly after the edict of 538 B.C. Sheshbazzar, a "prince of Judah" (Ezra 1:8), led the first returnees on the long and difficult trek homeward. The Bible does not mention the details of their route. The quickest route was the more dangerous desert road that passed through the oasis city of Tadmor. More likely, the exiles followed the trade route westward along the Euphrates River to Aleppo and then turned south along the main arteries that led to Judah. Altogether the journey would exceed one thousand miles. Ezra 2 and Nehemiah 7 list a total of 42,360 returnees. Scholars debate whether these lists refer to those returning with the first group or, more likely, those returning in several groups over an extended period of time.

What is clear is that not all of those taken into exile chose to return. Many Jews remained in Babylon, becoming permanent residents, the core of an influential Jewish community that much later produced one of the two Talmuds.

We know little about the initial phases of the return. Sheshbazzar was of royal Davidic lineage, a son of Jehoiachin, the exiled king of Judah. Cyrus appointed him as governor and entrusted to him the return of silver vessels taken from the temple by Nebuchadnezzar (Ezra 5:13–16). Under Sheshbazzar's leadership the foundations of a new temple were laid in Jerusalem. However, biblical information about Sheshbazzar ceases at this point; his fate remains unknown.

ZERUBBABEL AND JOSHUA

Two new leaders of the Jewish community—Zerubbabel and Joshua—eventually emerged. Zerubbabel was another son of Jehoiachin and nephew of Sheshbazzar. The date of his arrival in Jerusalem and the relationship of his work to that of Sheshbazzar is much debated.

In many ways the deeds attributed to Zerubbabel and Sheshbazzar are strikingly similar: both led returnees back to Judah; both were governors of Judah; both men led the people of Judah to begin the process of rebuilding the temple. Most likely, Zerubbabel returned to Judah later than Sheshbazzar and took over leadership of the community at a time when discouragement had set in. The people of Judah met stiff opposition to their rebuilding efforts both from Persian authorities, such as Tattenai, a regional governor (Ezra 5:6), and from enemies among the local populations (Ezra 4).

Spurred on by the prophetic voices of Haggai and Zechariah in 520 B.C., Zerubbabel led the people of Judah to complete the rebuilding of the temple. The high priest Joshua gave invaluable assistance. These events took place against the backdrop of the turmoil attending the death of Cambyses II and the accession of Darius I. Perhaps the Judean community saw an opportunity to assert themselves in the hope of greater independence. In any case, in 515 B.C. the people of Judah dedicated the new temple in Jerusalem (Ezra 6:13–18). This event marked the culmination of the initial phases of the Jewish return to their homeland (see further pp. 162–63).

Persian Administration

Judah was a small province in the great behemoth of the Persian Empire. Persian kings divided the empire into satrapies, larger administrative units governed by a royal official called a satrap. Palestine was part of the fifth satrapy, known as "Beyond the River" (Aramaic *'Abar nahara*, Ezra 4:10; Hebrew *'Eber-ha-nahar*, Ezra 8:36; Neh. 2:7). "Beyond the River" referred to the lands lying west of the Euphrates River, which by 450 B.C. included Syria, Palestine, Phoenicia, and Cyprus. Under Cyrus and Cambyses, "Beyond the River" was jointly administered with Babylonia. According to Herodotus, Darius I reorganized the empire into twenty satrapies and separated "Beyond the River" from Babylonia. Some scholars believe the final separation took place during the time of Xerxes I. In any case, the fifth satrapy stretched from Poseidium in the north to the Sinai in the south.

Persian administrative policy further subdivided the satrapies into provinces administered by a governor. In turn the province could be further subdivided into districts or half-districts, each with its own leader (see Neh. 3:9, 14–15). The Persians retained many of the administrative divisions previously made by their Assyrian and Babylonian predecessors. For ex-

ample, the provinces created by the Assyrians in the wake of their subjugation of Israel—Megiddo, Dor, Samaria, Karnaim, and Gilead—remained largely intact in the Persian era.

JUDAH, SAMARIA, AND THEIR NEIGHBORS

Samaria became particularly troublesome for Judah since her powerful governors, such as Nehemiah's enemy Sanballat, constantly interfered with Judean efforts to rebuild their homeland. Perhaps the Samaritan authorities feared a fully recovered Judah to their south. Ashdod (including the coastal plain south of the Sorek River to Gerar and the Shephelah) and Idumea became provinces under Babylonian control.

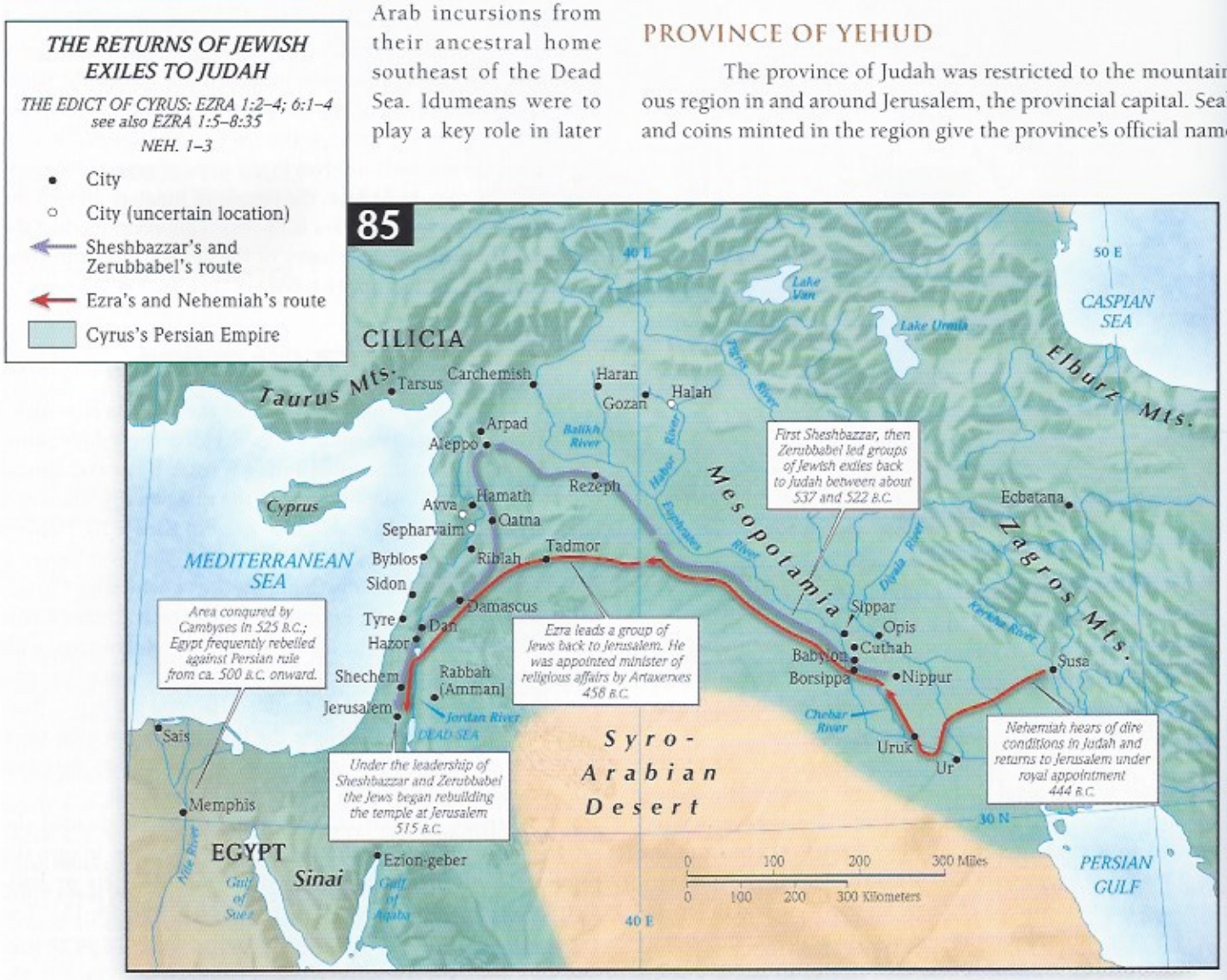
Phoenician influence along the Palestinian coast became pronounced as the Persians permitted Tyre and Sidon access to coastal cities. Idumea extended over the southern Judean hills. The population increasingly consisted of Edomites dislodged by Arab incursions from their ancestral home southeast of the Dead Sea. Idumeans were to play a key role in later biblical history through the powerful Herodian Dynasty. The provincial structure of Transjordan is less well known.

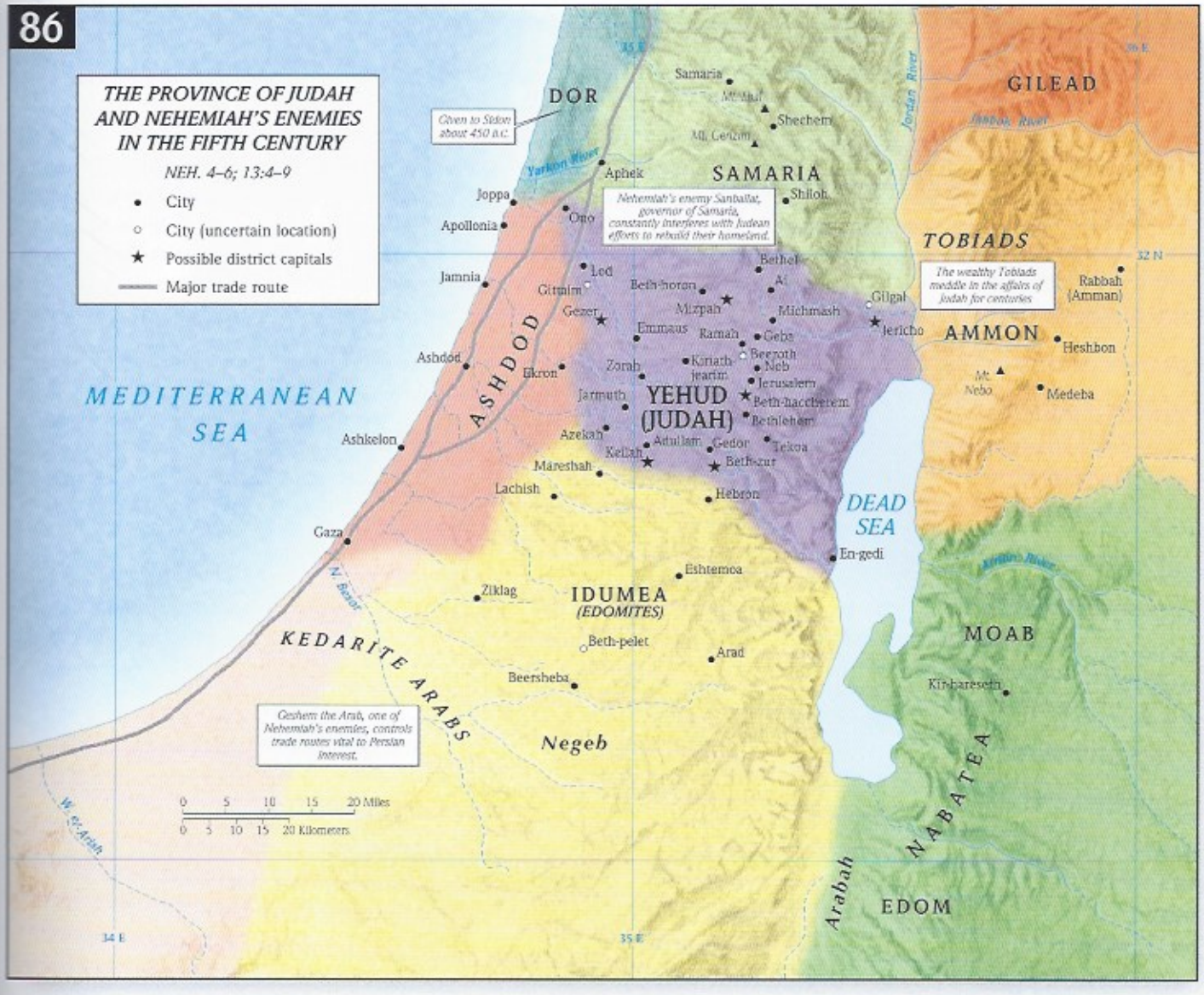
Ammon appears as a separate province with an important Jewish population. The powerful family headed by Tobiah the Ammonite, one of Nehemiah's foes (Neh. 2:19; 4:3), hailed from this area. The Tobiads meddled in the affairs of Judah for centuries. Their impressive palace at 'Araq el-Amir testifies to their wealth.

Moab suffered greatly under Arab pressure but maintained a separate identity unlike Edom, which collapsed under Arab intrusions. Ammonite and Moabite women were among wives Jewish men had taken in the time of Nehemiah (Neh. 13:23). To the south, the Kedarite Arabs controlled Edom and the Sinai. Another of Nehemiah's enemies was Geshem the Arab, a powerful chieftain who controlled trade routes vital to Persian interests (Neh. 6:1).

PROVINCE OF YEHUD

The province of Judah was restricted to the mountainous region in and around Jerusalem, the provincial capital. Seals and coins minted in the region give the province's official name:





Yehud. These materials give a good approximation of the borders of the province of Judah. Plotting their distribution reveals a northern limit in the territory of Benjamin, including Mizpah; a southern boundary that extends to Beth-zur; an eastern limit including Jericho and En-gedi; and a western boundary that embraces Gezer and Azekah.

Numerous biblical lists containing information about place names and returnees (Ezra 2:21–35; Neh. 3:2–22; 7:25–38; 11:25–35; 12:28–29) agree with this distribution. Judah comprised an area covering roughly nine hundred square miles. Jerusalem was the provincial capital where the resident governor lived.

The list of builders who worked on the walls of Jerusalem under Nehemiah's direction indicates that Judah was further subdivided into districts and half-districts. Scholars debate the precise number of districts. Excluding Jerusalem, the following cities likely served as district capitals: Beth-zur, Mizpah, Beth-haccerem, and Keilah. Other scholars assume the list is incomplete and include Jericho and Gezer as well.

Archaeology indicates that Judah in the Persian period was predominantly rural; most people chose to tend their plots of land in or near their ancestral villages. Jerusalem was not especially inviting; Nehemiah had to levy the villages to repopulate the city (Neh. 11:1–2). Luxury items were limited. Moreover, Judah was increasingly culturally isolated, as Greek and Phoenician influence predominated in the coastal regions. Persian policy toward Judah on the whole was benevolent, but hostile neighbors like the governors of Samaria were zealous to see that Jerusalem did not threaten their positions.

NEHEMIAH'S JERUSALEM

When Nehemiah arrived in Jerusalem in 445/444 B.C., he found the city in ruinous condition. The temple had been rebuilt and dedicated in 515 B.C. with Persian help, despite stiff opposition from local and regional authorities (Ezra 4:11–16; 5:3–17; 6:1–18). Yet the gates and walls that gave Jerusalem protection had yet to be repaired properly following the destructions wreaked upon the city by Nebuchadnezzar (Neh. 1:3; 2:3). Unscrupulous provincial officials who had much to gain by seeing that Jerusalem remained unprotected—thus no threat to their power—thwarted attempts to repair the city.

Nehemiah faced intense opposition from Sanballat, the governor of Samaria; Tobiah the Ammonite; and Geshem the Arab (Neh. 3:17–20; 4). In a nocturnal journey, Nehemiah surveyed the damage and developed a plan to repair Jerusalem's defenses (Neh. 2:11–16). Apparently the eastern slope of the City of David was in an impassable condition due to collapsed retaining walls and ruined structures. Nehemiah assigned various sections of the fortifications to groups supervised by leaders of the Jewish community. Nehemiah 3 contains numerous references to gates and structures along Jerusalem's fortifications. Unfortunately, identifying archaeological remains with any of these structures has been difficult, yet archaeologists have provided a clearer picture of Nehemiah's Jerusalem.

After the destruction of Jerusalem in 586 B.C., settlers confined themselves to the eastern ridge, the old City of David and the Temple Mount. There is no evidence of any occupation of the western ridge during the Persian era, although parts of Hezekiah's walls must have remained in fragmentary condition. Settlement upon the City of David apparently was more constricted than ever before. Much of the eastern slope perhaps was left unprotected, as a new line of defense was established farther up the slope, perhaps built along the line of a much earlier wall. Fragments of a wall built of roughly dressed limestone near the crest have been identified by some archaeologists as "Nehemiah's Wall," but others believe the "wall" is actually a quarry line. A few of the domestic structures on the eastern slope were reused, but most buildings were located on the crest of the ridge.

The fact that Nehemiah completed his initial repairs in fifty-two days argues strongly that segments of the earlier defenses must have been still standing; presumably the western line of defense and the walls enclosing the Temple Mount were on the same lines as those prior to 586 B.C. The Valley Gate (Neh. 3:13), along the Tyropoeon Valley, has tentatively been identified by some scholars with remains dating from the Iron Age. The location of other gates in Nehemiah 3 are more speculative. It seems reasonable to locate the Water Gate (Neh. 3:26) near the Gihon Spring and the Fountain Gate at the base of the southeastern hill (Neh. 2:14; 3:15). Several towers mentioned in Nehemiah 3 (the Tower of Hananel, the Tower of the Hundred) undoubtedly lay along the north defenses where Jerusalem was most vulnerable.

Jerusalem of Nehemiah's day was slightly smaller than the city of David and Solomon, perhaps covering thirty-seven to thirty-eight acres. The initial population must have been quite small, prompting a levy upon the people of Judah to repopulate the city (Neh. 11:1–2; cf. Neh. 7:4). Pottery impressions found in the city containing the name "Yehud" proclaim the Persian domination of the Jewish people. But Nehemiah's efforts not only restored the defenses of the city, but also reasserted Jerusalem's status as a provincial capital. In time, Jerusalem would recover, expanding once again over the western ridge and northward beyond the old fortified boundaries. The process unfolded slowly in the Hellenistic and Hasmonean periods, but reached its full flower under Herod the Great and his successors.

RENEWAL UNDER EZRA AND NEHEMIAH

Soon after 500 B.C. discouragement and spiritual apathy gripped Judah. Malachi confronted the people with his penetrating oracles that sought to revitalize the spirit of the people. The Jewish community was on the verge of cultural assimilation and extinction. God sent two pivotal figures to salvage the situation: Ezra and Nehemiah. Their ministries coincided with much greater Persian interest in their southern border. Egypt, backed by Greek encouragement, revolted against Persia, first in 488 B.C., and then later in 461 B.C., during the reign of Artaxerxes I (465–425 B.C.). The Persians fortified many sites along the Palestinian coast and the Shephelah as supply stations and garrisons to maintain their hold on Egypt. Judah became strategically important in light of Egypt's obstinance. Both Ezra and Nehemiah's missions to Judah must be viewed against this backdrop.

Ezra arrived in Jerusalem during the seventh year of Artaxerxes (Ezra 7:7), traditionally taken to mean Artaxerxes I and therefore 458 B.C. However, an alternative hypothesis suggests that Ezra followed Nehemiah, arriving in the seventh year of Artaxerxes II—398 B.C. For a variety of reasons the traditional date seems preferable. Ezra was "a scribe skilled in the law of Moses" (Ezra 7:6) who called the people back to their covenant

obligations. He led a group back from Babylon, carrying with him gold and silver granted by the king in addition to freewill offerings from the Jewish exiles. Apparently Artaxerxes appointed him as a "minister of religious affairs" in keeping with the general Persian policy of supporting local cults. After reading the Law to the people of Jerusalem, Ezra led the people in confession of their sin and recommitment of their lives (Neh. 8–10).

Nehemiah served as a cupbearer to Artaxerxes I (Neh. 2:1) before receiving his appointment as governor of Judah. Distressed by reports of the dire conditions of his kinspeople in Judah, he left Susa under royal appointment and journeyed to Jerusalem, arriving in 445/44 B.C. Nehemiah faced serious opposition to his effort to rebuild Jerusalem from Tobiah, Geshem the Arab, and, especially, Sanballat, governor of Samaria. Nehemiah quickly surveyed the situation and commenced rebuilding the fortifications of Jerusalem (Neh. 2:11–4:23). After securing the city walls, Nehemiah took economic measures to relieve the suffering of the poorer citizens: (1) usury was abolished, and (2) the burdensome taxation used to support governmental officials was ended (Neh. 5).

Returning to Susa after a twelve-year term, Nehemiah served his people as governor a second time, during which time he dealt with certain social and religious problems threatening Jewish identity. Mixed marriages were forbidden, commercial activities were banned on the Sabbath, and the Levites were reinstated to their rightful positions (Neh. 11–13).

In effect, the efforts of Ezra and Nehemiah saved the Jewish community from extinction. New foundations of the Jews were laid for the physical and spiritual well-being of the Jewish community. However, the threat of cultural assimilation was not over. The Greek period would present even greater challenges to Jewish identity.

Median soldiers in the service of the royal Persian guard as shown on a relief made of glazed bricks found at Susa, one of the Persian administrative centers.

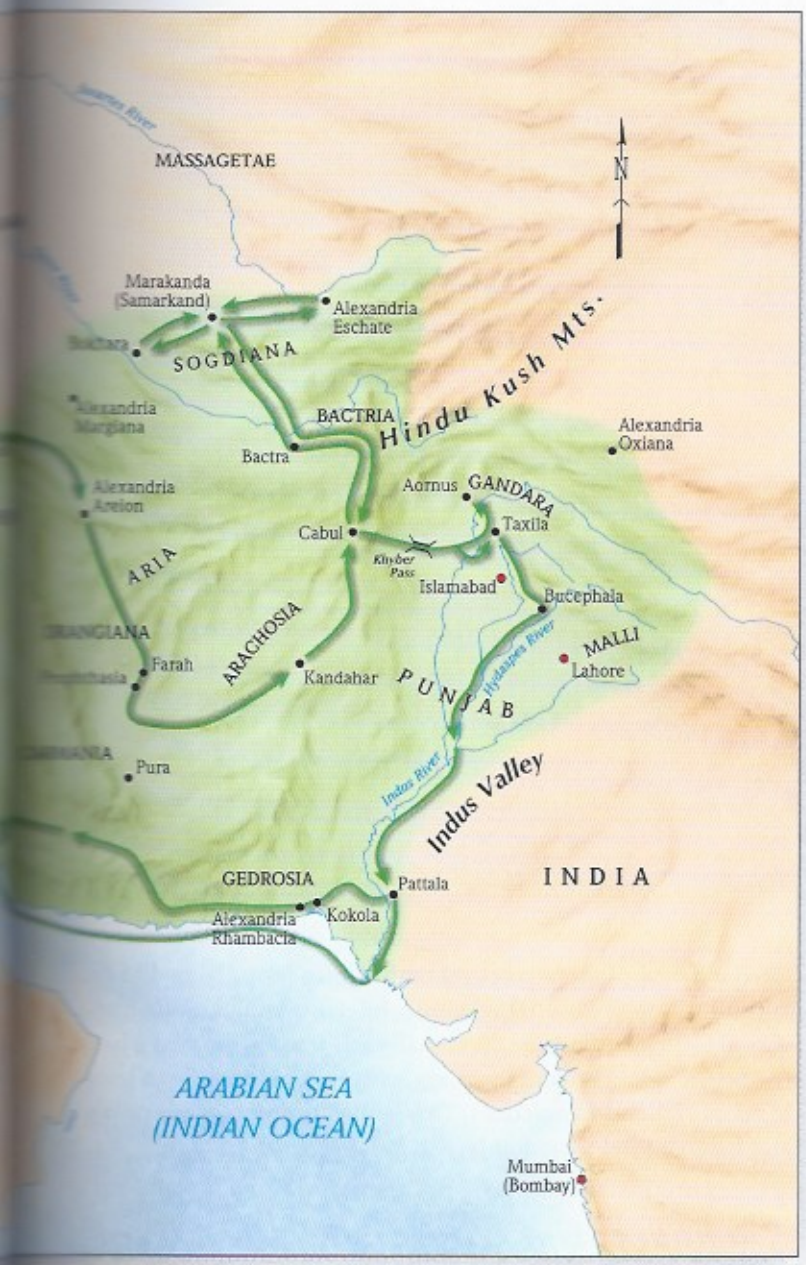
Chapter Fourteen

THE HELLENISTIC PERIOD

Introduction

The conquests of Alexander the Great signaled the dawn of a new era for the Near East. The center of international power shifted from East to West, first to Greece and later to Rome. Students of world history speak of the "Hellenistic Period," since *Hellas* is the Greek word for "Greece." The Hellenistic era witnessed momentous developments that prepared the way for the Christian movement and led to far-reaching changes in Judaism.

Trade between East and West had prospered for centuries. Greek merchants visited the coastal regions of the eastern Mediterranean before 1000 B.C. The military campaigns of Alexander accelerated the influx of Greek culture. He envisioned a single, unifying culture based on Greek ideals embracing all his conquered territories. Classical Greek ideas blended with local customs and concepts. The mix produced a new period of history marked by a rich and diverse blend of cultures. An international, cosmopolitan perspective began to replace the regionalism of previous historical eras.



Alexander's victories brought a culture uniting the world of his day, but he did not bring political unity. Palestine and the Near East suffered under the jealous wars of Alexander's successors. Two of Alexander's generals divided the eastern part of his empire. Ptolemy ruled from Alexandria, Egypt, while Seleucus set up his kingdom in Babylonia and Syria. They encouraged friends and leaders from Greece to join them in the East. Thus Westerners flooded the East as bureaucrats, merchants, and soldiers of war and fortune. This Greek upper class baptized the Near East with Greek customs, language, thought, and morality.

THE INFLUX AND INFLUENCE OF GREEK CULTURE

The Near East changed radically under the impact of Hellenism. The Greek language of the common people of Greece (*koine* Greek) in contrast with the Greek of the famous philosophers and poets (classical Greek) became the international language of politics, economics, and culture. Greek kings founded new cities such as Alexandria and Antioch. These cities quickly became major economic and cultural centers. The kings' massive building programs proclaimed royal power, erecting Greek temples, gymnasiums, and theaters in the major cities of the East. In the gymnasium, young men trained both body and mind in accord with classical Greek ideals. Thus Greek learning and practices spread through the Eastern world. Education levels rose rapidly throughout the area, as people sought skills to function and succeed in an increasingly complex society.

Standardized coins and easier access to larger markets caused trade to flourish. People began gradually to catch a vision of life beyond the limits of the small city-state. The rich possibilities of the inhabited, civilized world beckoned all citizens to new adventures. In many ways, these changes prepared the way for the "fullness of time" in which the gospel events unfolded.

Hellenism did not solve all problems, nor did it affect all people. Native cultures continued to flourish, especially in rural areas. The Greek ideas and way of life appealed primarily to the upper classes of the cities. The material benefits of Hellenistic life impacted the urban dwellers the most and thus also had greater allure for them.

THE CHALLENGE OF HELLENISM

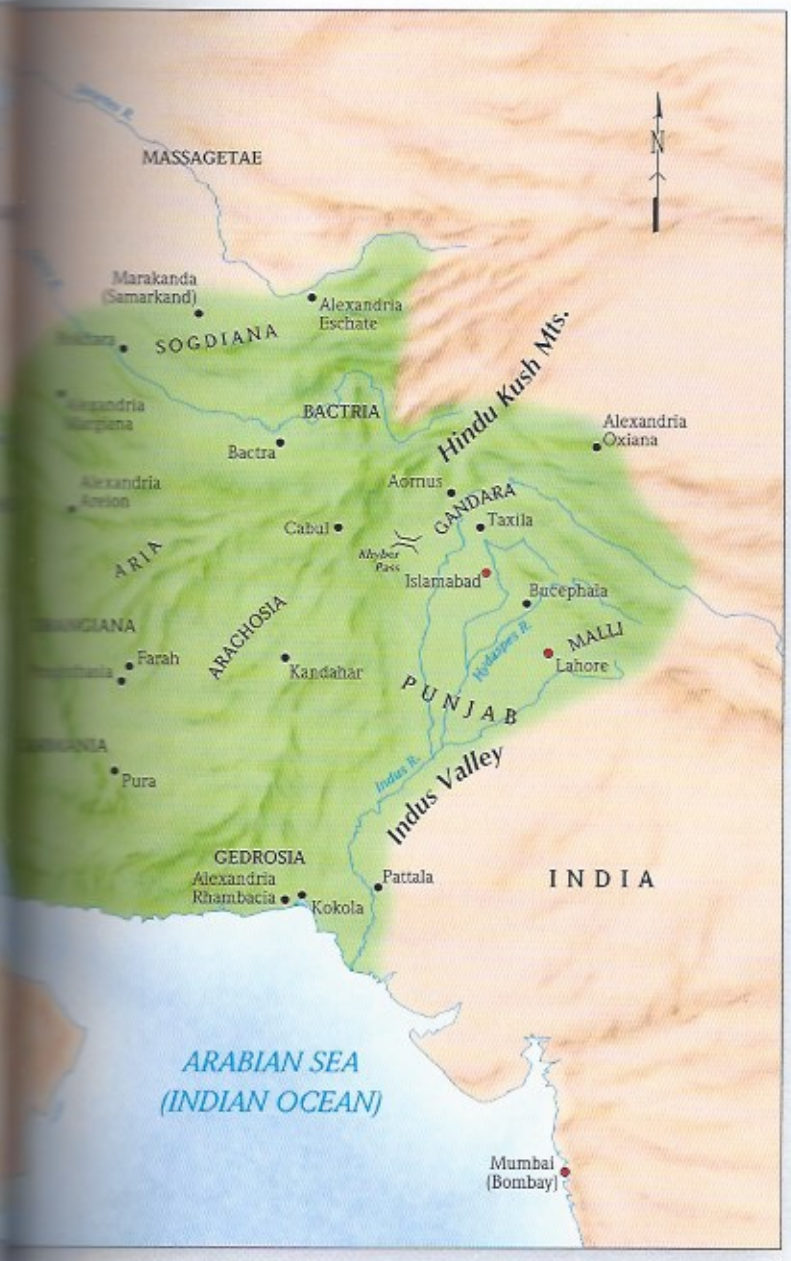
Hellenism brought problems as well. Lack of political unity resulted in wide-ranging wars among Alexander's successors. This meant insecurity and economic hardship for the vast majority of the population. Slavery became a continuing characteristic of Greek society. Greek values stood in strong opposition to traditional religious and cultural

values. People lived under the tension of loyalty to the old and the hope of prosperity from the new. Jews, with their traditional worship of only one God, stood under extreme threat and tension from Hellenism. Still, the new international traffic and trade led to rapid expansion and development of Judaism outside Palestine. These new international Jews (the Diaspora) prospered in a vital, Hellenized Judaism in cities like Alexandria.

New growth and expansion brought new tensions for Jews. To what degree could a Jew adopt the new culture and still adhere to the faith? More conservative Jewish elements strenuously resisted Hellenistic ideas, believing compromise constituted a denial of their ancestral faith. Other Jews claimed to be faithful to the traditional religion while also enjoying the benefits of Hellenistic culture. Eventually this tension erupted when the Seleucid kingdom of Syria aggressively sought to force Jews to adopt Hellenistic practices. This ignited the Maccabean revolt and led to a brief period of Jewish independence.

Campaigns of Alexander the Great

In 336 B.C., at the age of twenty, Alexander (356–323 B.C.) assumed the title "King of Macedon" upon the death of his father, Philip II. He shared his father's vision of leading a united Greek army against the Persian Empire, the long-standing en-



emy of the Greek city-states. To that end he assembled an army of forty thousand men composed primarily of Macedonians and Greeks. Alexander faced a much larger Persian army supported by a Persian fleet manned by Phoenicians. His opponent was Darius III, king of Persia.

Alexander crossed into Asia Minor in 334 B.C. with the immediate aim of "liberating" the Greek city-states from Persian rule. At the river Granicus he defeated a Persian force led by the local satraps (governors). Further skirmishes secured much of Asia Minor. Alexander appointed governors, mainly Macedonian or Greek, to consolidate his gains. In 333 B.C. Alexander engaged Darius III directly at the Battle of Issus and won a major victory. Darius escaped, but the Persian army was in full retreat.

THE EGYPTIAN PHASE

Alexander next moved south to capture the ports vital to the Persian fleet and to secure Egypt (332–331 B.C.). Many of the cities along the coastal regions of Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine surrendered peacefully. Tyre, a key base for the Persian fleet, refused to surrender, forcing Alexander to besiege the island city for seven months. After sacking the city, Alexander sold much of the population into slavery. Later, Gaza also resisted for two months with the same result. Alexander used his cavalry to range inland, when necessary, to secure interior areas. Most cities, apparently including Jerusalem, submitted without conflict; others, such as Samaria, offered resistance and suffered destruction. Alexander secured Egypt in late 332 B.C. and assumed the title of "Pharaoh."

THE MESOPOTAMIAN PHASE

In 331 B.C. Alexander moved his army north into Mesopotamia in pursuit of Darius. At Gaugamela, Alexander decisively defeated the Persian army, although Darius again escaped, only to be slain later by his own men. Alexander's forces captured the main centers of Persian administration—Babylon, Susa, and Persepolis—ending Persian rule. Subsequently, Alexander campaigned farther east, eventually reaching modern Afghanistan and the Indus Valley. He established numerous cities in which he placed Macedonian and Greek troops. Because he increasingly sought to share power with native people, his own troops threatened rebellion. Exhausted by the constant campaigns, his army finally mutinied and forced Alexander to return westward. He died in Babylon in 323 B.C. at the age of thirty-three.

The Division of Alexander's Empire

Alexander's sudden, unexpected death in 323 B.C. created a crisis. Who would succeed him as master over his vast empire? Alexander left no viable heir. Several of his close advisors formed a governing council and divided the empire among themselves. These men, known as *Diadochi* or "successors," were powerful figures who each coveted more territory. For our purposes, the most important of these successors were Ptolemy I, Soter, Antigonus Monopthalmus and his son Demetrius Poliorcetes ("beseiger of cities"), and Seleucus I. Ptolemy controlled Egypt, while Antigonus was awarded Asia Minor. Seleucus, another of Alexander's generals, was granted Babylon. War was inevitable among these ambitious rulers.

Antigonus initiated the conflicts by attacking Ptolemy I

The Hellenistic city of Jerash and the temple of Zeus.

and forcing Seleucus to abandon Babylon. Seleucus quickly allied with Ptolemy against Antigonus. Beginning about 315 B.C., the two competing forces fought fierce battles, principally in Syria, Phoenicia, and Palestine. Naval battles raged in the eastern Mediterranean. The fate of Palestine and the Jewish people hung in the balance, and the people of Palestine suffered greatly in this battle-plagued era.

In 312 B.C. Ptolemy forcibly removed a large group of Jews from Jerusalem and resettled them in Alexandria. Seleucus I returned to Babylon in 312 B.C., gaining a new advantage against Antigonus. A combined sea and land assault on Egypt led by Antigonus and Demetrius failed in 306 B.C. The decisive Battle of Ipsus in 301 B.C. resulted in the death of Antigonus and victory for Ptolemy and Seleucus.

Control of the East fell to the two competing Hellenistic dynasties that survived these wars. The Ptolemaic Dynasty, descended from Ptolemy I, centered upon Egypt and gained initial control over Phoenicia and Palestine. From their capital at Alexandria, the Ptolemies ruled Palestine for the next one hundred years (301–200 B.C.). The Seleucid Dynasty, successors to Seleucus I, claimed Syria and Babylonia. In 301 B.C. Palestine became a bone of contention between the two dynasties because Seleucus claimed Palestine as the spoil of war after the Battle of Ipsus. During the next century the Ptolemies and Seleucids fought five wars over Palestine until 200 B.C. when Palestine became Seleucid territory.

Ptolemaic Rule in Palestine (301–200 B.C.)

The Ptolemaic Kingdom was among the most wealthy and stable of the Hellenistic kingdoms. From Alexandria, the Ptolemies ruled over a vast empire, which, at its greatest extent, included Cyrenacia, Palestine, Phoenicia, Cyprus, some Greek islands, and parts of western Asia Minor. Two factors contributed to the kingdom's stability: (1) the native Egyptian population was homogeneous and, therefore, more easily governed, and (2) Egypt's clearly defined borders and relative isolation lent a measure of security to the Ptolemaic heartland.

Alexander the Great fighting Darius III at the battle of Issus in 333 B.C. The scene comes from a first century A.D. mosaic found at Pompeii.

PTOLEMAIC POLICIES

Ptolemy I Soter (304–285 B.C.) and his son Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246 B.C.) established the basic policies that made the kingdom powerful and wealthy. The Ptolemies strictly controlled commerce, finance, and agriculture through a complex bureaucracy that furnished money to the king. Land was farmed out under state control; certain industries came under state monopoly. Taxes were heavy and numerous.

Yet the Ptolemies did not force Hellenization upon the native peoples. The average Egyptian was unaffected culturally by the new policies. The Ptolemies' concern was to maximize profit for the court at Alexandria.

ALEXANDRIA

Alexandria became a major center of Greek culture and commerce under the Ptolemies. Located on the coast of the western Delta where a major branch of the Nile reaches the sea, the city had enormous economic potential. Two harbors served a fleet that exported grains, papyrus, and glass, among other things. Imports included metals and timber. The famous lighthouse of Pharos, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world, towered over the port. The early Ptolemies fostered the development of Hellenistic culture by supporting a large group of scholars at the Museum, an academy of learning, and building a library world renowned as the greatest repository of literary works in the ancient world.

The Jewish population of Alexandria increased steadily as Jews immigrated to Alexandria in search of new opportunities, often serving as mercenaries and merchants. Many Jews adopted features of Hellenistic culture, including the Greek language, a fact seen in the need for a Greek translation of their Hebrew and Aramaic Scriptures. This translation, known as the Septuagint, probably was begun in the reign of Ptolemy II, although it was not completed until much later. This version later became the "Bible" of the earliest Christian missionaries. They preached from this Greek version of the Old Testament since Hebrew was unintelligible to the vast majority of potential converts.

PALESTINE

Our knowledge of conditions in Palestine under Ptolemaic rule is sketchy due to the paucity of archaeological and literary sources. Since security against Seleucid expansion was a major consideration, the border regions and strategic points in southern Syria and Palestine were fortified and garrisoned with Ptolemaic troops. Macedonian and Greek garrisons had been placed previously at Gaza and Samaria by Alexander or Perdiccas; the latter was a Macedonian general originally charged with the

CHART 15: THE PTOLEMIES AND THE SELEUCIDS: 323–175 B.C.

PTOLEMAIC RULERS	KEY EVENTS	SELEUCID RULERS	KEY EVENTS
Ptolemy I Soter (323–285)	Established Ptolemaic line; founded great library of Alexandria; resettled many Jews in Alexandria	Seleucid I (312–280)	Founded Seleucid line of rulers; founded Antioch in 300
Ptolemy II Philadelphus (285–246)	First and Second Wars with Seleucids; Septuagint (LXX) begun in Alexandria	Antiochus I (280–261)	
Ptolemy III Euregetes (246–221)	Third War with Seleucids	Antiochus II (261–246)	
Ptolemy IV Philopator (221–203)	Defeated Antiochus III at Raphia	Seleucus II (246–223)	
Ptolemy V Epiphanes (203–181)	Lost Palestine to Seleucids in 200	Antiochus III (223–187)	Secured Palestine for Seleucid rule at Panias in 200; defeated by Rome in Asia Minor at Magnesia in 190
Ptolemy VI Philometor (181–146)		Seleucus IV (187–175)	Heliodorus tries to plunder the temple at Jerusalem
		Antiochus IV (175–163)	Corrupted the high priesthood in Jerusalem; invaded Egypt, but was forced to withdraw by Romans; policies provoked the Maccabean Revolt; profaned the temple in Jerusalem

responsibility of overseeing Alexander's Empire as divided among the *Diadochi* until his death in 321 B.C. Other such garrisons emerged through allotments granted to Greek military personnel in exchange for service.

The Ptolemies also developed the economic potential of southern Syria and Palestine and imposed upon these lands the same tight bureaucratic system found in Egypt to collect taxes and control trade. Dates, olive oil, grain, fish, cheese, and fruit exported to Egypt boasted Ptolemaic wealth. The Zenon Papyri (about 259–258 B.C.) record the travel in Palestine of a representative of the Ptolemaic finance minister Apollonius. These papyri allow us a glimpse of life in Palestine under the Ptolemies and the efficient bureaucracy designed to generate revenues.

The Ptolemies treated Judea as a temple state, that is, land dedicated to a particular god. For the Ptolemies, the high priest of Jerusalem functioned as the religious and civil authority of the Jewish people. The high priest was an intermediary between the Jews and the Ptolemies. His main governmental responsibility was to collect and pay an annual tax.

When Onias II, high priest under Ptolemy III, refused to render the tax, the Ptolemies permitted the Tobiad family to assume the responsibility and the consequent civic authority. The Tobiads, a wealthy business family who can be traced back to one of Nehemiah's opponents (Neh. 2:10; 6:1–19), represented a more Hellenized Jewry who presumably saw the benefits of Ptolemaic policies. Traditional Jews became increasingly isolated, both physically and spiritually, as economic and security factors promoted Hellenization in many cities, especially along the coasts and in the Transjordan. Ptolemais (Acco), Gadara, Philadelphia (Rabbah), Philoteria (Beth-yerah), and other cities surrounded Jerusalem as something of a Hellenistic border. Traditional beliefs inevitably were challenged.

The Seleucid Dynasty

The Ptolemies' rivals for power in the East were the Seleucids, a powerful dynasty officially founded in 312 B.C. when Seleucus I became satrap of Babylonia. As one of the "successors," Seleucus I claimed the title "king" in 305 B.C. He and Antiochus I, his son, set about establishing control of vast areas of northern Syria, Mesopotamia, portions of Asia Minor, and the Iranian plateau.

SELEUCID POLICIES

The Seleucids ruled their empire from two newly founded cities located at strategic points. Antioch in Syria, founded in 300 B.C., became the most important politically. Like its counterpart Alexandria in Egypt, Antioch rapidly became a city of great size and wealth, a virtual showcase for Hellenistic culture. Seleucia on the Tigris, dominating the confluence of vital trade routes, served as a base for administering the central and eastern regions.

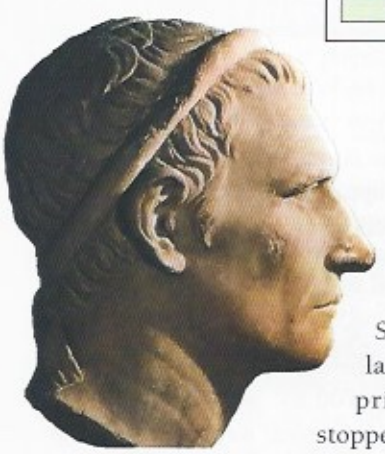
Seleucid rule was less centralized and less bureaucratic due in part to the sheer size of the empire, which presented serious administrative problems. Unlike the Ptolemaic Kingdom, the Seleucid Kingdom had no clear geographic borders and was not easily defended. Moreover, its population, unlike Egypt, was heterogeneous. Powerful local rulers exerted significant influence and required diplomatic tact on the part of the Seleucid kings to prevent rebellion.

To unify their diverse kingdom, the Seleucids aggressively encouraged people to adopt Greek practices and ideas. Seleucus I and Antiochus I established numerous military colo-

nies settled by Greek soldiers. These colonies functioned as islands of Hellenism and promoted the ideals of Greek culture. Many of these colonies developed into city-states (*Poleis*) with the attendant Hellenistic institutions. However, controlling the massive empire proved troublesome. The eastern provinces rebelled, while wars with the Ptolemies weakened both kingdoms.

ANTIOCHUS III

When Antiochus III (223–187 B.C.) came to power in 223 B.C., Seleucid fortunes revived. This energetic king pursued a policy of consolidation and expansion that ultimately earned him the title "the Great."



Antiochus III.

To secure his southern flank and to gain control of Phoenicia and Palestine, Antiochus launched the Fourth Syrian War (219–217 B.C.), but a large Ptolemaic force consisting primarily of native Egyptians stopped him at Raphia, just south of Gaza, in 217 B.C. As a result, these territories remained Ptolemaic. Antiochus was more successful in a series of campaigns in the eastern provinces, but the problem of securing his southern border remained. The Fifth Syrian War (202–198 B.C.) settled the matter with the decisive victory over the Ptolemaic

army at Panias (later Caesarea Philippi) in 200 B.C. Southern Syria and Palestine became Seleucid territories.

Palestine under Seleucid Rule

Antiochus III's victory in 200 B.C. over the Ptolemies caused most Jews to rejoice. The Jews were weary of the heavy taxes and oppressive bureaucracy of the Ptolemies. Antiochus rewarded their loyalty by granting the Jews the right to live according to their ancient traditions. He remitted several taxes and assisted in the repair of the Jerusalem temple, evidently damaged in recent fighting. The early years of Seleucid rule over Palestine were peaceful and prosperous.

WAR WITH ROME

War with Rome changed matters quickly. Antiochus expanded westward into Greece in the 190s B.C., where he caught the attention of Rome. Rome and Carthage had just finished an exhausting war (the Second Punic War) in which Hannibal rampaged across the Italian peninsula (see chap. 15 for a brief history of Roman expansion). When Antiochus invaded Greece in the company of Hannibal, Rome fought back. In western Asia Minor at Magnesia in 190 B.C., Antiochus was beaten decisively. The Romans demanded a large sum of money and the forfeiture of all Seleucid claims in Asia Minor. Antiochus III faced financial disaster and diminished power. He died in 187 B.C. while looting a temple in his eastern provinces attempting to secure money to pay his debts.

Antiochus III left two sons as potential heirs to the

Seleucid throne: the eldest, Seleucus IV, became king in 187 B.C. and ruled until his assassination in 175 B.C. Saddled with his father's debt to Rome, he increased taxes to pay the tribute and sanctioned plundering of temples in his kingdom. Seleucus sent Heliodorus to Jerusalem to confiscate the temple treasury. The attempt failed, according to a story in 2 Maccabees 3, when angelic beings intervened and forced Heliodorus to abandon his mission.

ANTIOCHUS IV

Heliodorus murdered Seleucus IV in 175 B.C. Antiochus IV, a brother of Seleucus who had been previously held as a political hostage in Rome, returned to Antioch to claim the throne. An ardent supporter of Greek culture, Antiochus took the typically Hellenistic title "Theos Epiphanes"—"god manifest." The new king also was ambitious and dreamed of restoring glory to the Seleucid kingdom through expansion. Egypt was the most promising target since any move toward the West would invite swift Roman retaliation.

Antiochus IV began an aggressive policy of Hellenization to unify his kingdom and prepare the way for an invasion of Egypt. In Jerusalem a strongly Hellenistic pro-Seleucid party emerged that Antiochus favored. The king sold the office of high priest to Jason, the brother of Onias III, who was the legitimate high priest. Jason was a thorough Hellenist who introduced Greek festivals and sporting events to Jerusalem. Young Jewish men received training in Greek ways at the gymnasia built in the city (2 Macc. 4:7–17). In 172 B.C. Menelaus outbid Jason for the high priestly office. Menelaus was from a nonhigh priestly lineage. The sacred office of high priest became a political tool and source of revenue for Antiochus while Jerusalem took on the trappings of a Greek city. These changes deeply distressed the more traditional elements of Jewish society.

Antiochus attacked Egypt on two occasions between 170 and 168 B.C. He was on the verge of complete success when Rome ordered him to withdraw from Egypt. Unwilling to risk war with Rome, Antiochus retreated. News of his failure—and a rumor that Antiochus was dead—prompted Jason to attempt to reclaim the high priesthood, a move Antiochus interpreted as rebellion against Seleucid rule.

Determined to ensure the loyalty of Palestine and secure his border with Egypt, Antiochus imposed restrictions on Jewish traditions and forced Greek customs on the Jewish population. An edict forbade the rite of circumcision and the observance of the Sabbath. A pagan altar dedicated to the worship of Zeus was built in the Jerusalem temple (the "Abomination of Desolation" in Dan. 11:31; 12:11 [NASB]). As a sign of loyalty, Jews were required to offer pagan sacrifices, including the offering of swine flesh. Antiochus placed Seleucid troops in Jerusalem at a citadel known as the Akra to ensure compliance to his edicts. On two occasions Seleucid troops plundered the temple on orders of the king.

THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

Many Jews cooperated willingly or under compulsion with the new regime. Others resisted. The catalyst that sparked the Maccabean revolt happened in Modein, a small village northwest of Jerusalem. When the king's representative came to Modein demanding a sacrifice to prove the loyalty of the village, an aged Jewish priest named Mattathias refused the demand. A fight ensued in which the king's representative and others were killed. Mattathias and his five sons—Simon, John, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan—fled to the Gophna Hills. The passionately orthodox followers of Jewish law, the Hasidim ("Pious Ones"), joined them in armed resistance. The Hasidim rejected any compromise with Greek culture, regarding such compromises as a betrayal of faith. The Pharisees and Essenes, who appear a little later, were spiritual kinsmen of the Hasidim.

Judas Maccabeus. After the death of the aged Mattathias, his son Judas became the leader of the revolt. Called Maccabeus, "the Hammerer," Judas fought a guerrilla war against Seleucid armies sent to crush the revolt. His success depended upon surprise and an intimate knowledge of terrain. He attacked enemy

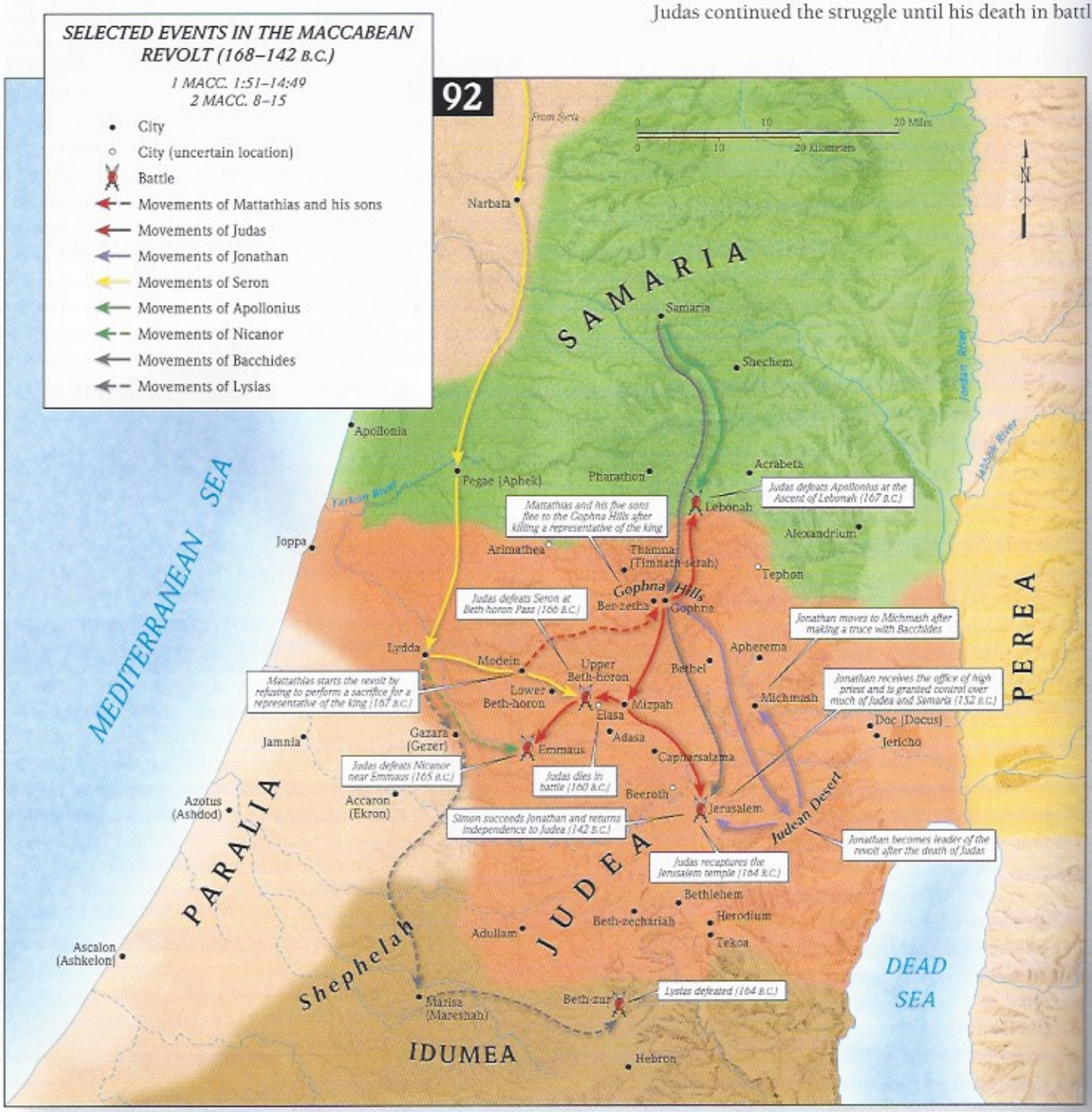
CHART 16: THE FAMILY OF MATTATHIAS AND THE MACCABEAN REVOLT

Mattathias	167–166 B.C.	Aged priest living at Modein; died in 166 B.C.; defied the order to offer a sacrifice in homage to Antiochus IV
Judas "Maccabeus"	166–160 B.C.	Third son of Mattathias'; led revolt from 166-160 B.C.; won victories over Seleucid troops at Beth-horon, Samaria, Emmaus, and Beth-zur; reclaimed and cleansed the Temple at Jerusalem in 164B.C.; gained religious freedom for the Jews in 162 B.C.; died fighting at Elasa
Jonathan	160–142 B.C.	Youngest son of Mattathias; led a guerilla war from the Judean deserts; eventually established a base at Michmash; appointed as High Priest in 152 B.C.; taken prisoner and executed by the Seleucid Trypho in 143 B.C..
Simon	142–134 B.C.	Second eldest son of Mattathias; gained political concessions from Seleucid rulers that led to an independent Jewish state in 142 B.C.; died in a coup in 135 B.C.

forces in the narrow approaches leading to Jerusalem, arming his followers with weapons secured in his victories.

Judas won an impressive string of victories over Seleucid commanders, including the defeat of Apollonius at the Ascent of Lebonah (167 B.C.) (1 Macc. 3:10–12), Seron at the Beth-horon Pass (166 B.C.) (1 Macc. 3:13–23), and Nicanor near Emmaus (165 B.C.) (1 Macc. 3:38–4:3–5). Judas' most impressive victory occurred in December, 164 B.C., when he recaptured the Jerusalem temple, dismantled the pagan altar, and cleansed the temple (1 Macc. 4:36–5:61). The Jewish sacrificial system once again was carried out in accordance with the Law of Moses. The Festival of Hannukah was instituted to commemorate this joyous event. Jesus declared: "I and the Father are one" while He attended this festival two hundred years later (see John 10:22–30).

Judas continued the struggle until his death in battle in



160 B.C. As his confidence increased, Judas grew bolder and suffered defeats. However, the death of Antiochus IV in 164 B.C. led to an important concession to the Jews. Several claimants to the Seleucid throne—including the son of Selecus IV, Demetrius I, and the Seleucid general Lysias—vied for power. To win Jewish support, Lysias granted religious freedom to the Jews (162 B.C.). This act overturned the oppressive edicts of Antiochus IV and satisfied the Hasidim, many of whom gave up the armed struggle. Later Jewish leaders exploited the Seleucid dynastic rivalries to gain additional concessions.

Jonathan. Jonathan became the leader of the revolt upon the death of his brother Judas in 160 B.C. His situation was desperate because many supporters had abandoned the conflict while Seleucid pressure increased. Jonathan moved to the Judean Desert and carried on a strategy of hit-and-run tactics against Bacchides, the Seleucid general sent to oppose him. Bacchides finally made a truce with Jonathan, prompting Jonathan to move to Michmash, where he "began to judge the people; and he destroyed the ungodly out of Israel" (1 Macc. 9:73). Jerusalem, however, remained in the hands of Greek sympathizers and Seleucid troops.

Jonathan skillfully exploited the rivalry between Alexander Balas and Demetrius, both aspirants to the Seleucid throne. Rome and Jonathan backed the pretender Alexander Balas, who claimed to be a son of Antiochus IV. For his support Jonathan received the office of high priest; later, he was granted control over much of Judea and Samaria. Unfortunately, Jonathan was murdered by Trypho, a Seleucid general representing yet another claimant for power—Antiochus VI.

Simon. Simon, the last surviving son of Mattathias, succeeded Jonathan in 143 B.C. During his days, two powerful rivals—Trypho and Demetrius II—fought for the right to rule the Seleucid kingdom. Simon sided with Demetrius in return for the independence of Jerusalem and Judea. In 142 B.C. Demetrius exempted all taxes upon Judea, in effect acknowledging Judean independence. Simon removed by force the despised Seleucid troops garrisoned in the Jerusalem Akra. In gratitude the Jewish people proclaimed Simon high priest and ethnarch ("ruler of a people") "forever, until a faithful prophet should arise" (1 Macc. 14:22). For the first time since 586 B.C., Judea was free.

The Hasmonean Dynasty

Simon and his descendants governed an independent Jewish state approximately eighty years until Roman intervention in 63 B.C. Historians call this line of kings "the Hasmonean Dynasty," named after an obscure ancestor of Mattathias mentioned in the works of the first-century Jewish historian Josephus (see chart of Hasmonean rulers, below). The Hasmonean rulers expanded their control to include most of Palestine. At the same time, these kings betrayed an increasing inclination toward Greek ways and the pomp of pagan royalty. Because they bore the title "high priest" even though Mattathias was not of high-priestly lineage, traditional Jews such as the Pharisees (who first appear in this era) distanced themselves from the Hasmoneans. Tensions between conservative elements and the royal court eventually led to armed conflict in the reign of Alexander Janneus.

Simon expanded the Jewish state to the coast when he seized Joppa and Gezer. He reaffirmed Judea's status as an ally of Rome. Antiochus VII Sidetes, one of the last effective Seleucid kings, tried to regain Palestine, but Simon and his sons repulsed the invasion near Modein.

In 135 B.C. Simon and most of his family were murdered in a palace coup at a banquet held at Dok near Jericho. The coup leaders intended to hand Judea over to Antiochus VII. The coup failed because Simon's son John Hyrcanus was at Gazara. John managed to reach Jerusalem, where he was proclaimed high priest.

CHART 17: HASMONEAN RULERS

Name	Dates of Rule	Significant Events
John Hyrcanus	135–104 B.C.	Son of Simon, last of the Maccabean brothers; conquered Medeba, Idumea, Samaria, and Joppa; Pharisees and Sadducees first appear in his reign
Aristobulus	104–103 B.C.	Oldest son of John Hyrcanus; eliminated all but one of his brothers in securing his rule; Upper Galilee conquered during his reign; first Hasmonean to use the title "king"
Alexander Jannaeus	103–76 B.C.	Brother of Aristobulus who married his widow, Salome Alexandra; added territories along the coast (Gaza, Dora, Anthedon, Raphia, Strato's Tower); extended Jewish rule in the Transjordan; civil war between Jannaeus and the Pharisees and their supporters
Salome Alexandra	76–67 B.C.	Widow of Alexander Jannaeus; assumed civil authority; appointed her eldest son Hyrcanus II high priest; favored the Pharisees
Hyrcanus II and Aristobulus II	67–63 B.C.	Rival sons of Salome Alexandra; Aristobulus, supported by Sadducees, seized power from Hyrcanus II; the Idumean governor Antipater used the Nabateans in an attempt to restore Hyrcanus to power; in 63 B.C. Pompey intervened in the dispute


93
JEWISH EXPANSION UNDER THE HASMONEAN DYNASTY
City
City (uncertain location)
Mountain peak
Judea before the Maccabean revolt
Conquests of Jonathan
Conquests of Simon
Conquests of Hyrcanus I
Conquests of Aristobulus I
Conquests of Alexander Jannaeus
MEDITERRANEAN SEA
Coele-Syria
PHOENICIA
ITUREA
GALILEE
SAMARIA
JUDEA
PEREA
Gilead
IDUMEA
PHILISTIA
NABATEA
Arabah
Sea of Galilee
DEAD SEA
Aristobulus completes the conquest of Upper Galilee by defeating the Itureans (104 B.C.)
Jannaeus subdues the attack of Demetrius III and executes 800 Pharisees in reprisal (88 B.C.)
Hyrcanus I destroys Samaritan temple (128 B.C.)
Simon is murdered in a palace coup (135 B.C.)
John Hyrcanus attacks and conquers Medeba in 129 B.C.
Sidon
Damascus
Tyre
Panias
Cadasa (Kedesh)
Gischala (Gush Halav)
Asor (Hazor)
Seleucia
Ptolemais (Acco)
Bethsaida
Gennesaret
Taricheae (Magdala)
Jotapata
Asochis (Hannathon)
Cana
Arbela
Dathema
Gamala
Mt. Carmel
Sepphoris
Hippos
Geba
Mt. Tabor
Philoteria (Beth-Yerah)
Abila
Gadara
Dora
Legio (Megiddo)
Strato's Tower
Scythopolis (Beth-shan)
Pella
Dion
Narbata
Samaria
Gerasa (Jerash)
Shechem
Amathus
Apollonia
Pegae (Aphek)
Acrabeta
Coreae
Pharathon
Alexandrium
Joppa
Arimathea
Lebonah
Zeredah
Gophna
Gedor (Gadara)
Jazer
Adida
Lydda
Modein
Berzetha
Bethel
Apherema
Tyrus
Philadelphia (Amman)
Beth-horon
Mizpah
Abila
Jamina
Gazara (Gezer)
Adasa
Michmash
Doc
Jericho
Esbus (Heshbon)
Kidron
Emmaus
Beth-ramatha
Azotus (Ashdod)
Accaron (Ekron)
Beth-haccherem
Jerusalem
Mt. Nebo
Samaga
Hyrcania
Medeba
Adullam
Bethlehem
Beth-basi
Herodium
Ascalon (Ashkelon)
Keilah
Tekoa
Marisa (Mareshah)
Nezib
Beth-zur
Asphar
Lemba
Machaerus
Lachish
Hebron
Anthedon
Adora (Adoraim)
Gaza
En-gedi
Gerar
Orda
Raphia
Masada
Beersheba
Malatha
Kir-Moab
Rhinocorura
Oronaim (Horonaim)
Elusa
Gabalis
Zoar
Sela
0 10 20 30 40 50 Miles
0 10 20 30 40 50 Kilometers
34 E
35 E
36 E
33 N
32 N
31 N

JOHN HYRCANUS

Antiochus VII's death in 129 B.C. left John Hyrcanus in a position to extend his rule further. In that year John attacked Medeba east of the Dead Sea and added the surrounding territory. A year later, he led a campaign into Samaria, eventually destroying the Samaritan temple on Mount Gerizim. John conquered Idumea in 125 B.C., forcing the Idumeans to submit to Jewish religion or leave. A second campaign northward against the cities of Samaria and Scythopolis brought more of Samaria and the Esdraelon Valley under Jewish control.

The thirty-year rule of John Hyrcanus (135–105/4 B.C.) lifted the political and economic fortunes of the Jews, but it revealed some curious features. The Hasmonean Dynasty took on the characteristics of a Hellenistic monarchy. John employed foreign mercenaries in his army. He changed the names of his children from Hebrew into Greek. Although he avoided the title "king," his court gradually assumed the trappings of Greek culture. Religion became a tool of conquest with John and his successors, as conquered people were forcibly converted to Judaism.

The majority of Jews supported John, but such actions stirred grave concerns among orthodox groups. John favored the Sadducees over the Pharisees. The Sadducees came from the aristocratic landowners and priestly upper classes who were more comfortable with royal power and, perhaps, less offended by certain accommodations to Greek customs.

ARISTOBULUS I

The brief reign of Aristobulus I (104–103 B.C.) was marked by cruelty. The eldest son of John Hyrcanus, Aristobulus received the high priesthood, but his mother occupied the throne. In a bid for complete power, Aristobulus imprisoned his mother— who later starved to death— and all of his brothers except one. He was the first Hasmonean to claim the title "king." The one enduring accomplishment of his reign was the conquest of Upper Galilee, which he wrestled from the Itureans, an Arab tribe inhabiting lands north and east of the Sea of Galilee. Aristobulus forced the Itureans to submit to circumcision.

ALEXANDER JANNAEUS

Alexander Jannaeus succeeded his brother Aristobulus upon his death in 103 B.C. To solidify his claim to the throne, Alexander married the widow of Aristobulus, Salome Alexandra. Jannaeus pursued a policy of conquest, extending the Jewish state to its greatest extent, with victories in Transjordan, the southern coastal plain (Raphia, Gaza, Anthedon), and the Sharon Plain (Strato's Tower, Dora). Campaigns in the Transjordan increased the Jewish state from Panias to the Dead Sea, with the exception of Philadelphia.

Commercial success followed as import taxes, tariffs, and exports derived from Jannaeus' control of trade routes produced revenues for the royal coffers. However, social and religious tensions ignited a six-year civil war pitting Jannaeus and his Sadducean supporters against the Pharisees. The Pharisees appealed to the Seleucid king Demetrius III for help. Demetrius III responded by attacking and inflicting a serious defeat on Jannaeus near Shechem. The presence of a Seleucid king in Palestine caused many Jews to support the Hasmonean Dynasty. Ultimately Jannaeus triumphed, although the political cost was great. Jannaeus executed eight hundred Pharisees and their families in reprisal and thereby alienated many Jews.

THE END OF INDEPENDENCE

The widow of Jannaeus, Salome Alexandra, assumed civil authority upon her husband's death and reigned nine years (76–67 B.C.). Her eldest son, Hyrcanus II, assumed the role of high priest. Under Salome's leadership the Pharisees rose to power in the Sanhedrin. Later Jewish literature described Salome's reign as extraordinarily prosperous, reflecting the Talmud's bias toward the Pharisees. However, upon Salome's death, her younger son, Aristobulus II, with support from the Sadducees, challenged the right of Hyrcanus II to rule. The Pharisees supported Hyrcanus in the ensuing civil war.

Hyrcanus was the weaker of the two brothers, although he was High Priest. After a military defeat, he was ready to surrender his cause when an Idumean governor named Antipater intervened on his behalf. Antipater, the father of Herod (the Great), was from a line of Idumean governors who served the Hasmonean Dynasty. Antipater, recognizing the opportunity to become a power broker, backed Hyrcanus, securing the aid of the Nabatean king Aretas III. The ploy worked; Aristobulus was defeated and put on the defensive.

The Jewish civil war came at an inopportune time. In 64 B.C. the Roman general Pompey conquered Syria and threatened Palestine. Supporters of both Jewish factions appealed to Pompey for help in deciding the matter. Pompey favored Hyrcanus—to the chagrin of Aristobulus, who resisted Pompey's decision. Pompey marched on Jerusalem in 63 B.C., seized the city, and established Hyrcanus as a High Priest. The era of Roman rule over the Jews had begun.