



## Part Two

### Old Testament Archaeology 4

By

Mark McGee

# Chapters

Handwriting On the Wall 3

Ezekiel 12

Historic Reliability 33

# Handwriting On the Wall

*“The handwriting is on the wall.”*

The next time you hear someone use that phrase, ask them where it comes from. Many people have no idea it comes from the Book of Daniel.

*“In the same hour the fingers of a man’s hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king’s palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote ... Then the fingers of the hand were sent from Him, and this writing was written. And this is the inscription that was written: MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN.” Daniel 5:5, 24-25*

In the last part of our study about archaeology and the Book of Daniel, we saw the evidence supporting the historical claim that Belshazzar ruled as a co-regent from Babylon. The “handwriting on the wall” concerns the last night of Belshazzar’s rule and the first days of the Persians conquering Babylon. Does archaeology support the details listed in Daniel? If so, what does that mean?

## Ancient Histories

The Persian defeat of Babylon is well-documented. The Greek historian Herodotus wrote during the 5th century BC that the Babylonians fought the Persians for a short time outside the city of

Babylon before retreating back into the city.

*“So when in his advance he came near to the city, the Babylonians joined battle with him, and having been worsted in the fight they were shut up close within their city. But knowing well even before this that Cyrus was not apt to remain still, and seeing him lay hands on every nation equally, they had brought in provisions beforehand for very many years. So while these made no account of the siege, Cyrus was in straits what to do, for much time went by and his affairs made no progress onwards.” Herodotus, Histories 1:190*

Herodotus wrote that the Persian soldiers took the city by surprise because “they chanced to be holding a festival, they went on dancing and rejoicing during this time until they learnt the truth only too well.” (Herodotus, Histories 1:191)

The Persian historian Xenophon (5th century BC) also wrote about the festival “during which all Babylon was accustomed to drink and revel all night long.” (Cyropaedia of Xenophon; The Life of Cyrus the Great, 7.5.15)

We learn more about that festival in the Book of Daniel.

*“Belshazzar the king made a great feast for a thousand of his lords, and drank wine in the presence of the thousand. While he tasted the wine, Belshazzar gave the command to bring the gold and silver vessels which his father Nebuchadnezzar had*

*taken from the temple which had been in Jerusalem, that the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines might drink from them. Then they brought the gold vessels that had been taken from the temple of the house of God which had been in Jerusalem; and the king and his lords, his wives, and his concubines drank from them. They drank wine, and praised the gods of gold and silver, bronze and iron, wood and stone.”*

*Daniel 5:1-4*

The Babylonians had just suffered defeat outside the city of Babylon at the hands of the Persians. Why would they be celebrating? It may have been Belshazzar's way of boosting morale among those who would be involved in helping him lead the people of Babylon during what could have been a long siege. The Nabonidus Chronicle (6th century BC) related that Nabonidus, Belshazzar's father, fled from the Persians days before the army entered Babylon. Another possibility is that Belshazzar used the festival as his own coronation as sole regent after he heard what had happened to Nabonidus. Yet another possibility might be that the Babylonians were observing an annual feast that happened to fall on that date and the Persian soldier took advantage of the leaders and people partying and not paying as much attention to the security of their city.

Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar brought the gold vessels from the Jerusalem Temple to Babylon many years decades earlier and housed them in a pagan temple treasury (details about what was taken found in 2 Kings 25:13-17). Why did Belshazzar have the

sacred vessels brought to the banquet? It may have been his attempt to demonstrate the superiority of the Babylonian gods to all other gods, including the Hebrew God. Whatever Belshazzar's reason, it did not end well for him or the people with him.

*“In the same hour the fingers of a man's hand appeared and wrote opposite the lampstand on the plaster of the wall of the king's palace; and the king saw the part of the hand that wrote. Then the king's countenance changed, and his thoughts troubled him, so that the joints of his hips were loosened and his knees knocked against each other. The king cried aloud to bring in the astrologers, the Chaldeans, and the soothsayers. The king spoke, saying to the wise men of Babylon, ‘Whoever reads this writing, and tells me its interpretation, shall be clothed with purple and have a chain of gold around his neck; and he shall be the third ruler in the kingdom.’ Now all the king's wise men came, but they could not read the writing, or make known to the king its interpretation. Then King Belshazzar was greatly troubled, his countenance was changed, and his lords were astonished. The queen, because of the words of the king and his lords, came to the banquet hall. The queen spoke, saying, ‘O king, live forever! Do not let your thoughts trouble you, nor let your countenance change. There is a man in your kingdom in whom is the Spirit of the Holy God. And in the days of your father, light and understanding and wisdom, like the wisdom of the gods, were found in him; and King Nebuchadnezzar your father—your father the king—made him*

*chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers. Inasmuch as an excellent spirit, knowledge, understanding, interpreting dreams, solving riddles, and explaining enigmas were found in this Daniel, whom the king named Belteshazzar, now let Daniel be called, and he will give the interpretation.” Daniel 5:5-12*

Herodotus recorded the name of the ‘queen’ who told Belshazzar about Daniel as ‘Nitocris’ (Herodotus, [Histories 1:185-188](#)). She may have been the daughter of Nebuchadnezzar, wife of Nabonidus and [mother of Belshazzar](#). Herodotus recorded how Nitocris directed workers to alter the flow of the river Euphrates ‘so that the Medes might not have dealings with her kingdom and learn of her affairs (Herodotus, [Histories 1:185-186](#)). Herodotus also recorded how the Medes-Persians were able to overcome Queen Nitocris’ defenses, enter the city of Babylon and defeat the Babylonians while they were dancing and rejoicing while holding a festival in the city (Herodotus, [Histories 1:190-191](#)) – possibly the same festival described in Daniel 5.

The ‘queen’ told Belshazzar about a man that King Nebuchadnezzar had made ‘chief of the magicians, astrologers, Chaldeans, and soothsayers.’ That man was Daniel. The queen strongly recommended that Belshazzar call for Daniel to come and ‘give the interpretation’ to the writing on the wall.

Daniel did come to the festival and told Belshazzar that God sent the fingers of the hand writing on the wall because Belshazzar had lifted himself 'up against the Lord of heaven' (Daniel 5:23). Daniel interpreted the words on the wall – MENE, MENE, TEKEL, UPHARSIN – as 'God has numbered your kingdom, and finished it ... You have been weighed in the balances, and found wanting ... Your kingdom has been divided, and given to the Medes and Persians' (Daniel 5:26-28). Belshazzar then gave the command that Daniel be clothed with purple along with a chain of gold around his neck, and that a proclamation be made about Daniel becoming the 'third ruler in the kingdom' (Daniel 5:29). As we've seen earlier, Belshazzar would have been the second ruler in the kingdom after his father, Nabonidus, so the highest position Belshazzar could have given Daniel was third ruler in the kingdom.

## Darius or Cyrus?

*"That very night Belshazzar, king of the Chaldeans, was slain. And Darius the Mede received the kingdom, being about sixty-two years old." Daniel 5:30-31*

Daniel wrote that Darius the Mede received the Kingdom of Babylon, but Herodotus wrote that Cyrus received it. Which one is correct?

That's where I **had** Christians when I was an atheist. All I had to do was ask Christians to 'prove it' and they were stuck. They were not able to present any proof that Darius the Mede received the Kingdom

of Babylon. In fact, Darius didn't even become king until almost 20 years after Persia defeated Babylon. Right? Well ...

Archaeologists have discovered evidence for two leaders named Darius during the 6th century BC. One is known as Darius the Mede and the other is known as Darius I. Let's begin with a look at the history of "Darius."

## Darius

Archaeologists have discovered that several ancient rulers used the name "Darius." They include Darius I, The Great (522-486 BC); Darius II, Ochus (423-404 BC); and Darius III, Codomannus (336-330 BC). Even though each of these men ruled during different centuries, they all had the same title name – **Darius**. According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, Darius II Ochus "adopted the name of Darius on his accession to the throne."

## Darius the Mede

Daniel mentioned Darius the Mede by name eight times (Daniel 5:31; 6:1, 6, 9, 25, 28; 9:1; 11:1). Daniel described Darius' lineage in 9:1 – "Darius the son of Ahasuerus, of the lineage of the Medes, who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans." Daniel also mentioned that he had served during the reigns of Darius and Cyrus the Persian (Daniel 6:28), which would appear to present them as different rulers, though some archaeologists (e.g. Donald J. Wiseman, former

Professor of Assyriology at the University of London and head of the Department of Western Asiatic Antiquities of The British Museum) have said that the word “and” in Hebrew can be translated as “even” – “So this Daniel prospered in the reign of Darius, even in the reign of Cyrus the Persian.” One theory is that the same ruler had two names because of the mixed empire of the time (Median/Persian); Darius the Mede for the Median part of the empire and Cyrus for the Persian part of the empire.

The name *Ahasuerus* is found multiple times in the Old Testament: once in Daniel, once in Ezra and 28 times in Esther. The Hebrew name comes from an old Persian name, *Khshayarsha*, and may have been a royal title name similar to Darius. Some historians believe Ahasuerus, the father of Darius the Mede, may have been Astyages, the last king of the Median empire (died 550 BC). Others believe Ahasuerus may have been Cyaxares I (died 585 BC). The Ahasuerus mentioned in Esther and Ezra may have been Xerxes I (died 465 BC). Esther is described in the Book of Esther as the wife of Ahasuerus/Xerxes.

One key to look at historically is that Daniel listed Darius the Mede’s age at the time of Belshazzar’s death and Babylon’s defeat (539 BC) as 62-years-old. That means Darius would have been born about 601 BC. Mentioning his age is a specific detail not mentioned for other people listed in Daniel, so it may have been listed there to help identify Darius the Mede or for some other reason known to Daniel.

Dates for the birth of Cyrus II range from 600 BC to 575 BC. The earlier date of 600 BC, if true, would mean he would have been about 62-years-old when he defeated Babylon in 539 BC. That could also support theories of some archaeologists (like Professor Wiseman) that Cyrus II and Darius the Mede were the same person.

Another theory is that Darius the Mede was a satrap of Babylon named Gobryas. Greek historian Xenophon (5th century BC) in his Cyropaedia recorded that the military leader who led Cyrus's army into Babylon was General Gobryas (also spelled Ugbaru and Gubaru). Xenophon described him as an "old man" who was still able to lead the army, which might fit with the description of a 62-year-old Darius the Mede.

The Nabonidus Chronicle also mentions Ugbaru as leading the army of Cyrus into Babylon.

*"On the sixteenth day, Ugbaru, governor of Gutium, and the army of Cyrus, without battle they entered Babylon."* The Nabonidus Chronicle

These 'possibilities' concerning the identity of Darius the Mede were enough for me to continue investigating the historical reliability of the Old Testament.

# Ezekiel

In past studies we saw that archaeologists have discovered records of three ancient deportations of people from Judah to Babylon: 605 BC, 597 BC, and 586 BC. Daniel was taken during the first captivity in 605 BC (Daniel 1:1-7). Many scholars believe Ezekiel was taken during the second captivity in 597 BC.

One thing the Books of Daniel and Ezekiel have in common among critics is they believe both were written later than the 6th century BC. The reason for that is simple – if Daniel and Ezekiel wrote during the 6th century BC, then the accuracy of their prophecies would be formidable to their opponents. As we saw in earlier studies, the Hebrew writing in Daniel is consistent with a 6th century BC dating, similar to Ezekiel's Hebrew. Could it be that critics oppose these findings because of their anti-supernatural bias?

Let's see what we can learn from archaeology – keeping in mind that this series is about what archaeological evidence existed in 1971 when I was an atheist investigating the claims of the Bible.

## Archaeology

*“Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the*

*fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there." Ezekiel 1:1-3*

The first three verses of the Book of Ezekiel are specific about the time and place where Ezekiel lived when he first saw visions from God. Ezekiel was a Hebrew priest who lived 'in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar' in the "thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month." Ezekiel may have been referring to his own age as being 30-years-old. The significance may have come from the age that Jewish men served as priests (see Numbers 4). The fifth year of "King Jehoiachin's captivity" is significant because it dates Ezekiel's vision to about 593 BC.

According to 2 Kings 24, Jehoiachin was 18-years-old when he became king, but he reigned in Jerusalem for only three months before King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon, "in the eighth year of his reign," attacked Jerusalem and took King Jehoiachin and the royal family prisoners back to Babylon.

An archaeological find known as the "Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle" has helped historians date the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar II. The clay tablet (ABC5) was discovered during 19th century AD excavations in Babylon, but not translated for several decades. It details the first decade of Nebuchadnezzar's reign (total reign 605-562 BC). Archaeologist and Assyriologist Donald Wiseman worked

for years at the British Museum and was able to decipher the Babylonian text. In 1956, Wiseman established the date of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of Jerusalem based on the ancient tablet as March 16, 597 BC.

*“In the seventh year (of Nebuchadnezzar-599 BC.) in the month Chislev (Nov/Dec) the king of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti (Syria/Palestine) he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar (16 March) he conquered the city and took the king (Jeconiah) prisoner. He installed in his place a king (Zedekiah) of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent forth to Babylon.” No 24 WA21946, The Babylonian Chronicles, The British Museum*

This dating by a Babylonian clay tablet matches the Bible's (2 Kings 24) dating of Nebuchadnezzar's capture of King Jehoiachin in the eighth year of Nebuchadnezzar's reign. Based on the Bible and the Babylonian Chronicle tablet, the fifth year of Jehoiachin's captivity would have been in 593 BC (possibly July 593 BC). Ezekiel used the year of Jehoiachin's captivity (and the beginning of his own exile) throughout his writings to date a variety of events (e.g. Ezekiel 1:2; 8:1; 20:1; 24:1; 29:1; 30:20; 31:1)

The name of the village where Ezekiel spoke to the Hebrew captives after God called him to a prophetic ministry was “Tel Abib, who dwelt by the River Chebar” (Ezekiel 3:15). Archaeologists have led many

excavations in the Khabur Valley and some believe the Khabur River is the same as the River Chebar. Professor Hermann Vollrat Hilprecht of the University of Pennsylvania believed he discovered the ancient Chebar River in the name Canal Kabari near Nippur. He conducted the Babylonian Expedition in the late 19th century AD. The modern city of Tel Aviv, Israel, may have been named after the ancient town of Tel Abib in Babylon.

The timing listed in the first few verses of the Book of Ezekiel places Ezekiel as a captive in Babylon in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity (593 BC). Jehoiachin reigned in Judah for only three months and was taken to Babylon in 597 BC along with many of his subjects. Ezekiel may have been among those early captives taken from Judah to Babylon.

## An Objection Overruled

One objection to the authenticity of Ezekiel is the author's dating events by "King Jehoiachin's captivity." Archaeologist W.F. Albright addressed the criticism of opponents, like C.C. Torrey, who believed Ezekiel was a revision of a 3rd-century pseudepigraphon because Jehoiachin would not have been referred to as "king." German archaeologist Robert Koldewey excavated the ancient city of Babylon from 1899 – 1917 and discovered tablets in the royal archives that mentioned food rations for "Ya'u-kinu, king of the land of Yahudu" and his sons.

*(a) To Ya'u-kin, king [of the land of Yaudu].*

*(b) 1/2 (PI) for Ya'u kinu, king of the land of Ya[hu-du]*

*2 1/2 sila for the fi[ve]sons of the king of the land of Yahudu*

*4 sila for eight men, Judaeans [each] 1/2 [sila]*

*(c) 1/2 (PI) for Ya'u [-kinu]*

*2 ½ sila for the five sons...*

*½ (PI) for Yaku-kinu, son of the king of the land of Yakudu*

*2 1/2 sila for the five sons of the king of Yakundu by the hand of Kanama.*

*(d) ....Ya]u-kinu, king of he land of Yahudu [...the five sons of the king] of the land of Yahudu by the hand of Kanama.  
(<http://fontes.lstc.edu/~rklein/Doc5/grabbe.htm>)*

The Babylonians viewed Jehoiachin as the rightful king of Judah, thus supporting Ezekiel's use of his title. Archaeologists dated the rations tablets from early 6th century BC, which also supports the biblical dating of the Book of Ezekiel.

## Specific Dating

One of the attributes of Ezekiel's writing that stood out to me as a journalist was his use of specific dates and places in referring to his own historical connection to the exile. That's the kind of information I would expect in an historical document. Plus, historical declarations can be compared to historical detail.

*“Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the River Chebar, that the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth day of the month, which was in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.” Ezekiel 1:1-3*

*“And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.” Ezekiel 8:1*

*“It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth month, on the tenth day of the month, that certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me.” Ezekiel 20:1*

*“Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, write down the name of the day, this very day—the king of Babylon started his siege against Jerusalem this very day.’” Ezekiel 24:1-2*

*“And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, ‘Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.’” Ezekiel 26:1-2*

*“In the tenth year, in the tenth month, on the twelfth day of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt.’” Ezekiel 29:1-2*

*“Now it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third month, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude...’” Ezekiel 31:1-2*

*“And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth month, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt, and say to him...’” Ezekiel 32:1-2*

*“It came to pass also in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying...”*

*Ezekiel 32:17*

*“And it came to pass in the twelfth year of our captivity, in the tenth month, on the fifth day of the month, that one who had escaped from Jerusalem came to me and said, ‘The city has been captured!’”* Ezekiel 33:21

*“In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth day of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the Lord was upon me; and He took me there.”* Ezekiel 40:1

## The Prophet

Ezekiel is known as one of Israel's greatest prophets, but how good was he really? His prophecies against Israel's enemies were specific, so how did Ezekiel do? How many did he get right and how many did he get wrong?

More than 800 verses in Ezekiel contain predictive (future) material. That's more than half of the Book of Ezekiel. The prophecies of Ezekiel concern the doom of Jerusalem, the hope of Jerusalem, and the judgment of foreign nations and cities.

- Ezekiel's prophecies concerning the doom of Jerusalem years before its destruction by the Babylonians are specific and many; including the type of siege against Jerusalem, what the people of Jerusalem would eat and drink during the siege, what their life would be like during the siege, how people in Jerusalem would die because of the siege, and the Babylonian defilement of the Jewish temple.
- Ezekiel's prophecies concerning the hope of Jews returning to Jerusalem to rebuild the city and the temple
- Ezekiel's prophecies concerning the judgment of foreign nations and cities; including Tyre, Sidon and Egypt

## Dates of Ezekiel's Visions

First, let's look at the years Ezekiel received the prophetic visions –

**Ezekiel's Call Vision** – “Now it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth *month*, on the fifth *day* of the month, as I *was* among the captives by the River Chebar, *that* the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God. On the fifth *day* of the month, which *was* in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the River Chebar; and the hand of the Lord was upon him there.” Ezekiel 1:1-3 (593 BC)

**Ezekiel's Visit to Jerusalem Vision** – “And it came to pass in the sixth year, in the sixth *month*, on the fifth *day* of the month, as I sat in my house with the elders of Judah sitting before me, that the hand of the Lord God fell upon me there.” Ezekiel 8:1 (592 BC)

**Ezekiel's Rebellion of Israel Vision** – “It came to pass in the seventh year, in the fifth *month*, on the tenth *day* of the month, *that* certain of the elders of Israel came to inquire of the Lord, and sat before me. Then the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, speak to the elders of Israel, and say to them, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘Have you come to inquire of Me? *As I live,*’ says the Lord God, ‘I will not be inquired of by you.’ ‘Will you judge them, son of man, will you judge *them?* Then make known to them the abominations of their fathers.’” Ezekiel 20:1-4 (591 BC)

**Ezekiel's Start of Jerusalem Siege Vision** – “Again, in the ninth year, in the tenth month, on the tenth *day* of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, write down the name of the day, this very day—the king of Babylon started his siege against Jerusalem this very day.’” Ezekiel 24:1-2 (588 BC)

**Ezekiel's Tyre Judgment Vision** – “And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, ‘Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.’” Ezekiel 26:1-2 (587 BC)

**Ezekiel's Egypt Judgment Vision** – “In the tenth year, in the tenth *month*, on the twelfth *day* of the month, the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, set your face against Pharaoh king of Egypt, and prophesy against him, and against all Egypt.’ Ezekiel 29:1-2 (587 BC)

**Ezekiel's Judgment Against Pharaoh Visions** – “And it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the first *month*, on the seventh *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, I have broken the arm of Pharaoh king of Egypt; and see, it has not been bandaged for healing, nor a splint put on to bind it, to make it strong enough to hold a sword.’ Ezekiel 30:20-21 (587 BC) .... and .... “Now it came to pass in the eleventh year, in the third *month*, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, say to Pharaoh king of Egypt and to his multitude ...’ Ezekiel 31:1-2 (June 21, 587 BC) ... and ... “And it came to pass in the twelfth year, in the twelfth *month*, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, take up a lamentation for Pharaoh king of Egypt ...’ Ezekiel 32:1-2 (585 BC) .... and .... “It came to pass also in the twelfth year, on the fifteenth *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying: ‘Son of man, wail over the multitude of Egypt, And cast them down to the depths of the earth, Her and the daughters of the famous nations, With those who go down to the Pit: ‘Whom do you surpass in beauty? Go down, be placed with the uncircumcised.’ Ezekiel 32:17-19 (585 BC)

**Ezekiel's Babylonia Plunder Egypt Vision** – “And it came to pass in the twenty-seventh year, in the first *month*, on the first *day* of the month, *that* the word of the Lord came to me, saying, ‘Son of man, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon caused his army to labor strenuously against Tyre; every head was made bald, and every shoulder rubbed raw; yet neither he nor his army received wages from Tyre, for the labor which they expended on it. Therefore thus says the Lord God: ‘Surely I will give the land of Egypt to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon; he shall take away her wealth, carry off her spoil, and remove her pillage; and that will be the wages for his army. I have given him the land of Egypt *for* his labor, because they worked for Me,’ says the Lord God.” Ezekiel 29:17-20 (571 BC)

**Ezekiel's New Jerusalem Vision** – “In the twenty-fifth year of our captivity, at the beginning of the year, on the tenth *day* of the month, in the fourteenth year after the city was captured, on the very same day the hand of the Lord was upon me; and He took me there. In the visions of God He took me into the land of Israel and set me on a very high mountain; on it toward the south was something like the structure of a city.” Ezekiel 40:1-2 (573 BC)

## Dates of Ezekiel's Fulfilled Prophecies

Second, let's look at the years some of Ezekiel prophetic visions were fulfilled. Keep in mind the key dates about Ezekiel: Ezekiel taken captive in Jerusalem and moved to Babylon in 597 BC; Ezekiel received his visions about Jerusalem's destruction between 593-590

BC; Ezekiel's last recorded prophecy in 570 BC. I've also listed the words of the prophet Jeremiah who was a witness of some of Ezekiel's fulfilled prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem:

## Prophetic Fulfillment

- Nebuchadnezzar and Babylonian army began two-year siege of Jerusalem in 588 BC
- Jews inside the besieged city of Jerusalem experienced a severe famine (586 BC)
- Nebuchadnezzar slaughtered King Zedekiah's sons before his eyes, then blinded Zedekiah, bound him with chains and took him to Babylon in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52:10-11)
- Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem, including the temple, the king's palace, all the houses of Jerusalem, and all the houses of the nobles in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52:12-14)
- The Babylonian commander of guards deported many of the Jews from Jerusalem to Babylon, but left some of the poorest Jews in Judah to be vinedressers and farmers in 586 BC (Jeremiah 52:15-16)
- Tyre was attacked by "many nations" .... Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to the mainland city of Tyre for 13 years (586-573 BC) until Tyre agreed to pay tribute ... the Persians (539 BC) .... Alexander the Great laid siege to the island city of Tyre (333-322 BC) and threw rubble from Tyre's mainland and tossed it (timber, stones, soil) into the sea to build a land bridge to the island city .... Macedonians (315 BC), Ptolemies (290 BC),

- Seleucids (195 BC) and Romans (64 BC) also occupied Tyre prior to the time of Christ
- Nebuchadnezzar attacked Egypt and took “plunder” from the campaign in 568 BC
  - Babylon’s King Evil-Merodach pardoned Judah’s imprisoned King Jehoiachin and released him from prison in 562 BC and was given a regular allowance for the rest of his life (Jeremiah 52:31-34)
  - The beginning of the resurrection and reunification of Judah and Israel as a people (Ezekiel 38 – 1948 AD)
- 

Many of Ezekiel’s prophecies are still future. They deal with the coming Messianic Kingdom when Jesus will rule the world from David’s throne. However, that did not interest me when I was an atheist looking at the historical reliability of the Bible. I did not believe in the supernatural and was only interested in what evidence existed that might validate historical portions of Old and New Testament texts.

## Prophecy Proclaimed

Ezekiel spent several years prophesying about God’s judgment on Jerusalem and other nations in the region (Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia, Tyre, Sidon, Egypt). Those years are important to know when comparing prophecy “proclaimed” to prophecy “fulfilled.”

605 BC — Nebuchadnezzar's army invades Judah for the first time and takes many captives to Babylon, including Daniel. Jeremiah and other Hebrew prophets correctly proclaimed this event before it happened.

598 BC — Nebuchadnezzar's army invades Judah for a second time and takes many captives to Babylon, including Ezekiel.

593 BC — Ezekiel sees visions of God and receives his first prophecies concerning the destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple. Ezekiel continued to prophecy until about 571 BC.

586 BC — Nebuchadnezzar's army invades Judah for a third and final time, killing many Jews, taking many captives, and destroying the city of Jerusalem and the Temple.

585 – 571 BC — Ezekiel receives prophecies about the restoration of Israel – “Therefore say to the house of Israel, ‘Thus says the Lord God: ‘I do not do *this* for your sake, O house of Israel, but for My holy name’s sake, which you have profaned among the nations wherever you went. And I will sanctify My great name, which has been profaned among the nations, which you have profaned in their midst; and the nations shall know that I *am* the Lord,’ says the Lord God, ‘when I am hallowed in you before their eyes.’” Ezekiel 36:22-23

## Prophecy Fulfilled

**Jerusalem and Temple Destroyed** — We have written previously about the archaeological evidence for Assyria's defeat of the northern kingdom of Israel and Babylonia's defeat of the southern kingdom of Judah. Some of the archaeological finds that have confirmed Nebuchadnezzar's attacks on and eventual destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple (along with the captivity of Jews from Judah to Babylon) include the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle, The Lachish Letters, The Babylonian Chronicles, Nebuchadnezzar's Eunuch Tablet, Jehoiakin Inscription, Eliakim Seal, Gedaliah Seal, Nabonidus Stele, Al-Yahudu Clay Tablets,

**Jerusalem and Temple Restored** — We have written previously about the archaeological evidence for Persian kings mentioned in the Bible as being involved with the exiled Jews. The first who supported the restoration of Jerusalem and the Temple (along with the return of many Jews to Judah) was King Cyrus. Persian kings mentioned in the Old Testament in addition to Cyrus are Darius, Xerxes (Ahasuerus) and Artaxerxes. Cambyses is not mentioned by name in the Old Testament, but Daniel prophesied about “three more kings will arise in Persia, and the fourth shall be far richer than them all” (Daniel 11:2). The tombs of the kings are located in the mountain range of Husain Kuh at Haqsh-i-Rustam. The Silver Bowl of Artaxerxes in The British Museum includes the names of three Persian kings in an inscription in punched Old Persian cuneiform

around the inner rim of the bowl –

*“Artaxerxes, the great king, king of kings, king of countries, son of Xerxes the king, of Xerxes [who was] son of Darius the king, the Achaemenian, in whose house this drinking cup/saucer was made.”*

The dating of the reign of Persian kings in the Old Testament is consistent with archaeological dating (e.g. Silver Bowl of Artaxerxes, Tombs of Cyrus, Darius, Xerxes, Artaxerxes, Cyrus Cylinder, Cyrus Brick Inscriptions, Elephantine Papyri, Behistun Inscription, Jehoiachin Ration Record, Babylonian Chronicles, Jar handles stamped with name of King Jehoiachin at Tell Beit Mirsim and Beth-Shemesh).

[We will look deeper into the rebuilding of Jerusalem and the Jewish Temple when we investigate the Old Testament books of Ezra and Nehemiah.]

**Prophecy Against Tyre** — Ezekiel prophesied against the powerful and wealthy Phoenician city-state of Tyre during the early part of the 6th century BC –

*“And it came to pass in the eleventh year, on the first day of the month, that the word of the Lord came to me, saying, Son of man, because Tyre has said against Jerusalem, ‘Aha! She is broken who was the gateway of the peoples; now she is turned over to me; I shall be filled; she is laid waste.’ Therefore thus*

*says the Lord God: 'Behold, I am against you, O Tyre, and will cause many nations to come up against you, as the sea causes its waves to come up.' Ezekiel 26:1-3*

Ezekiel's prophecy says that God will "cause many nations" to come against them. The first nation was Babylon –

*"For thus says the Lord God: 'Behold, I will bring against Tyre from the north Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, king of kings, with horses, with chariots, and with horsemen, and an army with many people.' Ezekiel 26:7-14*

Nebuchadnezzar's army besieged the mainland city of Tyre for 13 years (585-572 BC). The Achaemenid Empire conquered the city in 539 BC and controlled it until Alexander the Great laid siege against the island city for several months in 332 BC and captured it. Alexander's army built a 200-foot causeway from the mainland to the island using debris from the mainland city (see The Anabasis of Alexander, XVI – XXIV). Tyre became a Greek city and later came under the control of Rome. It was captured during the Crusades and later retaken by Muslims.

Modern-day Tyre is a port city built down the coast from the ancient city's location. The ancient location is a barren rock where fishermen spread their nets to dry –

*“And they shall destroy the walls of Tyre and break down her towers; I will also scrape her dust from her, and make her like the top of a rock. It shall be a place for spreading nets in the midst of the sea, for I have spoken,” says the Lord God; ‘it shall become plunder for the nations ... I will make you like the top of a rock; you shall be a place for spreading nets, and you shall never be rebuilt, for I the Lord have spoken,’ says the Lord God.” Ezekiel 26:4-5, 14*

**Prophecy Against Egypt** — Ezekiel prophesied against Egypt (Ezekiel 29 – 32). The prophecy included Babylon plundering Egypt and Egypt falling to its enemies. King Nebuchadnezzar invaded Egypt a short time after Ezekiel’s prophecy (attack in 568 BC). The Persians attacked Egypt near Pelusium in 525 BC and followed with attacks on Gaza and Memphis. Persia ruled Egypt the rest of the 6th century, most of the 5th century and a portion of the 4th century BC. Alexander the Great conquered the Persians and Egypt in 332 BC. After Alexander’s death in 323 BC, his kingdom was divided among his top generals and Ptolemy became pharaoh. The Ptolemaic Kingdom continued through the 2nd and much of the 1st century BC until the Roman Empire took control of Egypt after the death of Queen Cleopatra VII in 30 BC. Cleopatra was the last of the Egyptian pharaohs. Rome ruled Egypt for centuries until it became part of the Byzantine Empire in the 5th century BC and the Islamic Empire in the 7th century AD.

Here are some archaeological and historical resources you may find helpful in your research:

- [Egypt in the Late Period](#) (ca. 712-332 B.C.)
- [Nebuchadnezzar's Conquests](#)
- [Battle of Pelusium](#)
- [Alexander the Great](#)
- [Ptolemaic Kingdom](#)
- [Roman Egypt](#)
- [Egypt \(Roman province\)](#)
- [From Ptolemaic and Roman rule to the Arab Conquest](#) (332 BC – 646 BC)
- [Roman and Byzantine Egypt](#) (30 BC-AD 642)
- [List of Conflicts in Egypt](#)

**Prophecy Against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistine** — Ezekiel prophesied against several other countries before his prophecies against Tyre and Egypt (Ezekiel 25). The Ammonites and Moabites were descendants of Lot (Genesis 19:37-38). Both nations disappeared from the family of nations. Ammon was located in what is now part of the country of Jordan. The Edomites were descendants of Esau (Genesis 25:25). The Maccabees defeated the Edomites and absorbed them into the Jewish state. The Philistines were an ancient seafaring people who had been enemies of Israel for hundreds of years before Ezekiel prophesied against them (e.g. Judges 3:31; 10:7; 13-16; 1 Samuel 4-5).

Here are some archaeological and historical resources you may find helpful in your research:

- [The Kingdoms of Ammon, Moab and Edom: The Archaeology of Society in Late Bronze/Iron Age Transjordan](#)
- [Decline and Fall of Moabites](#)
- [The Ammonites: Elites, Empires, and Sociopolitical Change \(1000-500 BCE\) by Craig W. Tyson](#)
- [The Amman Citadel Inscription](#)
- [Edom and Copper: The Emergence of Ancient Israel's Rival](#)
- [Map of the Ammonites Territory](#)
- [The Old Testament Kingdoms of Jordan](#)
- [Maccabees and Ammonites](#)
- [The Citadel, Amman, Jordan](#)
- [The Forgotten Kingdoms of Jordan](#)
- [Ammon in Transition from Vassal Kingdom to Babylonian Province](#)
- [Horned Altar From Tell es-Safi Hints At The Origins Of The Philistines](#)
- [The Philistines to the North](#)
- [The Philistines and Other Sea Peoples in Text and Archaeology](#)
- [New Discoveries Among the Philistines: Archaeological and Textual Considerations](#)

# Historic Reliability

Before we move to the next phase of Israel's history, let's review what was available from archaeology about Israel's kings and other Iron Age II (1000 – 539 BC) notables mentioned in the Bible during the time I was investigating the historical reliability of the Old Testament 45 years ago (except where listed with asterisk \*\*).

## 10th Century BC

### King David

1 Samuel 16

2 Samuel 5

[Tell Dan Stele](#) \*\*

[Mesha Stele](#)

### Goliath

1 Samuel 17

[Goliath Inscription](#) \*\*

[Gath Inscription](#) \*\*

## **Pharaoh Shishak (Shoshenq I)**

1 Kings 11:40; 14:25; 2 Chronicles 12

[Karnak Temple of Amun Reliefs](#)

## **9th Century BC**

### **King Ahab**

1 Kings 16; 21 and 22

[Mesha Stele](#)

[Kurkh Monolith](#)

[Palace in Samaria](#)

### **Ben Hadad II**

2 Kings 8 & 13

[Tell Dan Stele](#) \*\*

[Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III](#)

## **King Hazael**

2 Kings 8 & 12

Tell Dan Stele \*\*

Gath siege trench \*\*

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

Ivory Decoration Inscription at Khadatu

## **King Jehu (Joram)**

1 Kings 19:16-17; 2 Kings 9:20; 10:31

Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III

## **Queen Jezebel**

1 Kings 16:31; 21; 2 Kings 9

Palace in Samaria

Stamp bulla

## **King Mesha of Moab**

2 Kings 3

[Mesha Stele \(Moabite Stone\)](#)

## **King Omri**

1 Kings 16; 2 Kings 8:26; 2 Chronicles 22:2; Micah 6:16

[Mesha Stele](#)

[Black Obelisk of Shalmaneser III](#)

## **Yahweh**

Numbers 6:24-26

[Mesha Stele](#)

[House of God Ostrakon](#) (7th-6th century BC)

[Silver Scrolls and Ketef Hinnom Amulets](#) \*\*

## 8th Century BC

### King Ahaz

2 Kings 16

Matthew 1

Stamp bulla \*\*

Stamp bulla \*\*

### Amariah

2 Chronicles 31

Stamp bulla \*\*

Stamp bulla \*\*

### Immer family name

Jeremiah 20 & 38

Stamp bulla \*\*

## **King Hezekiah**

2 Kings 16:20; 18:1-2

Stamp bulla \*\*

Water tunnel

Annals of Sennacherib

Sennacherib Annals

Jerusalem broad wall \*\*

The Azekah Inscription

Taylor Prism

## **King Hoshea**

2 Kings 15:30; 17:1

Stamp bulla

Assyrian Records of Tisglath-Pilser III

## **King Jeroboam II**

2 Kings 13:13; 1 Chronicles 5:17; Amon 1:1; 7:9-11

[Megiddo Seal – Jeroboam Inscription](#)

## **King Jotham (Uzziah's son)**

2 Kings 15:32

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **King Menahem**

2 Kings 15:14-23

[Assyrian Records of Tiglath-Pilser III](#)

## **King Merodach-baladan**

2 Kings 20:12; Isaiah 39

[Sennacherib Prism](#)

[Annals of Sargon of Assyria](#)

[Marble Boundary Stone](#)

## **King Pekah**

2 Kings 15:27

[Assyrian Records of Tisglath-Pilser III](#)

## **Tiglath-Pilser III (Pul)**

2 Kings 15:19, 29; 1 Chronicles 5:6; 2 Chronicles 28:20

[Assyrian Records of Tisglath-Pilser III](#)

Palace Wall Relief

## **King Sargon II**

Isaiah 20:1

[Palace of Sargon](#)

[Annals of Sargon](#)

[Winged Bull of Sargon II](#)

[Royal Brick Inscription](#)

## **King Sennacherib** of Assyria

2 Kings 18:13; 19:16-36; 2 Chronicles 32; Isaiah 36; 37

[Annals of Sennacherib](#)

[Sargon's Palace Reliefs](#)

[Taylor Prism](#)

[Royal Brick Inscription](#)

## **Shebna**

2 Kings 18:18-37; Isaiah 22:15-25

[Royal Steward Inscription](#)

## **King Uzziah** (Azariah)

2 Kings 15:13-34; 2 Chronicles 26; 27; Isaiah 6:1

[Uzziah Burial Palace](#)

[Stamp bulla](#)

## 7th Century BC

### **Ahikam**

2 Kings 22

[Stamp bulla](#)

### **King Ashurbanipal**

Ezra 4

2 Chronicles 33

[Nineveh library texts](#)

[Stele of Ashurbanipal](#)

[Nineveh palace reliefs](#)

### **Azaliah**

2 Kings 22

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Azzur**

Jeremiah 28

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Baruch**

Jeremiah 32

[Stamp bulla](#) \*\*

## **King Esarhaddon**

2 Kings 19

Ezra 4

Isaiah 37

[Letters of Esarhaddon](#)

[Stone Prism of Esarhaddon](#) ([British Museum Photo](#))

[Wall relief of Esarhaddon](#)

[Esarhaddon Chronicle](#)

[Royal Brick Inscription](#)

Stone Lion's Head with Inscription

**Gedaliah**

Jeremiah 38

Stamp bulla

**Hannaiah**

Jeremiah 28

Stamp bulla \*\*

**Hilkiah**

2 Kings 22:4-14; 23:4, 24

Stamp bulla \*\*

**Son of Immer**

Jeremiah 20:1

Assyrian Records of Tisglath-Pilser III

Stamp bulla \*\*

## **Jaazaniah**

2 Kings 25:23; Jeremiah 40:8

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **King Jehoahaz (Shallum)**

2 Kings 23:30-34; 1 Chronicles 3:15; 2 Chronicles 36

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Jerahmeel**

Jeremiah 36:26

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Joezer and Igdaliah**

Jeremiah 35:4; 1 Chronicles 12:6

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Malchiah**

Jeremiah 38:6

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **King Manasseh**

2 Kings 20:21; 21; 2 Chronicles 33:10-11

[Stamp bulla](#)

[Prism B of Esarhaddon](#)

## **Meshullum**

2 Kings 22:3

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Nathan-melech**

2 Kings 23:11

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **King Nebuchadnezzar**

2 Kings 24; Daniel 1 – 5

[Babylonian Chronicles](#)

[Ishtar Gate](#)

[Behistun Inscription](#)

East India House Inscription

Royal Brick Inscriptions

**Pharaoh Necho**

Jeremiah 36:32

Statute

Inscriptions

**Neriah**

Jeremiah 36:32

Stamp bulla \*\*

**Seriah**

Jeremiah 51:59

Stamp bulla \*\*

**Shaphan**

2 Kings 22:12

Stamp bulla \*\*

## **Shelemiah**

Jeremiah 37:3

Stamp bulla \*\*

## **Pharaoh Tirhakah (Taharqa)**

2 Kings 15:13-34; 2 Chronicles 26; 27; Isaiah 6:1

Esarhaddon Victory Stele

Tirhakah Sphinx

Tirhakah Wall Carving

Tirhakah Statute \*\*

## **6th Century BC**

### **King Ba'alis**

Jeremiah 40

Stamp bulla

## King Belshazzar

Daniel 5, 7 & 8

[Nabonidus Chronicle](#) ([article](#))

[Cylinder of Nabonidus](#) ([article](#))

## King Cyrus II

2 Chronicles 36

Ezra 1

Isaiah 44 & 45

[Cyrus Cylinder](#) ([article](#))

[Cyrus Brick Inscriptions](#)

[Tomb at Pasargadae](#)

## King Darius I

Ezra 4

[Elephantine Papyri](#)

[Behistun Inscription](#)

Tomb at Persepolis

**Eliakim**

2 Kings 18

Stamp bulla

**Elishama**

Jeremiah 36

Stamp bulla

**King Evil-Merodach**

2 Kings 25

Jeremiah 52

Jehoiachin Ration Tablet

**Gedaliah**

2 Kings 25

Jeremiah 39, 40, 41 & 43

Stamp bulla

## **Gemariah**

Jeremiah 29 & 36

[Lachish Letters](#)

[Stamp bulla](#) \*\*

## **Pharaoh Hophra (Apries)**

Jeremiah 44:30

[Babylonian Chronicles](#) ([article](#))

[Herodotus's Histories](#)

[Palace at Memphis](#) ([photo](#))

[Tablet Reliefs from Abydos](#)

## **King Jehoiachin (Coniah)**

2 Kings 24:8-15; 2 Chronicles 36; Jeremiah 22:24-28; 37:1

[Jehoiachin Ration Record](#)

[Jar handles stamped with king's name at Beth-Shemesh and Tell Beit Mirsim](#) ([detailed article about finger-impressed jar handles at Khirbet Qeiyafa](#))

## Babylonian Chronicles

### **Jehucal**

Jeremiah 37:3; 38:1

## Stamp bulla

### **Pedaiah**

1 Chronicles 3:18

## Stamp bulla

### **Sarsekim**

Jeremiah 39:3

## Cuneiform Tablet (British Museum)

## 5th Century BC

### **King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I)**

Esther 1

## Silver Bowl of Artaxerxes I

Tomb at Persepolis

Elephantine Papyri

Palace wall relief in Persepolis

**King Artaxerxes I**

Ezra 4 & 7

Nehemiah 2, 5 & 13

Silver Bowl Inscription

Elphantine Papyri

Tomb at Persepolis

**King Darius (the Persian)**

Nehemiah 12

Behistun Inscription

Palace wall relief at Persepolis

Silver Bowl of Artaxerxes I

## **Elnathan**

Ezra 8

[Stamp bulla](#)

## **Sanballat**

Nehemiah 2:10

[Elephantine Papyri](#)

## **Shelomith**

1 Chronicles 3:19

[Stamp seal](#) \*\*

---

We hope this list is helpful to you in your research. Join us in the next section of our study as we look at what archaeological evidence for the Old Testament was available in 1971 for the Second Temple period (Post Exile).

“Scripture taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright © 1982 by Thomas Nelson. Used by permission. All rights reserved.”