

Through the Bible - 2 Kings 21-23 & 2 Chronicles 33-35

Joshua Tallent, 1/31/2024

Background

- A few notes on Hezekiah
 - [SLIDE] Extended the city to the western hill.
 - [SLIDE] Dug a tunnel under the old city to re-route the Gihon spring to a new pool, within the city walls.
 - [SLIDE] This is the inside of the tunnel
 - [SLIDE] The Rock Cut Pool, where Solomon was crowned king
 - [SLIDE] Siloam Inscription: “and this is the story of the tunnel... the axes were against each other and while three cubits were left to (cut?) ... the voice of a man ... called to his counterpart... and on the day of the tunnel (being finished) the stonecutters struck each man towards his counterpart, ax against ax...”
 - [SLIDE] Siege of Lachish, the walkway up to the gate.
 - [SLIDE] Lachish reliefs from the Assyrian South-West Palace of Sennacherib in Nineveh
 - [SLIDE] Siege engines attacking the city, and sling balls found within the city.
 - [SLIDE] Captured Jews building siege ramp and being killed.
 - [SLIDE] "Sennacherib, King of the world, King of Assyria, on a throne he sat and the booty of Lachish passed before him."
 - [SLIDE] Taylor Prism (a.k.a. Sennacherib's Annals) - "As for the king of Judah, Hezekiah, who had not submitted to my authority, I besieged and captured forty-six of his fortified cities, along with many smaller towns, taken in battle with my battering rams. ... I took as plunder 200,150 people, both small and great, male and female, along with a great number of animals including horses, mules, donkeys, camels, oxen, and sheep. As for Hezekiah, I shut him up like a caged bird in his royal city of Jerusalem.
- [SLIDE - timeline] Hezekiah is dead. The Godly king had restored proper worship to Israel, removing the worship of false gods and even removing the high places that the people would use to worship the God of Israel.
- He reinstated the observance of the Torah, the Law, and brought back the Passover to a degree that it had not been followed since the days of Solomon, 250 years before.

Manasseh

- However, as with many other Godly kings in the history of Israel, he failed to pass along these lessons to his son, Manasseh.
- Manasseh became king at the age of 12, and was the longest-reigning king in the history of Judah, reigning for 55 years.
- He was an evil king, possibly the most evil king of Judah.
- [READ 2 Kings 21:3–9]

- 2 Chronicles 33:9 — So Manasseh encouraged Judah and the inhabitants of Jerusalem to do more evil than the nations whom the LORD destroyed before the sons of Israel.
- God was understandably unhappy with this idolatry.
- He sent prophets to Judah (though we are not told which specific prophets), but Manasseh did not listen.
 - Manasseh was so evil that tradition says he was the one who killed the prophet Isaiah.
 - a first-century, noncanonical book called the Ascension of Isaiah says that Isaiah was tied inside a sack, placed within the hollow of a tree trunk, and then sawed in two. This might be the reference in Hebrews 11:37, which talks about the troubles of the righteous people of faith in the Hebrew Bible, when it says, “They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were tempted, they were put to death with the sword;”
- So God allowed the Assyrians to attack Judah again.
- 2 Chronicles 33:11 says, “Therefore the LORD brought the commanders of the army of the king of Assyria against them, and they captured Manasseh with hooks, bound him with bronze chains, and led him to Babylon.”

Esarhaddon

- This Assyrian king mentioned in 2 Chronicles 33:11 is Esarhaddon, son of Sennacherib.
- 2 Kings 19:36-37 tells us the story of how Esarhaddon became king:
 - So Sennacherib the king of Assyria departed and returned home, and lived at Nineveh. Then it came about, as he was worshiping in the house of Nisroch his god, that Adrammelech and Sharezer killed him with the sword; and they escaped to the land of Ararat. And his son Esarhaddon became king in his place.
- One of the Babylonian Chronicle inscriptions (ABC 1 iii 34-35) tells us the story from the Assyrian viewpoint:
 - On the twentieth day of the month Tevet, Sennacherib, king of Assyria, was killed by his son in a rebellion. For twenty-four years Sennacherib ruled Assyria. After the twentieth day of the month Tevet the rebellion continued in Assyria until the second day of the month Addar. On the eighteenth day of the month Addar Esarhaddon, his son, ascended the throne in Assyria.
 - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-1-from-nabu-nasir-to-samas-suma-ukin/abc-1.iii/>
- Why was Manasseh taken to Babylon? Wasn't that controlled by the Babylonians?
 - Sennacherib had destroyed Babylon in 689 BCE after dealing with insurrections and revolts there by the Babylonians for many years, even after placing one of his other sons as a ruler there.
- Chronicles tells us that while he was in prison in Babylon, Manasseh humbled himself before God, so we was returned to Jerusalem.
- We don't have a corroborating story of this event in extra-biblical literature, but we do have another important archaeological discovery from the time of Manasseh:
- **[SLIDE]** the Esarhaddon Prism.
- This prism, found in the excavation of Nineveh in 1928, gives us the the first extra-biblical reference to Manasseh.

- It describes the history of King Esarhaddon's reign and provides an account of the reconstruction of the Assyrian palace in Nineveh.
 - I called up the kings of the country Hatti and (of the region) on the other side of the river Euphrates: Ba'al, king of Tyre; Manasseh, king of Judah; ... Together twenty-two kings of Hatti, the seashore, and the islands. All these I sent out and made them transport under terrible difficulties, to Nineveh, the town of my rulership, as building material for my palace: big logs, long beams and thin boards from cedar and pine trees, products of the Sirara and Lebanon mountains, which had grown for a long time into tall and strong timber, also from their quarries in the mountains...
 - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/anet/291-esarhaddons-prism-b/>
- Esarhaddon died in the middle of Manasseh's reign, in 669 BCE.
 - The Esarhaddon Chronicle tells us:
 - The twelfth year: The king of Assyria marched to Egypt but became ill on the way and died on the tenth day of the month Arahsamna. For twelve years Esarhaddon ruled Assyria... In the month Kislev Ashurbanipal, Esarhaddon's son, ascended the throne in Assyria.
 - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-14-esarhaddon-chronicle/>
- **[SLIDE]** When Manasseh came back home to Jerusalem, he rebuilt the wall on the eastern side of the city.
 - 2 Chronicles 33:14 — Now after this he built the outer wall of the city of David on the west side of Gihon, in the valley, up to the entrance of the Fish Gate; and he encircled the Ophel with it and made it very high.
- Kings and Chronicles seem to differ on the lasting impact of Manasseh.
 - Kings makes it sound like Manasseh was evil his entire life.
 - 2 Kings 21:16 — Furthermore, Manasseh shed very much innocent blood until he had filled Jerusalem from one end to another, besides his sin into which he misled Judah, in doing evil in the sight of the LORD.
 - Chronicles paints the picture of a man who was transformed by repentance, who took down the idols to other gods and reinstated the worship of the God of Israel in the Temple.
- Either way, Manasseh was not considered to be a godly king in the end. He was not buried in the burial caves of the Kings of Judah, he was buried in a garden in his own house.

Amon

- **[SLIDE - timeline]** When Manasseh died, his 22-year-old son Amon became king.
- Amon was evil, as well, but his reign didn't last long. His palace servants conspired against him and killed him.
- The people of Jerusalem put the servants to death, and crowned Amon's son Josiah as the new king.
- Amon was also buried in his garden, not in the burial caves of the kings.

Josiah

- Josiah was only eight years old when he became king, but he turned out to be a good and righteous king.
- When he was 16 years old, he started to pursue God.
- When he was 20, he started purging the land of Judah and the city of Jerusalem of all of the idolatry that his father and grandfather had introduced. Both 2 Kings 23 and 2 Chronicles 34 talk about the extent of his reforms. He went through the entire land of Israel, tearing down the idols, defiling the high places, and smashing the ritual objects.
 - **[SLIDE - map]** In 2005 I had the pleasure of visiting Israel for the first time and participating in an archaeological dig in Tel Tamar, also known as Ein Hatzevah.
 - 15 years earlier, in 1990, the dig team at Tel Tamar started digging just outside the walls of the fortress, expecting to find a moat or a sloped incline that would help fortify the city. Instead they found a pit.
 - **[SLIDE]** Inside that pit they found 75 limestone and clay vessels and ritual objects, including incense altars and a stone sculpture.
 - In most cases, when you do an archaeological dig you are likely to find pieces of pottery, or sometimes a few pots that have not been destroyed by time. In this case, finding 75 objects, all in one place, and all complete, with no pieces missing, is extraordinary.
 - These ritual objects were all thrown into the pit at the same time, and large cut stones called ashlar that are normally used to build walls were thrown down on top of the objects, crushing them.
 - The pit and the ritual objects, which were connected to Edomite idol worship, were dated to this time period, the reforms of Josiah.
 - <https://library.biblicalarchaeology.org/article/smashing-the-idols-piecing-together-an-edomite-shrine-in-judah/>
- Josiah was so committed to the reforms and to cleaning out the idolatry in Judah that he went to Bethel, one of the two cities that Jeroboam had set up idols when the northern tribes had split from the southern tribes, and Josiah tore down the altar there.
 - There's an interesting connection here in 2 Kings 23 to a story that is told in 1 Kings 13. **[READ on your own]**
- **[SLIDE - Temple]** When Josiah was 26 years old he started a massive repair project on Solomon's Temple. The temple was much worse for the wear at this point. In addition to tearing down all of the idolatrous implements, they needed to do extensive repairs to the structure and its surrounding walls.
- As they were collecting all of the money that had been hidden away in the Temple for safekeeping, Hilkiah the High Priest found a copy of the Torah, the Instructions of God, hidden in the temple.
- He gave it to Shaphan the scribe, who took it to King Josiah. Josiah had Shaphan read him the scroll, and when he heard the words he tore his clothes in grief.
- Worried that the nation was going to be destroyed because they had not been obeying the terms of their covenant with God, Josiah asked Hilkiah and Shaphan to find a prophet and ask God if there was destruction coming.

- The found a prophetess named Huldah in Jerusalem.
- God promised through the prophecy of Huldah that while the destruction was coming, it would not come in the days of Josiah because he had a humble heart and led the people in destroying their idols.
- After that, Josiah had the Torah read to the people of Judah so that they would know what they were supposed to be doing.
- 2 Chronicles 35 tells us that Passover was celebrated again, just as it was in the days of Hezekiah.
 - Josiah donated 30,000 lambs and goats for the Passover offerings, plus 3,000 bulls.
 - His officers also donated 7,600 sheep and goats and 800 bulls
 - Chronicles describes the processing of these animals, and commends the Levites for their hard work and dedication in ensuring the entire process went smoothly, even preparing the Passover lambs that the priests and the gatekeepers and their families would need.
 - 2 Chronicles 35:18 — There had not been a Passover celebrated like it in Israel since the days of Samuel the prophet; nor had any of the kings of Israel celebrated such a Passover as Josiah did with the priests, the Levites, all Judah and Israel who were present, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem.
 - Notice the “all Judah and Israel.” This is another confirmation of what we discussed a few weeks ago, that many of the Israelites who fled from the destruction of Samaria in 722 BCE were absorbed into Judah when they fled south during and after the war.

Lead-up to the Battle of Carchemish

- **[SLIDE - timeline]** In 631 BCE, about 8 years into Josiah’s reign, Ashurbanipal died and the Assyrian Empire entered a time of internal conflict and weakness.
- The Babylonians had been defeated by the Assyrians and ruled as a vassal state for about the last 100 years. In 626 BCE, a general named Nabopolassar assumed the title of King of Babylon and started an insurrection against the Assyrians.
- It took about 10 years for him to finally push the Assyrians out of Babylonia, but he decided to continue pushing, gradually making progress into the very heart of Assyrian lands.
- **[SLIDE - map]** Due to the weakness of the Assyrian Empire, it was not just the Babylonians who revolted. The Empire was besieged on all sides by the Medes, the Persians, and the Scythians.
- In 614, the Medes assaulted multiple cities in Assyria, finally defeating and completely destroying the city of Assur, the religious capital of Assyria. Nabopolassar showed up after that battle was complete and made a treaty with the Medes so that they could take on the rest of the Assyrian armies together.
- Two years later, in 612 BCE, after a siege lasting only two months, the Babylonians and Medes conquered Nineveh and killed the Assyrian king Sinsharishkun.
- The Assyrians regrouped in Harran and crowned Ashur-uballit II (whose name means "Ashur has kept alive") as the new king.
- In 609 BCE, Pharaoh Necho II of Egypt, a former vassal of Assyria, marched to Ashur-uballit’s aid against the Babylonians.

- However, Josiah decided to get involved in the war. Given the growing power of the Babylonians, it may have been that he was under their thumb and was in some way obligated to fight the Egyptians. However, there's no reason given in the scriptures or in other sources for his decision to go to battle.
- According to the Bible, Necho's response to Josiah was to say that God had sent him to fight the Babylonians and Josiah was interfering with God's work.
 - 2 Chronicles 35:20–21 — Necho king of Egypt came up to wage war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him. But Necho sent messengers to him, saying, “What business do you have with me, King of Judah? I am not coming against you today, but against the house with which I am at war, and God has told me to hurry. For your own sake, stop interfering with God who is with me, so that He does not destroy you.”
- Josiah didn't listen. He disguised himself as a common soldier and fought Necho at Megiddo. Josiah was killed, and his army was defeated at the Battle of Megiddo. The people took him back to Jerusalem and buried him in the burial caves of the kings of Judah.
- Then the Pharaoh continued on his way up to Harran, arriving too late to help the Assyrians at Harran.
- Josiah's son Jehoahaz succeeded him on the throne, but he only lasted for three months. Pharaoh Necho imprisoned Jehoahaz initially in Riblah, probably because that's where he was operating from. Later he took Jehoahaz to Egypt where Jehoahaz died.
- After imprisoning Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Necho made Josiah's other son Eliakim king of Judah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim.
- After the defeat at Harran, the remainders of the Assyrian army joined with the Necho and the Egyptians, but did not crown a new king of Assyria. They tried for the next 4 years to defeat the invading armies of Babylonia, who were now allied with the Medes, Persians, and Scythians, but that force as too big.
- The final battle of the Assyrian Empire was the Battle of Carchemish in June 605 BCE. This battle is covered in many ancient sources besides the Bible, including a clay tablet known as the Jerusalem Chronicle.
 - **[SLIDE]** In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad [Nabopolassar] stayed in his own land, Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown-prince, mustered the Babylonian army and took command of his troops; he marched to Karchemiš which is on the bank of the Euphrates, and crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemiš. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and beat them to non-existence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country.
 - <https://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-5-jerusalem-chronicle/>
- The Egyptian and Assyrian armies were completely defeated at Carchemish and wiped out soon afterwards.
- Meanwhile, Nabopolassar, the king of Babylon, had gone back home before the battle, and died on August 15, 605 BCE. Nebuchadnezzar immediately went back to Babylon to secure

his throne, and was crowned king on September 1, ensuring that none of his brothers were able to usurp the throne with him gone to war.

- Time for a cliffhanger! We will find out what happens next when we come back to the story in March.