

Why the Bible Began 3; Hezekiah and Isaiah: Putting Judah on the Map

- “The **long reign of Hezekiah (728-687 BCE)** marks the point when Judah became a truly independent and powerful kingdom...[The Southern kingdom’s growing centralization and pride after the conquest of the Northern Kingdom by **Assyria is] related to the increasing importance of writing in Judah. Beginning in Hezekiah’s reign, Judah bloomed with signs of more widespread literacy among its elites....**Now that the Assyrian Empire had wiped Israel off the map, **many inhabitants of the former Northern kingdom may have made their way to Judah’s borders.” [103-104]**
- HEZEKIAH IN THE BIBLE. The **royal seal of Hezekiah, king of Judah**, was discovered in the Ophel excavations under the direction of **archaeologist Eilat Mazar [in 2015. It features Hezekiah’s personal name and signet, and features the Egyptian ankh symbol of eternal life, reflecting perhaps his alliances with the pharaohs]**. Photo: Courtesy of Dr. Eilat Mazar; photo by Ouria Tadmor. Source: <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/news/king-hezekiah-in-the-bible-royal-seal-of-hezekiah-comes-to-light>



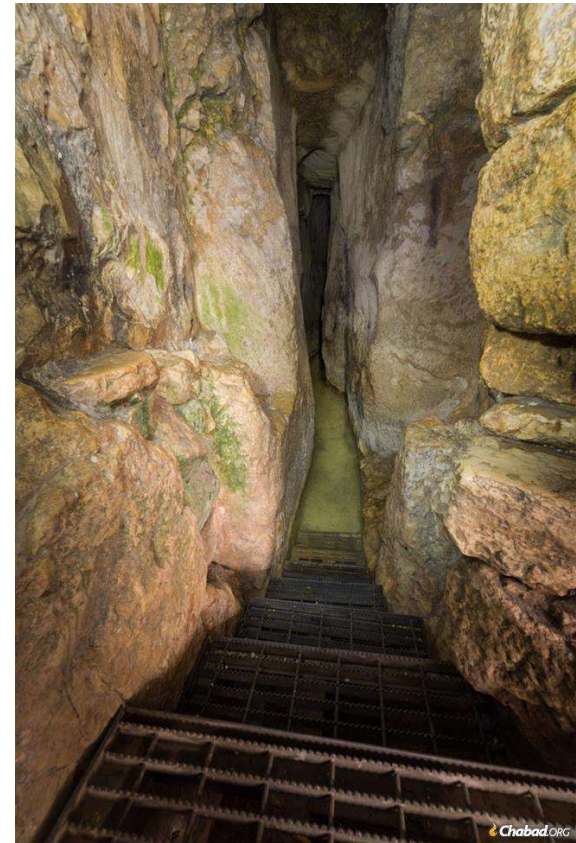
The Battle of Lachish

- The “*Palace History...conspicuously avoids* any mention of the...*important battle fought at Lachish, a Judean city that protected the Shefelah...* Graphic scenes of siege and destruction were later carved into the palace walls of Nineveh and now can be viewed in the British Museum...They...portray *Assyrian troops deporting the population, with women and children riding in carts, and men walking beside them....Dating to the early 7th c. BCE, they are our earliest depictions of Judeans...* Although Jerusalem was spared the fate of its Northern neighbor, the Assyrians reduced the kingdom of Judah to a rump state...*During the long reign of Hezekiah’s oldest son Manasseh (697-643 BCE), Judah demonstrated unwavering loyalty to the Assyrian Empire, and this...resulted in unprecedented levels of prosperity and growth...Some scholars think tha Northern scribes may even have had a hand in the drafting of an...inscription that a student discovered in 1880...* [see next slide]” [105-108]
- A section of the Assyrian siege ramp as seen on the [Lachish relief](#) from Sennacherib’s palace at Nineveh.
Credit: Osama Shukir Muhammed Amin FRCP(Glasg), CC BY-SA 4.0, via Wikimedia Commons. Source: <https://www.biblicalarchaeology.org/daily/biblical-sites-places/biblical-archaeology-places/sennacheribs-siege-of-lachish/>



“Hezekiah’s” Tunnel and the Siloam Inscription

- “**Judah Eliahu**...had been exploring the Siloam tunnel, a human –made subterranean canal stretching some 580 yards below East Jerusalem that brings water from the Gihon Spring to the Pool of Siloam...**He spotted an ancient text engraved on the wall...The Siloam Inscription as it is known today is an invaluable find for the history of writing in ancient Judah...**It relates not a triumph on the battlefield but a much more quotidian, but nevertheless **symbolic feat: workers quarried stone in two narrow tunnels ..they managed to meet in the middle...**What is remarkable about the Siloam Inscription is that it seems to have omitted any reference to Hezekiah or the palace...If so it highly unusual case for ancient West Asia: **a monumental inscription that does not acknowledge, let alone extol, the achievements of a ruler.**” [108-110]
- It says, “The tunneling [was completed]. This is the narrative of the tunneling: While [the stone-cutters were wielding] the picks, each toward his co-worker, and while there were still three cubits to tunnel through, **the voice of a man was heard calling out to his co-worker, because there was a fissure in the rock, running from south [to north]**. On the (final) day of tunneling, each of the stonecutters was striking (the stone) forcefully so as to meet his co-worker, pick after pick. Then the **water began to flow from the source to the pool, a distance of 1,200 cubits**. And 100 cubits was the height of the rock above the head of the stone-cutters.” [the original stone text is housed in the Istanbul Archeology Museum]Text and Picture Source: https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/5489254/jewish/The-Incredible-Tunnel-of-King-Hezekiah.htm



Samarian scribes and Judean scribes

- ‘With ***the move of Samarian scribes to Jerusalem***, we have finally hit on ***the social location of the first generatons of the biblical writers***. Many of the ***earliest biblical writings are the work of Judean scribes who wrote on the behalf of Davidic kings in Jerusalem***. But ***in addition*** to these Southern circles working for the crown, ***an important body of biblical writings were composed by scribes from the North***—not only by those who ***served he Assyrian bureaucracy in the province of Samaria, but also by those who would have worked in Jerusalem***.
- The Judean scribes were working as spin-doctors for Davidic dynasts. They were not only on the payroll of the palace, but the writings they produced, such as ***the Palace History, were also monarchic and statist in their perspective***. In contrast, ***Northern scribes who were serving in both Samaria and Judah produced for themselves a corpus of texts that emphasize the role of the people and its direct relationship to Yhwh***. These writings include the Family Story in Genesis and the Exodus-Conquest Account...

The Judean narrative--the Palace History--is post 722 BCE

- “This work would eventually grow to significant proportions, comprising much of the books of Samuel and Kings. But at its core is the synthesized story of Saul and David in which David mounts the throne of Israel, and that the nation’s deity approved of David’s decision to make Jerusalem the place where he was to be worshipped. Following Yhwh’s instructions, the same prophet [Samuel] who had previously anointed Saul now anoints David, and later Yhwh promises to never take his love from his descendants, as he did from Saul...***These tales represent some of the finest storytelling in the entire Bible...The intended audience would have discerned parables of Israel’s and Judah’s history. Being the youngest of eight sons from the small town of Bethlehem, David (like Judah) is an underdog. Nevertheless Yhwh chooses him to replace Saul.***” [111-112]
- “...When the tribal chiefs of the North go down to Hebron to make David their king, they make a statement that spoke directly to their descendants living after 722 BCE [the Assyrian destruction of the Kingdom of Israel]:...’Yhwh has said to you: “I is you who shall be shepherd of my people Israel, ***you who shall be ruler over Israel.***”” (2 Samuel 5: 2)...***It is possible that this literary activity pre-dates Israel’s downfall in 722 BCE, yet it is not likely.*** Up to that point Judah’s kings were much weaker than those in Israel, and they were not in the position to expect communities in the North to recognize themselves as their legitimate rulers. ***Not until Hezekiah’s reign were the conditions propitious for Judean scribes to compose these elaborate appeals to a kingless Northern community.***” [112]

The Northern response to Southern aspersions

- “The authors [of the Palace History], writing from Jerusalem, went to great lengths to cast aspersions on both Samaria and the important cultic site of Bethel directly on Judah’s border [in the North]. Their malice toward these places reflects the threat they posed for Jerusalem, as the Davidic dynasty was laying claim to Israel’s preeminent position in the Southern Levant. That threat only intensified after Judah’s downfall in 586 BCE, when the powerful province of Samaria overshadowed its southern neighbor...***The Northern scribes responded to the insults hurled at their communities in Southern writings: they drafted poetry and narratives—such as the Song of Deborah; the Family Story in Genesis, and the Exodus-Conquest Narrative—that remove the king from Israel’s national identity...***”
- “The ***Song of Deborah*** provided Israel with a national anthem that celebrates a diverse host of groups coming together around Yhwh and ‘a mother in Israel.’ Yet...***it conspicuously omits any reference to Judah or Southern communities.*** The Family Story in Genesis contains an older core that focuses on the life of the patriarch Jacob/Israel. ***Some of the Jacob traditions must have emerged before Samaria’s downfall in 722 BCE, and the court in Samaria may even have put them to use as a unifying myth of origins for the Northern kingdom’s diverse populations. The stories affirm that all members of the kingdom belong to the family of Jacob,*** live in places where he roamed, was blessed by Israel’s God, and as such, are natural members of one nation that the kings of the North managed to consolidate.” [114-115]

The Southern scribes embrace the Northern narrative

- “***Traditions of migrations from Egypt and of heroes like Joshua who had long ago liberated their clans from enemy oppression in Canaan may have once circulated among communities in the Northern kingdom. Northern scribes*** drew on these traditions as they ***drafted*** the narrative of the exodus and conquest that is transmitted—in a highly embellished form!—in the books of ***Exodus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, and Joshua. [This is the Exodus-Conquest Account]***...The removal of a royal figure from this story of national liberation stands in stark contrast to the Palace History...
- Over time, Northern scribes...[would attach] many of the accounts in Judges of non-monarchic figures who Yhwh rises up to deliver the nation (Deborah, as well as Ehud, Barak, Gideon, and Jephthah...***The introduction of divinely revealed law (the Covenant Code in Exodus (20-23))... [by the Northern scribes] transformed a historical narrative into sacred scripture***, with rules and a roadmap for rival communities that had lost their bearings through conquest and colonization.”
- “After the Southern kingdom suffered the same fate as the North, ***Judean scribes would begin to embrace the ideas of their Northern congeners [persons in the same category] and transmit their writings...[They would] insert their own figures into the narrative: Abraham and Sarah, Moses’ brother Aaron (the ancestor of priests who served in Jerusalem), Caleb (a non-royal figure that became an alternative to David as Judah’s greatest hero)***...They would also expand these narratives with new corpora of laws, such as the Deuteronomic Code, the Holiness Code, and the Priestly Source. ***In contrast to Northern writings, much of this later material asserts the centrality of Jerusalem’s temple. However, it’s authors also embraced the originally Northern conception of a direct covenant between Yhwh and he nation***, as well as the kinship and solidarity that this covenant fosters among all members of the nation. ***[These writings later came together as] a grand National Narrative, which imagines a shared past for the North and South.***” [115-117]

Josiah, Huldah, D'varim: Judah's Downfall and Deportation

- [There is a discovery of a Torah scroll in the Temple in the 18th year of King Josiah's reign (c. 623 BCE). He consults, through the chief-scribe Shaphan, the prophetess Huldah, rightly fearful that Yhwh would punish the Kingdom of Judah for not following divine dictates found in the "lost-and-just-found book". This is now the 5th book of the Bible, and the Torah—Deuteronomy, D'varim in Hebrew]. ***“Using a common book-finding scheme [used, like many authors, by Hawthorne in “The Custom House” preface to “The Scarlet Letter”, and many others, the scribes] made a claim for the antiquity of a text that, historically, may have begun to coalesce during Josiah’s reign...Within this emerging text-based culture, the role that the prophet Huldah plays is noteworthy.*** With unmatched authority, her words suffice to authenticate the document, and Josiah launches major reforms in direct response to her seal of approval.” [120]
- “After inheriting Assyria’s imperial holdings [after ending the once great Assyrian Empire at its capital Harran], ***the Babylonians set their sights on annexing Egypt***, the perennial holy grail for Mesopotamian powers...[While the Babylonian never succeeded, its frustrated attempts involved the destruction of Jerusalem.] “In 597 [BCE] Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem, and according to official Babylonian annals, the city fell three months later, on March 16...the Babylonian annals agree with the biblical Palace History [in 2 Kgs 24: 11-17] on three issues: Nebuchadnezzar did not destroy the city; he placed a new king on the throne; and he carried off a massive amount of tribute.” ***[The “puppet” king Zedekiah turned rebel ally of Egypt, incited Babylonia to] descend] “on Jerusalem...Over the course of an eighteen-month siege, which ended in the summer of 586, Babylon brought the Judean capital to its knees.”*** [126127-]

Jeremiah and the post-collapse society of Judah

- “The **book of Jeremiah** paints an intimate portrait of Judean politics directly before and after the destruction. **Its perspectives evolved over several generations** and are clearly partisan...The prophet’s opponents include not only the palace, but also priests and other prophets...He...writes a letter to the first group of exiles, urging them to not listen to those who were promising an imminent return to the homeland. **These deported communities were to build homes, plant gardens, raise families, and ‘seek the peace of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to Yhwh for it, because in its prosperity, you too will prosper’** (Jeremiah 29:7). The archeologist **Avraham Faust describes Judah after the Babylonian conquest as a ‘Post-Collapse Society’...** [“Judah and the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archeology of Desolation” (2012)].
- “Oded Lipschits...estimates that **Judah declined from about 110,000 to 40,000...**Judah’s archeological record testifies to a major rupture after 586 [BCE]...[“The Rise and Fall of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule” (2005)]. No longer do we witness the characteristic features of the society...: the four-room house [we pictured earlier], burial caves, pillar figurines, (Greek) imported pottery... **The age of territorial states—which gave rise to the kingdoms of Israel, Judah, and their neighbors—had come to an end...**The Babylonian Empire itself would endure for just another half century, making way for a succession of **new imperial powers: the Persians [in 515 BCE], the Hellenistic kings who succeeded Alexander the Great, the Romans, the Christian Byzantines, the Muslim caliphates, the Ottomans, and finally the British.**” [131-133]

Before and After: Admitting Defeat

- “The primary factors behind the Bible’s formation are **political division and military defeat**...In its constitution and function, the kingdoms of Israel and Judah resembled their rivals throughout the region...**A Judean was thus one who lived in Judah. The Jew had yet to be invented.** When these kingdoms fell, there was little left—in either institutions or ideology—that could reconstitute its clans and communities...In both the diaspora and their homeland, they now lived in the ‘shadows of the empire.’”
- “Defeat is a pervading presence in the biblical corpus...Its presence is closely connected to the new role that scribes assigned to language and texts in the post-destruction period...As Judeans rebuilt llthe ruins of their destroyed capital and reflected upon the demise of an earlier, more glorious age, **scribes in their midst pieced together the fragments of their last...[Their literary labors...presuppose both communal lament and physical labors.]**” [135-136]

Daughter Zion: Finding One's Voice--Lamentations

- **[In Hebrew the book of Lamentations is known by its incipit, its first word, “eichah”, literally, “how.”]** “The problem of ‘how’...unifies this work. **It refers to a past of violence, a present of psychic torment, and a future of uncertain answers...** Although these laments may have been composed long after the depicted events, they capture the upheaval and agony of Judah’s downfall in the most immediate and intense forms...Its poetry repeatedly reaches a fever pitch as various voices call the deity to account for failing to show pity...This attention to defeat is by no means limited to Lamentations. **Loss is the lens through which biblical scribes contemplate the past...**[However] this book is more orderly...than others, consisting of five highly structured poems. By giving some semblance of structure to their sorrow, these poems pay tribute to the power of the ...word in the process of recovery. The book’s authors worked through their national trauma by literally working through the alphabet (aleph-bet in Hebrew). Four of the five poems are ordered acrostically, the first letter of each strophe corresponds to the alphabet, with strophes proceeding from A to Z (or from aleph to tav). **In using an alphabet to comfort their people, the authors of Lamentations were contributing to what is, without exaggeration a revolution in the history of writing. ”**
- “The scribes of the former Northern and Southern kingdoms composed new works] “having a wider social impact, as it [their collective efforts, which eventually became the Tanach] became central to an emerging ‘People of the Book.’ As a late addition to this corpus, **Lamentations challenges the deity, and as such, it joins several other books that are formative for the ‘People of Protest’** [a new form of literature!]**...Lamentations is both survivors’ literature and survival literature**—that is, it is not only produced in the wake of disaster, but also for life thereafter. That life is imagined as a shared one, and thus instead of the solitary work of an individual, the process of recovery requires the participation of an entire community, with the present generation joining their ancestors as co-witnesses to catastrophe...Daughter Zion [the personification of the vanquished people] reveals her will and strength to live another day. **She may have no one to comfort her, but when she raises her voice in protest and anger, we know that she is not destined to perish.** “[138-40]
- “Consisting of **five** individual **units**, the structure of Lamentations **corresponds to the Five Books of Moses** (the Pentateuch), which claim to bear the divine revelation received at the culmination of the nation’s liberation [at Mt. Sinai]. **The five poems of Lamentations offer a new revelation---...fathomed by many in the depths of defeat.**” [144]

Defeat and the collective consciousness in the Tanach

- “***The pattern of most monarchic inscriptions begins with defeat and ends in triumph. The biblical narrative presents the opposite, with the liberation and success at the beginning, and destruction and downfall at the end.*** The Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the Twelve ‘Minor’ Prophets) not only make defeat the focus of their penetrating discourses, but also place responsibility for it squarely on the nation...Defeat, life in exile, and national restoration are also formative themes for much of the “Writings,” the third and final section of the Hebrew canon (to which Lamentations belongs)...Daniel and Esther relate to life in exile [in Persia]...Ezra-Nehemiah depicts exiles returning to Judah and rebuilding the ruins of Jerusalem; this restoration proceeds, however, in the shadow of foreign hegemony...***The book of Job describes trauma inflicted on an individual in a manner that mirrors the nation’s collective experience. In antiquity, we rarely, if ever, hear about the experience of defeat from the survivors.*** Most kingdoms consigned their downfall to oblivion.

It was something that they wished to forget. With few exceptions, the vanquished vanished from the historical record. ***The only reason we know about them today is... because other societies preserved information about them (above all, in the Bible),... or we discovered remains from them in recent years [through archeology].*** [146-147]

- “The pervasive presence of defeat is an important clue to the enigma of the Bible’s existence. It suggests that ***the most formative time for biblical literature was*** the period following the destruction of the kingdom of Israel in 722 BCE, the decades leading up to the destruction of the kingdom of Judah in 586 BCE, and ***especially the centuries thereafter, during which new communities re-emerged in both the North and the South***...The Bible’s project of peoplehood grew out of the will to admit defeat, yet also ***the refusal to allow it to be the final word.***” [152-153]

The Creator: Comforting the Afflicted

- “Genesis...may be less exciting than..competing cosmologies [such as the Babylonian epic “Enuma Elish, describing the world as a product of combat between the gods and their copulation], but it offered a powerful framework for thinking about the world and one’s place in it. **A cosmos created through language and labor, and declared to be good, offered more hope to a conquered people than a cosmos created through combat.** The authors of Genesis.. Articulated a new way of looking at life. While it may seem that existence is all about physical might and (violently)imposing one’s will on others, their cosmology declares that peace, not war, is the natural order of things. **As a model to be emulated, Elohim works, not as a warrior but as an artist and architect** [Wright identifies this as Genesis 1, the Priestly Source; the older account, now identified as Genesis 2, begins with an already existing world, and begins creating a human out of the dust of the earth , like the Egyptian god Khnum, the “Divine Potter”, who is instructed to plant and till a garden].” [160]
- **“Elohim creates not only by speaking but also by separating (havdil), by pushing back the darkness and blocking the waters. The divine activity of partitioning makes room for light and life.** It is also central to the thought of the Priestly Source, with **its dual principle of imago Dei and imitation Dei—that is, just as all humans are created in ‘the image of God,’ they are expected to ‘imitate God’ in their conduct.** All are to engage in the sacred, creational activity of havdil [separation] as they navigate their way in the world. One of the primary purposes of the Priestly Source is to provide the people of Israel with guidelines for this activity, and in doing so, it addresses all realms of human life: from conventional cultic matters of holiness and purity to matters of public health (e.g., the treatment of contagious diseases through quarantine)...**But havdil also has an esoteric quality, especially when it is applied to the political realm; the nation has been separated from others in the world and entrusted with a special, secret knowledge [and task] ..making space for the sacred and bringing light to the darkness, momentous acts of creation that they could perform even as...a conquered nation.**” [162]

Wright: How and When the Seventh Day Became Shabbat

- “One of the most unusual features of Genesis (1) is that Elohim creates the cycles of nature (days, months, seasons and years) in the framework of an **unnatural cycle**. The latter is the same cycle that Yhwh, during the revelation at Sinai, makes known to Israel: the covenantal order of the week, culminating in the Sabbath [Shabbat]. Elsewhere [at the very beginning of the National Narrative], **the Priestly Source identifies the Sabbath as the sign and symbol of the eternal covenant between the nation and Yhwh** [Exodus 31: 16-17].”
- The heading on this slide is the title of a Jacob Wright article in The Torah.com, 2015, who also references his “Shabbat of the Full Moon”, in The Torah.com 2015, and includes material in Why the Bible Began, 163-164].
- “**During the centuries before Judah’s defeat, the Sabbath appears to have been a monthly festival celebrating the Full Moon, parallel to the New Moon...It was intimately linked to the land, its seasons, harvests, agrarian communities, altars, and sanctuaries.** The **destruction of the Temple** meant therefore the disruption of the festival calendar, with its monthly Sabbath. This point is being made when the community mourns **in Lamentations 2:6, ‘Yhwh has abolished in Zion festival and Sabbath,** and in his fierce indignation has spurned king and priest.’ **For the Sabbath to survive, it had to be reinvented...This full-moon Sabbath was combined with a seen-day cycle of labor** [see the Covenant Code in Exodus 23:12]...AS such it became a central feature of Judah’s collective identity... **Time transcends space...The Sabbath did not require being in the sacred land that the nation’s deity inhabited.**

Hebrew as a Judean Language

- “*Genesis (1) affirms the power of words and the primacy of time over space, but it also promotes a particular language—the one of the biblical corpus. ‘Yeh-hee or—Let there be light!’* The biblical writers recognized the potential of language to unite communities and form a people...One of the figures who sought to resuscitate and reform Judean culture was Nehemiah. *In his memoir [the book of Nehemiah]...he reports that many children in Judah no longer knew how to speak ‘Judean.’ For him, language was the key to culture,* and without speaking ‘Judean,’ one was at a disadvantage when participating in Judah’s new public life. His reforms to remedy the problem are depicted as the culmination of his many initiatives to foster a sense of kinship and solidarity among Judah’s inhabitants.”
- Field of Dreams, Scenes of the Kinsella farm were taken on the property of Don Lansing in [Dyersville, Iowa](#); some of the [baseball field](#) scenes were shot on the neighboring farm of Al Ameskamp. Source of Photo: Wikipedia
- “...Language did not play the same socially formative role in monarchic times, but after the kingdom’s downfall, it would gradually become a key strategy with which communities resisted imperial domination...Languages contain within themselves not only rich cultural histories but also important insights on life, and thus their preservation is no less important than the protection of endangered wildlife. *The biblical scribes* championed a similar program [as the current UNESCO efforts to rescue imperiled languages] by *portraying Yhwh speaking, writing, and reading in Hebrew*. These writers argued again according to the principle of imitation Dei, if our God knows the language of the biblical scribes, then we should too. And it is in this language that they tell their people’s story.”[165-166]