

## Say Ye Not, A Confederacy – Jerry Leslie, October 2001

Isaiah 8:12

These words condemned the conspiracy of Pekah of Israel with Rezin of Syria against Jerusalem in the days of Ahaz of Judah. Yet the last kings of Judah fell to the same temptation to trust the arm of foreigners and doubt the arm of the Lord. The final years of the kingdom of Judah were plagued by relations with neighboring kingdoms to the south and north. But neither declarations of independence nor alliances with Gentile nations could avoid the divine judgment which resulted from internal compromise of their Mosaic law covenant and the throne of David.

Considerable effort is made to date the Kings of Judah and Israel in history. However, it is important first to understand events and circumstances that flow through history and scripture, then upon this basis to mark the strength of prophetic time. In this regard we will examine the momentous era that marked the last five kings of Judah, leading first to captivity, then to the desolation of Jerusalem. This study refutes the possibility for the 70-year desolation prophecy to begin in the reign of Jehoiakim or Jehoiachin, but finds its beginning with the removal of Zedekiah.

### **Josiah:**

This history is recorded in 2 Kings 22-23 and 2 Chron.34-35. Josiah was the last of the good kings of Judah. *“He did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, and walked in all the ways of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left”* (2 Kings 22:2). Josiah came to the throne of Judah at the tender age of eight. In sharp contrast to his father, Amon, and his grandfather, Manasseh, he matured into a ruler second only to David in fame and praise. Indeed, *“Before him there was no king like him...nor did any like him arise after him”* (2 Kings 23:25). King Manasseh had even offered a son as a burnt offering on one of the many pagan altars he built throughout Judah. Amon served the idols that his father served and reigned only two years before his own servants murdered him.

Only gradually did Josiah come to affirm his faith in the Lord and his obedience to the law of God given to Moses. He first began to seek the God of David at the age of 16. Later, when he was 20, Josiah condemned polytheistic religious practices in Judah and began to destroy pagan shrines in the high places. At the age of 26, he financed the restoration of Jerusalem’s temple with money collected from the people at the entrance.

It was then that the priest Hilkiah discovered the book of the Law in the long-neglected temple precincts. Scholars debate whether the book was the entire Pentateuch or just Deuteronomy. Nevertheless, it was the find of the century. When Josiah heard the words of the Law read by his secretary, Shaphan, he rent his garments in despair. The reason for his grief was probably the curses and commentary on them in Deut.28:15-68. The prophetess Huldah confirmed that the nation would indeed suffer devastation owing to its history of disobedience.

Perhaps with some hope of averting this doom, Josiah called Judah together to hear God’s word read publicly and led his people in renewing their covenant commitment to the Lord. After the reading, Josiah launched a thorough religious reform and then prepared a Passover feast at the temple to symbolize the reconsecration of Judah. For the first time in many generations, the whole nation of Judah celebrated a Passover.

Notwithstanding, the judgments of God’s determination stood fast against temporary and superficial reform. *“The Lord turned not from the fierceness of his great wrath...And the Lord said, I will remove Judah also out of my sight, as I have removed Israel, and will cast off this city Jerusalem which I have chosen, and the house of which I said, My name shall be there”* (2 Kings 23:26-27). For his own faithfulness, Josiah was spared seeing this destruction of his nation and city. *“Thine eyes shall not see all the evil which I will bring upon this place”* (2 Kings 22:20).

This sparing occurred due to his early demise. Pharaoh-Necho, king of Egypt, sought a passage through his territories on an expedition against the Chaldeans. But Josiah refused to allow a march of the Egyptian army through his domain and prepared to resist the attempt by force of arms. Though Necho claimed to be on a mission from God, Josiah did not accept such words of a foreign King. Some historians conjecture that Josiah’s resistance was a political move to enlist the favor of the Assyrians. But the Bible attributes no such foreign motives to him. We can only assume he did

not want to compromise the autonomy of his country in this struggle between two super powers. In the battle that ensued at Megiddo, Josiah was wounded and died. Then Necho marched on to Carchemish by the Euphrates. Josiah was taken to Jerusalem and buried. There he was mourned by Jeremiah and the whole nation, but not condemned for his final decision to resist alliances. In death, he was spared the final scenes that would carry out God's judgments against the nation.

### **Jehoahaz:**

The sons of Josiah were first Johanan (apparently died young) then Jehoiakim (also named Eliakim), afterward Jehoahaz (also named Shallum in Jer.22:11) and the youngest, Zedekiah (also named Mattaniah). Jehoahaz was not the first in the line of succession, but "*the people of the land*" chose him over his older brother (2 Kings 23:30). Jehoahaz was 23 when he began to reign and immediately returned to the worship of pagan gods. These evil ways received quick retribution. He only reigned three months in Jerusalem when Necho returned from campaigns on the Euphrates and ordered Jehoahaz to be arrested in Jerusalem and brought to his headquarters at Riblah. Jehoahaz was taken to Egypt and died there without ever seeing his homeland again.

Due to his short reign of only three months, Jehoahaz is not usually counted in the addition of years for the Kings. Henceforth the kings of Judah were subjected to one or another of its powerful neighbors.

### **Jehoiakim:**

The young deposed king Jehoahaz was replaced by his older brother Eliakim, renamed Jehoiakim. Necho apparently rejected any king not appointed by himself and so named Jehoiakim to the throne, emphasizing that Judah was then firmly under the thumb of Egypt. The change of names is significant of his dependence and loss of liberty, as heathen kings were accustomed to give new names to those who entered their service. Necho also extracted a tribute of one hundred talents of silver and a talent of gold in bitter revenge for his previous repulsion (2 Kings 23:34-35; 2 Chron.36:3-4).

The 1<sup>st</sup>, 4<sup>th</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> years of Jehoiakim's reign were significant milestones in the further decline of the southern kingdom of Judah. At first Jehoiakim remained a vassal of Egypt, which effectively controlled all the territory north through Syria. Using slave labor, Jehoiakim expanded the royal palace in the Egyptian style and was condemned by the prophet Jeremiah of murder and theft, for "*practicing oppression and extortion*" (Jer.22:13-19). All this was styled as "*that what was evil in the sight of the Lord*" (2 Kings 23:37).

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim the balance of power shifted between Egypt and Babylon. Pharaoh Necho went up again to Carchemish on the Euphrates and this time was defeated. Jeremiah marked a brief record of the event in Jer.46:2. After his great defeat at Carchemish, Necho lost all his Syrian possessions. Henceforth "*the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land, for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt*" (2 Kings 24:7). This event now transferred Judah to the thumb of Babylon. Jehoiakim became Nebuchadnezzar's servant for the next three years (2 Kings 24:1).

In this same fourth year, the prophet Jeremiah caused a collection of his prophecies to be written out by his faithful servant, Baruch, to be read publically in the court of the Temple. Part of this reading was the prophecy of 70 years concerning the whole land becoming a perpetual desolation (Jer.25:11-12). Nevertheless, Jeremiah proclaimed his warning with a provision whereby the judgments could be averted. "*Go not after other gods to serve them, and to worship them, and provoke me not to anger with the works of your hands, and I will do you no hurt*" (Jer.25:6; 36:3).

Fear of the desolating judgments had the effect of causing the people to proclaim a fast in the next year in Jerusalem and throughout the land. They also sought to persuade Jehoiakim to repent (Jer.36:9,16). This fast was held in the 9<sup>th</sup> month of the 5<sup>th</sup> year with an endeavor to prevent the judgments. This coming to his attention, Jehoiakim had it read to him. But he heard not much of the bitter denunciations before he took the scroll from the reader and cast into a fire. However, the counsel of God stood sure. A fresh scroll was written, with further denunciations against the king. All this appears to have made little impression upon Jehoiakim, who still walked in his old paths.

Coming to Jehoiakim's eighth year, he defied the new power center in Babylon (2 Kings 24:1-7). After abiding three years under the shadow of Babylon, Jehoiakim rebelled in the fourth. What moved him to this rebellion is difficult to say, unless it was the restless turbulence of his own bad disposition and dislike of paying the tribute to the king of Babylon. Or else seeing Egypt entirely severed from the affairs of the north since the battle of Carchemish, and the king of Babylon occupied with distant wars, he hoped to make himself independent. Though Nebuchadnezzar was not able at that time to come in person to chastize his unruly vassal, he sent against him numerous bands of Chaldeans, with Syrians, Moabites and Ammonites, who were also subject to Babylon. These cruelly harassed the whole country, being for the most part moved by hatred against the Jewish name and nation.

Now the question arises, just what happened in regard to Dan.1:1-2 and 2 Chron.36:5-7? It should be understood that the first year of Nebuchadnezzar corresponded to the fourth year of Jehoiakim. So Daniel's reference to the third year of Jehoiakim would seem to precede Nebuchadnezzar's rise to the throne of Babylon or else he uses a different reference basis (i.e. accession year) than used by Jeremiah, Kings and Chronicles. Daniel may indeed refer to the events that led up to the assumption of lands previously dominated by Egypt. We notice that Daniel records that Jehoiakim was only given into the hands of Nebuchadnezzar, i.e. became his servant, and took tribute of some vessels of the temple. Daniel does not say captives were taken in this year, though we sometimes assume this because the context following verse 3. The first two verses are easily read as marking the subjection of Jehoiakim and Judah's vassalage. From verse 3 begins a narrative dealing with captives and events in subsequent years, but no mention is made of the year of their being taken.

2 Chron.36 could also be understood as recording events following the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim. But the year is not mentioned, **nor is a captivity recorded here**. Whatever the year, Nebuchadnezzar had Jehoiakim bound [to] carry him to Babylon. But Nebuchadnezzar did not pursue his intention, but demanded tribute and carried off some of the temple vessels. For verse 5 says he reigned 11 years in Jerusalem.

Both the Daniel and Chronicles accounts could refer to the 4<sup>th</sup> year of Jehoiakim during the ascendancy of Babylon over Egyptian domains, Daniel using the Babylonian counting of years. We see similar tribute or submission of Judah was rendered by Rehoboam to Shishak (2 Chron.12:8-9), by Asa to Benhadad (2 Chron.16:1-7), by Hezekiah to Sennacherib (2 Kings 18:13-17), by Jehoahaz to Necho (2 Chron.36:2-5). However, we notice the events of 2 Chron.36:6-7 may also apply to either Jehoiakim's 5<sup>th</sup> or even 8<sup>th</sup> year<sup>1</sup>. Daniel may as well use the Babylonian vantage point of the third year of Jehoiakim as being a vassal to Nebuchadnezzar. If the vassalage counts after the victory of Babylon over Egypt in Jehoiakim's 4<sup>th</sup> year, then Nebuchadnezzar may have come against Jehoiakim in his 8<sup>th</sup> year on the occasion of his rebellion.

The exact circumstances of his death are uncertain, although it seems that Jehoiakim was assassinated in the 11<sup>th</sup> year of his reign in Jerusalem (Jer.22:18-19; 36:30). This was likely carried out by his distraught subjects when they saw Nebuchadnezzar's army coming to lay siege against the city. His body appears to have been ignominiously thrown over the walls to convince the enemy that he was dead. Thereafter his carcass was left exposed for some time, dragged away and buried "*with the burial of an ass*" without lamentation "*beyond the gates of Jerusalem.*" Nebuchadnezzar had to content himself with deporting his successor.

### **Jehoiachin:**

Jehoiachin is also known as Coniah and Jeconiah in the book of Jeremiah. He was only 18 when coming to the throne although 2 Chron.36:9 says 8 years old. This is acknowledged by most scholars as a copy error in order to accord with 2 Kings 24:8. However, he was only on the throne 3 months and 10 days, barely 13 weeks after Jehoiakim's death. For this reason he, like Jehoahaz, is not counted as adding years to the period of the Kings. His short reign and long captivity is recorded in 2 Kings 24:12-15; 2 Chron.36:9; Jer.22:24-28; 24:1; 29:1-2; 52:31-34; Ezek.17:12-13; 19:9.

He offered a short resistance to the forces of Nebuchadnezzar. But then seeing that further opposition was futile he surrendered and was taken as a prisoner of war along with his mother, his generals and troops and princes, officers, craftsmen, smiths and carpenters (2 Kings 24:12-15; Jer.24:1; Ezek.17:12), 10,000 in all. **This being the first definitive statement regarding a deportation by Nebuchadnezzar.** Ezekiel (33:21) dates his own captivity with this year before the smiting of Jerusalem and refers to it as “*our captivity.*” Daniel and his three noble companions may also have been taken in this same sweep of the best talents and resources of the country. Nebuchadnezzar spared the life of Jehoiachin and others not only for their youth and vital contribution to his own country, but in deference to a worthy opponent. He was also not hasty to entirely crush the cultural or national identity of those continuing in the land who offered a southern buffer to his own expanding domains. Brother Russell also suggests Daniel was taken with Jehoiachin.<sup>2</sup>

### **Zedekiah:**

It was not Nebuchadnezzar’s object to destroy altogether a power which, as tributary to him, formed an outpost towards Egypt. He therefore still tolerated the throne of Judah. The youngest son of Josiah, of the old Davidic lineage, was installed on the throne. It was then that his vassal’s name was changed from Mattaniah to Zedekiah. To rename someone was to claim control over that person. Nebuchadnezzar departed with treasures from the temple, but he left Jerusalem intact and the last Hebrew king of Judah on the throne. Nebuchadnezzar hoped that loyalty would bring tranquility to his southern frontiers.

Jerusalem might have maintained its autonomy within the Babylon empire had Zedekiah possessed wisdom and regard for the prophets of God. This, however, he would not do (Jer.37:1-2). In his fourth year, he heeded the false prophet, Hananiah, who forecast the eminent return of all the plundered treasures along with the deportees (Jer.28:1-9). He also dismissed Jeremiah for denying the prophecy and cast him into a miry dungeon (Jer.38:6). This same year he made some mission to Babylon in regard to the powers of the north (Jer.51:59).

The history of Zedekiah is largely covered in Jeremiah from the 27<sup>th</sup> chapter forward. Jerusalem seems to have been a center of reference for the neighboring kingdoms of Tyre, Sidon, Edom and Moab to consult in the courts of Zedekiah as regard their own subjective roles in the march of history. Jeremiah used the public exposure to saddle himself with an ox yoke to symbolize how Babylon would put a yoke on the neck of Jerusalem and Judah and that the surrounding nations should also submit to the inevitable.

His first act of overt rebellion was the formation of an alliance with Egypt, equivalent to an act of hostility with Babylon. The repercussions are mention in Jer.34:21; 37:5-11; Ezek.17:15-20. Nebuchadnezzar was now provoked beyond tolerance. Being made aware of the defection, he at once sent an army to ravage Judea. The whole country was overrun and reduced, except Jerusalem and two cities: Lachish and Azekah, which still held out (Jer.34:7).

Panic followed and Zedekiah proclaimed a false Sabbath year ordinance within Jerusalem, releasing debts and servitude (Jer.34:8-17). Jeremiah promptly condemned the hypocrisy. Zedekiah’s penance was too little and too late. He prophesied that the city would yet burn with fire and that the Lord “*will make the cities of Judah a desolation without an inhabitant.*”

In the meantime Pharaoh moved to the assistance of his ally. On hearing of his approach, the Chaldeans at once raised the siege and advanced to meet him. At this diversion, Zedekiah allowed the people to take back their slaves. But the Babylonians promptly returned, after chasing off the Egyptians. Neither rebellion nor alliances could spare the nation.

Two years into the siege, in the eleventh year of Zedekiah, “*famine prevailed in the city, and there was not bread for the people*” (2 Kings 25:3). What may have been an eyewitness account, the author of Lamentations describes the horrors, “*The hands of compassionate women boiled their own children for food*” (Lam.4:10).

Babylonian soldiers broke through part of the wall in the eleventh year of Zedekiah’s reign, on the ninth day of the fourth month. That evening Zedekiah tried to escape with his army. But they were overcome near Jericho and led to Nebuchadnezzar’s military base. There the Babylonians killed

Zedekiah's sons and officials before his face, then put out his eyes, bound him in bronze shackles. Then they "*carried him to Babylon, and put him in prison till the day of his death*" (Jer.52:11).

As for Jerusalem, the destruction was complete. There was not another successor on the throne of David. The burning of Jerusalem and the temple and deportation is briefly recorded in 2 Chron.36:18-21 in fulfillment of Jeremiah's prophecy. Although Ezekiel does not mention Zedekiah in Ezek.21:25-27, he is understood to be the subject. God allowed Babylon to remove his crown and there was not another appointee, "until he came whose right it is."

### Review:

Following the righteous king Josiah was dying time for a wayward nation. Jeremiah fairly warned Israel of the dire consequences. Nevertheless, the remaining kings had the opportunity to repent and look to divine provisions and not lean on the arm of pagan neighbors. The nation had the responsibility to return to the law and prophets and turn from other gods. Intrusions and plundering by foreign powers impoverished the nation and made them tributary to both Egypt and Babylon. However, Israel's national crown continued until Zedekiah. While some historians count the Babylonian captivity from the first year of Nebuchadnezzar, in the fourth year of Jehoiakim, yet no scripture delineates a captivity during his reign. The first recorded captivity to Babylon is for his successor, Jehoiachin, at which time Ezekiel and Daniel were likely also taken. God terminated Israel's sovereignty only upon the burning of Jerusalem and deporting the population; thus desolating the nation upon the removal of Zedekiah, leaving no successor to the typical throne of Judah.

### Looking forward:

Jeremiah, serving during these last five kings, was not entirely a prophet of doom. Chapters 31 and 33 promise a restoration of the bewildered captives. But the prophecy extends beyond their release under Cyrus. It extends to the arm of the rightful heir to the throne of David returning his people to the land, not to be rooted up again. "*For I will cause their captivity to return, and have mercy on them*" (33:26). We are watching the fulfillment of this prophecy, while Israel is learning the futility of all human alliances and the strength of the divine. "*I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS*" (23:5-6). A greater than Cyrus has arrived.

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1. Keil and Delitzch: If Jeremiah in the fourth year of Jehoiakim announced that because Judah did not hearken unto his warnings addressed to them "from the thirteenth year of Josiah even unto this day," that is, for the space of three and twenty years, nor yet to the admonitions of all the other prophets (ch.25:3-7) whom the Lord had sent unto them, therefore the Lord would now send his servant Nebuchadnezzar with all the people of the north against the land and against the inhabitants thereof, and against all these nations round about, utterly to destroy the land and make it desolate, etc.—then **it must be affirmed that he publicly made known the invasion of Judah by the Chaldeans as an event which had not yet taken place**, and therefore that the supposition that Jerusalem had already in the preceding year had been taken by Nebuchadnezzar, and that Jehoiakim had been brought under his subjection, is entirely excluded.... Therefore Hitzig and others conclude from Jer.36:9 that Nebuchadnezzar's assault upon Jerusalem was in the ninth month of the fifth year of Jehoiakim as yet only in prospect, because in that month Jeremiah prophesied of the Chaldean invasion, and the extraordinary fast then appointed had as its object the manifestation of repentance, so that thereby the wrath of God might be averted.

2. R:2401-2 (December 1, 1898): The captivity of Judah by Nebuchadnezzar was in two parts: (1) He carried captive the chief of the warriors and craftsmen, and noble people of the land, about eighteen thousand being specified—Daniel and his companions being of this number. (2 Kings 24:12-18.) He left the poor and less capable people in the land, appointing over them as under-king the uncle of Jehoiachin, viz., Zedekiah, whom he compelled to take an oath of allegiance to the Kingdom of Babylon. (2) The second captivity was eleven years later, and was the result of Zedekiah's unfaithfulness to his oath of allegiance, for he attempted to throw off the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar.

This is one of the points at which chronologists in general blunder. They begin to count the seventy years mentioned by the prophet from the captivity of Jehoiachin, instead of eleven years later, at the captivity of Zedekiah. They very generally fail to notice an important item; viz., that **the Lord does not specify through Jeremiah's prophecy, seventy years of captivity, but seventy years of desolation of the land without an inhabitant.**— See chapter on Chronology in MILLENNIAL DAWN, VOL. II.