

Through the Bible

2 Kings 24-25 & 2 Chron 36 & Habakkuk

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Background: The Battle of Carchemish

- **[SLIDE - timeline]** In 631 BCE, about halfway through 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.

Habakkuk

- It was around this time, between 640 BCE and 615 BCE, that the prophet Habakkuk was given a word from the LORD.
- We don't know a lot about Habakkuk. His name only appears in two verses in the Bible, and we are not told about his background or family. He was a contemporary of other prophets: Jeremiah, Nahum, and Zephaniah.
- The book begins with Habakkuk's complaint to God.
- **[READ Habakkuk 1:2-4]**
- Note the order he calls out here: He sees the disaster and devastation leading to strife, which then leads to the Torah being ignored.
- God responds starting in verse 5, saying that he is raising up the Babylonians (Chaldeans) "To take possession of dwelling places that are not theirs."
 - This is likely a reference to them defeating the Assyrian empire, the current major world power.
 - And also a reference to them taking control over Judah, as well.
- Habakkuk responds starting in verse 12.
- **[READ Habakkuk 1:12-13]**
- Why are you using an evil people as judgement. How can you let them succeed when they are so evil?
- In chapter 2, God responds.
- First, he says that this prophecy is going to come to pass soon.

- Then he prophecies against the Babylonians, saying that they will be held to account for their own wickedness, for their destruction of the other nations. A few key verses:
 - **[READ Habakkuk 2:4]**
 - **[READ Habakkuk 2:14]**
 - **[READ Habakkuk 2:18–20]**
- Habakkuk chapter 3 is a type of victory hymn. For some unknown reason, a verse-by-verse commentary of Habakkuk found in the Dead Sea Scrolls does not include chapter 3.
 - **Habakkuk 3:2** — In anger remember mercy.
 - **Habakkuk 3:13** — You went forth for the salvation of Your people [Israel], For the salvation of Your anointed. [Moshiach — Messiah]
 - **[READ Habakkuk 3:17–19]**

Background: The Battle of Carchemish

- 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 2 Chronicles 35:20–21, 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.
 - 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 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 him initially in Riblah, probably because that's where he was operating. Later he took Jehoahaz to Egypt where he died.
- After imprisoning Jehoahaz, Pharaoh Necho made Josiah's other son Eliakim king of Judah, and changed his name to Jehoiakim.
 - Eliakim means "God has raised up", and uses the general word for "god" that is the same in other ancient languages of the near east.
 - Jehoiakim means "The LORD has raised up", and uses part of the tetragrammaton, the God of Israel's unique and holy name.
 - It seems that Necho was trying to make a point about his supposed mission from Hashem.
- After the defeat at Harran, the remainders of the Assyrian army joined with the Egyptians, but did not crown a new king. They tried for the next 4 years to defeat the invading armies of Babylonia, allied with the Medes, Persians, and Scythians, but that force was too big.
- The final battle of the Assyrian Empire was the Battle of Carchemish in June 605 BCE. This battle is covered in ancient sources besides the Bible, including a clay tablet known as the Jerusalem Chronicle.
 - 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.

Nebuchadnezzar Invades Judah

- The Battle of Carchemish occurred in 605 BCE, in the 4th year of king Jehoiakim. After the battle, the Babylonians assumed control over the area that the Assyrians had taken.
- The Jerusalem Chronicle says that immediately after his ascension to the throne, Nebuchadnezzar left Babylon again and continued his campaigns against the lands formerly controlled by the Assyrians.
 - **[SLIDE]** "In the accession year, Nebuchadnezzar went back again to the Hatti-land and until the month of Šabatu. [He] marched unopposed through the Hatti-land; in the month of Šabatu he took the heavy tribute of the Hatti-territory to Babylon."
 - "Hatti-land" in this text is a reference to the land historically controlled by the Hittites, which includes Eastern Anatolia, Syria, Lebanon, and Israel.
 - This happened in January or February of 604 BCE, technically about 4-5 years into Jehoiakim's reign, despite Daniel 1:1 saying that it happened in Jehoiakim's third year.
 - Jerusalem was no match for Nebuchadnezzar. He defeated the city quickly and took a large number of captives, including Daniel and his three friends, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah. He also took some of the vessels from the Temple and put them in the temple of his own gods in Babylon.
 - We'll see those temple vessels again in Daniel in the story of the hand of God writing on the wall of the king's palace.

- Jehoiakim was a servant of Nebuchadnezzar for three years, but then he revolted. Apparently other rival nations that had been under Assyrian control were also trying to assert dominance, so bands of Chaldeans, Syrians (or Arameans), Moabites, and Ammonites all attacked Judah.
 - **[SLIDE - Tel Arad]** This is supported in the Arad Ostraca, also known as the Arad Inscriptions, a large number of pottery sherds with writing on them that were found in Tel Arad, a fortified city in Judah.
 - **[SLIDE - Arad 24]** In one letter (Arad 24), Edom is mentioned as having invaded the south of Judah as far as Ramath-Negev.
- 2 Kings 24:6 says that Jehoiakim died and was buried in Jerusalem, while 2 Chronicles 36:6 says that he was bound in chains by Nebuchadnezzar and taken to Babylon.
 - Scholars are divided on what actually happened, but it appears that the most logical course of events is found in Kings.
 - We know that Jehoiakim was succeeded by his son Jehoiachin, and that Jehoiachin only reigned for 3 months.
 - We also know that Jehoiachin was taken captive by Nebuchadnezzar, so it does not make a lot of sense for both him and his father to have been taken captive at different times.
- The Prophet Jeremiah talks a bit about the reign of Jehoiakim, so we'll come back to him again in a few weeks.

Siege of Jerusalem

- **[SLIDE - Timeline]** Jehoachin, the son of Jehoiakim, was only 18 years old when he became king, and he didn't reign very long—only 3 months and 10 days.
- Jehoachin is also called Jeconiah, especially in the book of Jeremiah, so I'm going to use that name for him to make things easier.
- Nebuchadnezzar had, at some point toward the end of Jehoiakim's life, decided he'd had enough. In 597 BCE, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem again and besieged it.
- **[SLIDE]** The Jerusalem Chronicle is famous for (and named after) its inclusion of this siege of Jerusalem:
 - "In the seventh year [598/597], the month of Kislîmu [Nov.-Dec.], the king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar] mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land [Syria-Palestine], and besieged the city of Judah [Jerusalem] and on the second day of the month of Addaru (16 March 597) he seized the city and captured the king [Jeconiah]. He appointed there a king of his own choice [Zechariah], received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon."

- It's possible that the new king being crowned in Jerusalem is what inspired Nebuchadnezzar to march down and exert his own control again. He may not have liked the idea of Jeconiah taking the throne.
- When he had defeated Jerusalem, he bound Jeconiah in chains and took him captive back to Babylon.
- Chronicles 36 tells us that Nebuchadnezzar also took more of the sacred vessels from the Temple.
 - 2 Kings 24:13 says, "he smashed all the articles of gold that Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the LORD"
- When Nebuchadnezzar left Judah he also took more captives with him.
 - 2 Kings 24:14-16 — "Then he led into exile all the people of Jerusalem and all the commanders and all the valiant warriors, ten thousand exiles, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None were left except the poorest people of the land. So he led Jehoiachin into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother, the king's wives, and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the valiant men, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, a thousand, all strong and fit for war, these too the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon."
- Here's where we see another interesting Biblical connection:
 - **[SLIDE]** Esther 2:5-6 — "There was a Jew at the citadel in Susa whose name was Mordecai, the son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, a Benjaminite, who had been taken from Jerusalem with the exiles who had been deported with Jeconiah king of Judah, whom Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon had deported."
 - Mordechai's great grandfather was taken captive during this siege of Nebuchadnezzar, and was taken into exile in Babylon.

Zedekiah and the End of the Kingdom

- **[SLIDE - Timeline]** Nebuchadnezzar then made Zedekiah, Jeconiah's uncle, the brother of Jehoiakim, king of Judah.
- However, the people of Israel still maintained that Jeconiah was the true king of Israel, not Zedekiah. This can be seen in how Ezekiel counts time
 - Ezekiel 1:2-3 — (On the fifth of the month in the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's exile, 3 the word of the LORD came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar; and there the hand of the LORD came upon him.)
 - We'll come back to that in a moment.

- Zedekiah reigned for 11 years. I'm sure Nebuchadnezzar picked him because he thought Zedekiah could be controlled, but that turned out to not be the case.
- In January 589 BCE Nebuchadnezzar besieged Jerusalem again.
- In the summer of 586 BCE, the eleventh year of Zedekiah's reign, on Tisha B'Av (the 9th day of the Hebrew month of Av), Nebuchadnezzar broke through Jerusalem's walls, conquering the city.
- Zedekiah and his followers attempted to escape but were captured on the plains of Jericho and taken to Riblah. There, Zedekiah's followers, including his own sons, were executed. After being forced to watch their executions, Zedekiah had his eyes gouged out and was taken captive to Babylon, where he remained a prisoner until his death.
- Then Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem again and set fire to the city, completely destroying the Temple, the king's palace, and the rest of the city. Then the army tore down the walls that surrounded the city.
- The Babylonians also smashed all of the remaining bronze, gold, silver, and other precious materials that were in the Temple and took them back to Babylon. That included the bronze sea that Solomon had built, along with the bronze pillars that stood outside the Temple doors.
- The army collected all of the key leaders, including the high priest, the army captains, and the king's advisors, and brought them to Nebuchadnezzar who was staying at Riblah, and killed them there.
- After the destruction of Jerusalem was complete, Nebuchadnezzar's army led into exile the rest of the Jews, both those who had not been killed in the siege and those who had defected to the Babylonian side.
- 2 Kings 25 tells a small story about Gedaliah, the governor whom Nebuchadnezzar placed in charge when he left Judah. Gedaliah was seen as a collaborator by the final leaders of the Judean army, so they killed him and fled to Egypt to escape the Babylonians.

Jeconiah Released

- The Jews still considered Jeconiah to be the rightful king of Judah. 2 Kings 25:27-30 tells us his eventual fate after being taken as a captive to Babylon.
- In the 37th year of Jeconiah's reign (still being counted even in exile), Evil-merodach (known as Amel-Marduk in the Babylonian writings), the son of Nebuchadnezzar, ascended to the throne. He released Jeconiah from prison and placed him in the royal court, and gave him an allowance to live on. Scholars point

out that despite being treated more nicely, Jeconiah was still a prisoner, and was not released to return to Israel and rebuild the kingdom.

- We do see, however, that the last descendant of David to sit on the throne still had sons and passed down the covenant of kingship that God had granted to David and his descendants forever.
- Just 500 years later, a new descendant of Jeconiah would be born, a new king of Israel, who ascended into heaven but will return to reestablish the throne of his forefather David in the rebuilt Jerusalem.
 - Matthew 1:12–16 — After the deportation to Babylon: Jeconiah fathered Shealtiel, and Shealtiel fathered Zerubbabel... [nine generations later] Jacob fathered Joseph the husband of Mary, by whom Yeshua was born, who is called the Messiah.