

Session 4

The judges and kings of Israel

The periods of the Judges and Kings lasted from about 1400 B.C. until 600 B.C. Much of the Old Testament is concerned with this period. Judges such as Samson and Gideon and kings such as David and Solomon led Israel through this period.

4.1 The period of the Judges

This section covers a period of about 350 years of Israel's history. In this time Israel was not an organised and united nation as in the period of the Kings which followed. For this reason, chaos often prevailed as everyone went their separate ways.

In his mercy God raised up men and women of faith who delivered the nation from their oppressors, including Deborah, Gideon and Samson. In each case of deliverance we find that God's strength was made perfect in weakness; he used insignificant means to bring about the deliverance in case Israel should claim victory for themselves. He was impressing the lesson upon them that he alone can overcome their enemies and provide salvation.

This era drew to its conclusion in the days of Samuel who faithfully administered the law and endeavoured to direct the people in God's ways.

4.2 Saul, the first king of Israel

Samuel was the last judge. Near the end of his life, the people demanded a king. In effect, they rejected God as their king and demanded a human king. God gave them King Saul—a tall and handsome leader.

The early part of Saul's reign was full of promise. So long as he was humble and placed his confidence in the strength of God, success

followed. After his first military victory, he praised God as the one who had really obtained victory for Israel, "... for this day the LORD has rescued Israel." (1 Samuel 11:13).

It seemed as though the people's desire for visible leadership was to be realised in Saul. But the story of his decline and ultimate rejection as king is one of the most tragic recorded in Scripture. The character that had developed in Saul throughout his rule erupted into presumption and disobedience. For this reason he was rejected as king of Israel.

1 Samuel 13: Saul rejected as king

The prophet Samuel had told King Saul to go to Gilgal and wait there seven days. Then Samuel would come to offer the sacrifices on behalf of Israel. Read 1 Samuel 13:1–14.

1. What should Saul have done?
2. What would you have done in Saul's position?
3. Was Samuel being fair to Saul?

Saul continued to disobey God (1 Samuel 15:16–23). The new king God had sought out (v14) was David.

4.3 David becomes king of Israel

God considered the new king, David, "a man after my own heart". Acts 13:22; 1 Samuel 13:14
David's early life as a shepherd fitted him for the time when he became king of Israel and conqueror of God's enemies.

But David's life was not without difficulty. Much time would elapse in the wisdom of God before the promised throne would be his. In this there are lessons for ourselves—"we must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God" (Acts 14:22). David's experiences in his exile and sufferings provide us with lessons in courage, faith, justice. His innermost thoughts are recorded in many of the Psalms.

Under David's reign, Israel moved into the most glorious period of its history.

Jerusalem chosen as the national capital

David needed to secure his defences knowing the Philistines would soon attack. Jerusalem was a natural fortress and David wanted to acquire it quickly. He also wanted Jerusalem as his capital because it

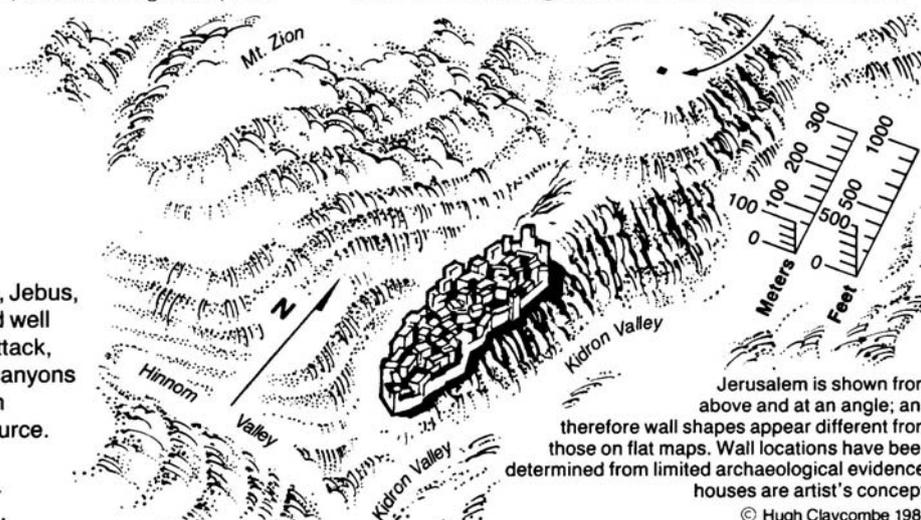
1. The City of the Jebusites and 2. David's Jerusalem

Substantial historical evidence, both Biblical and extra-Biblical, places the temple of Herod (and before it the temples of Zerubbabel and of Solomon) on the holy spot where King David built an altar to the Lord. David had purchased the land from Araunah the Jebusite, who was using the exposed

bedrock as a threshing floor (2Sa 24:18-25). Tradition claims a much older sanctity for the site, associating it with the altar of Abraham on Mount Moriah (Ge 22:1-19). The writer of Genesis equates Moriah with "the Mountain of the LORD," and other OT shrines originated in altars erected by Abraham.

c. 1000 B.C.

Barely 12 acres in size, Jebus, a Canaanite city, could well defend itself against attack, with walls atop steep canyons and shafts reaching an underground water source. David captured the stronghold, c. 1000 B.C. and made it his capital.



was the city which God had selected to "place his name there" and was the place God had chosen for all tribes to assemble for worship and spiritual instruction.

Deuteronomy 12:5; Psalm 78:68-70; 132:11-14

The Jebusites (inhabitants of Jerusalem) boasted that David would not be able to take the city but David overthrew them and secured the city.

David also defeated the Philistines with God's assistance and at long last brought peace to the land of Israel

Political and religious reform

David organised the nation of Israel on a political and religious basis and reinstated the priesthood so a service to God could be carried out correctly. In keeping with his plans for national reformation and out of a desire to honour God, David wanted to build a temple for the ark. This was rejected by God because of the amount of blood that he had shed.

God's promise to David

We now come to another of the great covenants of promise. God had guided David's life with the intention of "establishing a great name for him". David's interest in God brought a promise of a dynasty that would last forever.

Covenants of promise:
God also made promises to Eve in Genesis 3:15, and to Abraham in Genesis 12–22.

2 Samuel 7: God's promise to David

At this time, Israel had not temple. They still worshipped at the tent (or tabernacle) which was made when they were in the wilderness. David decided he wanted to build a more permanent temple for God. Read 2 Samuel 7.

1. Why did God not want David to build him a temple?
2. Did God want a temple built?
3. David's son Solomon succeeded him as king. Is it Solomon who is prophesied in verses 12–16?
4. One thousand years later, Jesus was born to be king of the Jews and heir to the throne of David (see Luke 1:31–33). His mother Mary was a descendant of David. Is it Jesus who is prophesied in verses 12–16.
5. What does David's prayer reveal about his character?

The promise to David means that one of his descendants would be the promised Messiah who would rule the world from Jerusalem forever.

4.4 The reign of Solomon

Solomon followed his father David to the throne and his coronation is recorded in 1 Chronicles 29. God gave Solomon wisdom, riches and honour (2 Chronicles 1:10).

The reign of this great king lasted 40 years. It was a period in the nation's history noted for widespread peace and prosperity. It was also marked by tremendous building activity. The most glorious and significant of which was the Temple of God at Jerusalem. In this way the plans of David were realised in his son.

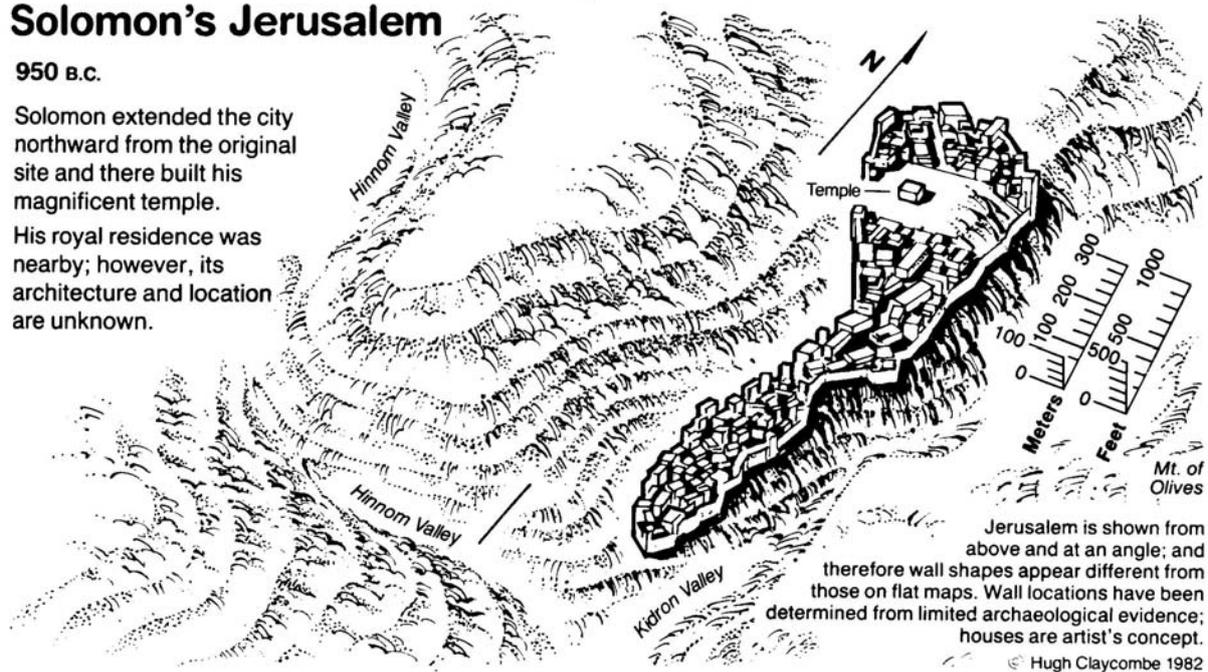
Solomon is responsible for writing the books of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon.

Solomon's Jerusalem

950 B.C.

Solomon extended the city northward from the original site and there built his magnificent temple.

His royal residence was nearby; however, its architecture and location are unknown.



4.5 The divided kingdom: Israel and Judah

At the end of the reign of Solomon, his son Rehoboam succeeded to the throne of Israel. The heavy taxation levied during the reign of Solomon led to civil unrest in Israel, leading to a division in the nation of Israel. The ten tribes of the north separated to form the kingdom of Israel, and the two southern tribes remaining loyal to Rehoboam, formed the kingdom of Judah.

The people of the northern kingdom proclaimed Jeroboam to be their king. Jeroboam was determined to consolidate his position of power, and actively sought to widen the gap between the northern and southern kingdoms. The city of Jerusalem was still the centre of worship for all the land, and Jeroboam saw this as a danger. His solution was to set up his own form of worship, and he had idols placed in the cities of Dan and Bethel in the northern kingdom. These, he said would be worshipped by the kingdom of Israel, removing the need for them to travel to Jerusalem.

This action was in direct opposition to the commandments of God and for this reason Jeroboam is referred to thereafter in the Bible as "Jeroboam the son of Nebat who made Israel to sin".

Throughout its history, Israel has always suffered when they ignored the laws of their God. The northern kingdom of Israel was to be no exception—it was a nation in decline almost from the outset. Throughout the 250 year history of Israel all of its 19 kings followed

the ways of Jeroboam, and ignored the ways of their God. Eight of these monarchs were assassinated during their reign, and finally the destruction God had warned them of became a reality.

Threatened by Assyria, Israel's last king, Hoshea, tried to form an alliance with Egypt. In 722 B.C., the Assyrians invaded the land of Israel and the northern kingdom came to an end.

2 Kings 17: The end of the kingdom of Israel

Read 2 Kings 17:1–23.

1. What reasons are given for Israel's demise?
2. In what pagan religious practices did they participate?
3. How did God seek to stop them from pursuing idolatry?
4. What parallels are there between this event and our own society today?

4.6 The prophets of Israel

While Israel as a nation was lawless in the eyes of their God, there was always a minority in the kingdom who remained faithful. The Bible teaches that God preserved this group despite the sins of the general population. To assist in this he provided the prophets. These were faithful men who were at times inspired by God to speak and write messages of encouragement to the faithful and warning to the unfaithful. In this can be seen the mercy of God towards Israel.

The LORD warned Israel and Judah through all his prophets and seers: "Turn from your evil ways. Observe my commands and decrees."
(2 Kings 17:13)

The words and actions of these men preserved the faithful and condemned those who ignored them. Some of the prophets sent to Israel were:

Elijah	875 – 850	BC
Elisha	850 – 790	BC
Jonah	775 – 760	BC
Amos	765 – 750	BC
Hosea	755 – 710	BC
Micah	735 – 700	BC

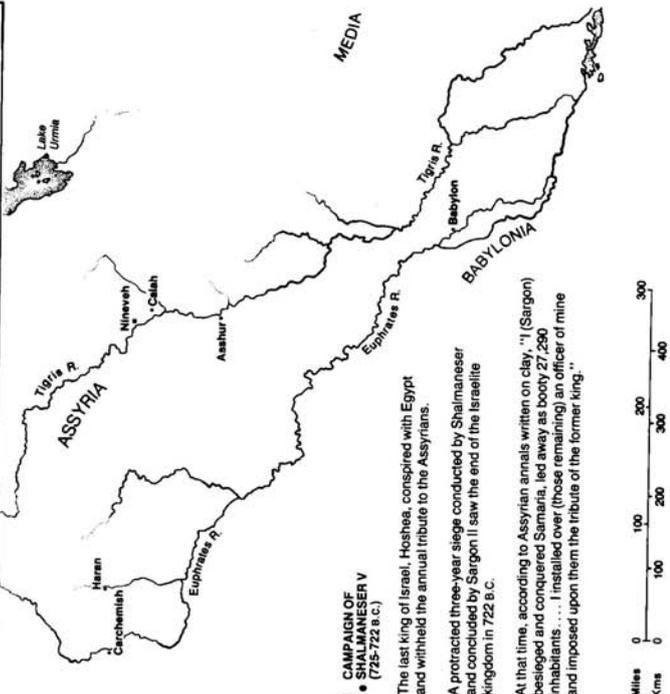
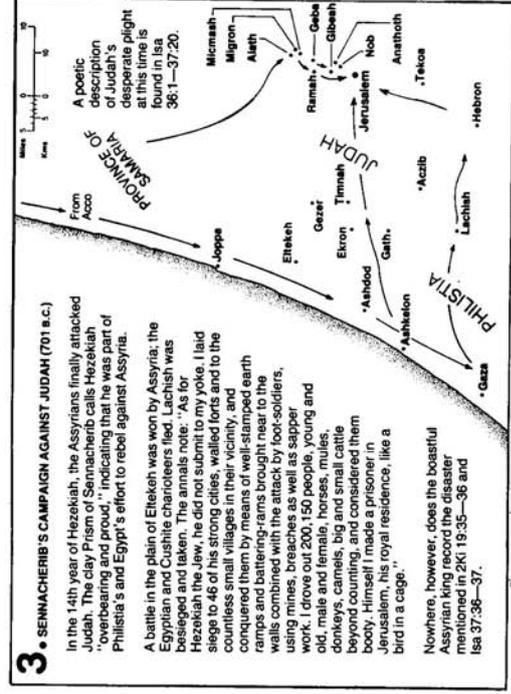
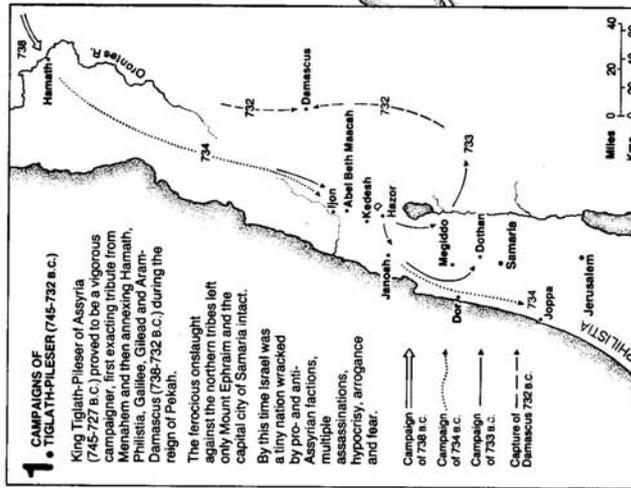
Assyrian Campaigns against Israel and Judah

The Assyrian invasions of the eighth century B.C. were the most traumatic political events in the entire history of Israel.

The brutal Assyrian style of warfare relied on massive armies, superbly equipped with the world's first great siege machines manipulated by an efficient corps of engineers.

Psychological terror, however, was Assyria's most effective weapon. It was ruthlessly applied, with corpses impaled on stakes, severed heads stacked in heaps, and captives skinned alive.

The shock of bloody military sieges on both Israel and Judah was profound. The prophets did not fail to scream out against their horror, while at the same time pleading with the people to see God's hand in history, to recognize spiritual causes in the present punishment.



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4.7 The kingdom of Judah

Following the division of the nation of Israel, the southern tribes of Judah and Benjamin remained loyal to Rehoboam the son of Solomon. They formed the southern kingdom of Judah. This nation lasted over 340 years, from 930 BC to 586 BC, although the last three kings were vassals controlled by foreign invaders. The capital city was Jerusalem, the site of the Temple, and in total 20 kings occupied the throne of Judah.

The history of Judah was a mixture of prosperity and poverty. They experienced the truth of the words spoken to king Asa early in their history,

The LORD is with you when you are with him. If you seek him, he will be found by you, but if you forsake him, he will forsake you. (2 Chronicles 15:2)

The material state of the nation was mirrored by the moral state of its people, who were in turn greatly influenced by their king.

These monarchs ranged from great kings like Hezekiah, to others who were no better than their neighbours to the north.

Finally the nation refused to heed the laws of their God and following a succession of evil kings toward the end of their history, Judah suffered the same fate as had befallen Israel before them. The fact that they had turned to God at times in their history had enabled Judah to survive over 130 years more than Israel, but their refusal to listen to the warnings of God through the prophets resulted in their defeat. In 609 BC the Babylonian army, led by Nebuchadnezzar, invaded Judah. The end result of this invasion was that the people of Judah were taken into captivity into a foreign land; the land of Babylon.

The prophets of Judah

Throughout the highs and lows of Judah's history, a minority always remained faithful to their God. As was seen in Israel, God inspired prophets to preserve this minority through their words and actions, while at the same time warning the nation of the consequences of disobedience.

Some of the prophets of Judah were:

Micah	735 – 700	BC
Isaiah	740 – 681	BC
Nahum	620	BC
Zephaniah	635 – 615	BC
Jeremiah	626 – 585	BC
Habakkuk	620 – 605	BC

Homework

1. Read Judges 4.
 - (a) Why do you think Barak was unwilling to undertake the campaign without Deborah?
 - (b) Does this reveal a defect in his faith?
 - (c) What insight does this give into God's willingness to bear with our human frailty?
2. David was a man who had become very close to God through prayer. Read his prayer in 1 Chronicles 29:10–19.
 - (a) What does he say about God?
 - (b) What does he say about humans and of his own attitude
 - (c) What did he pray for?

Seek to learn how to enrich and enlarge your own praying by considering David's prayers.

Nebuchadnezzar's Campaign against Judah

605-586 B.C.

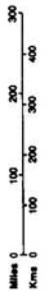
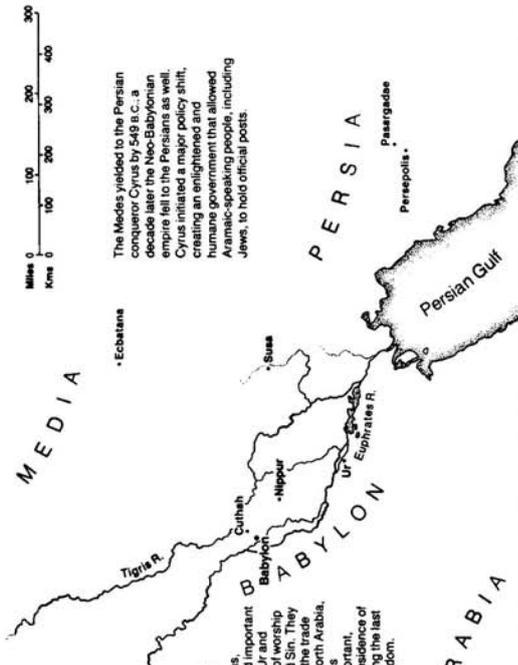
Events in Judah moved swiftly following the death of Josiah. Pharaoh Neco pressed his advantage by deposing the new ruler and appointing a second son of Josiah, Jehoiakim, as king.

Soon a stronger power appeared in the north in the person of Nebuchadnezzar, king of the Chaldeans (Neo-Babylonians), who determined to follow the fierce policies of his Assyrian predecessors.

The tribute of Jehoiakim was paid at a distance when he heard of Nebuchadnezzar's approach. After three years as a Babylonian vassal, he rebelled, bringing a rapid response in the form of small-scale raids from Babylonians, Arameans, Moabites and Ammonites

(c. 602 B.C.). Finally, Nebuchadnezzar's forces controlled all of the coastal territory north of the Wadi of Egypt.

When 18-year old Jehoiachin had ruled just three months (597 B.C.), the main Babylonian army struck, capturing Jerusalem and exiling the king as a captive in Babylon. Ten thousand persons were deported.

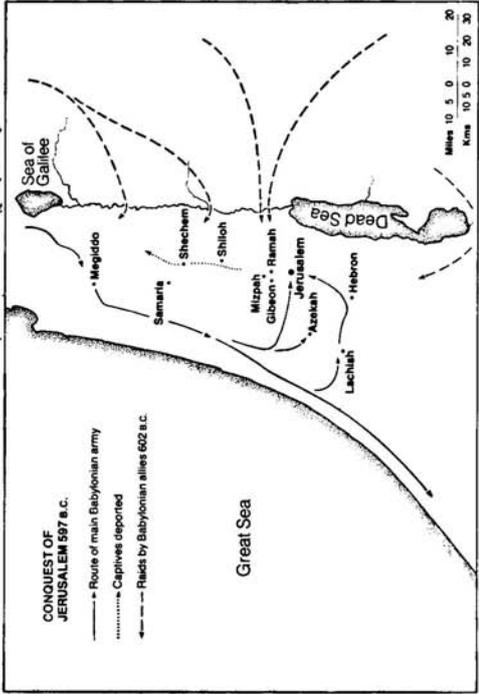
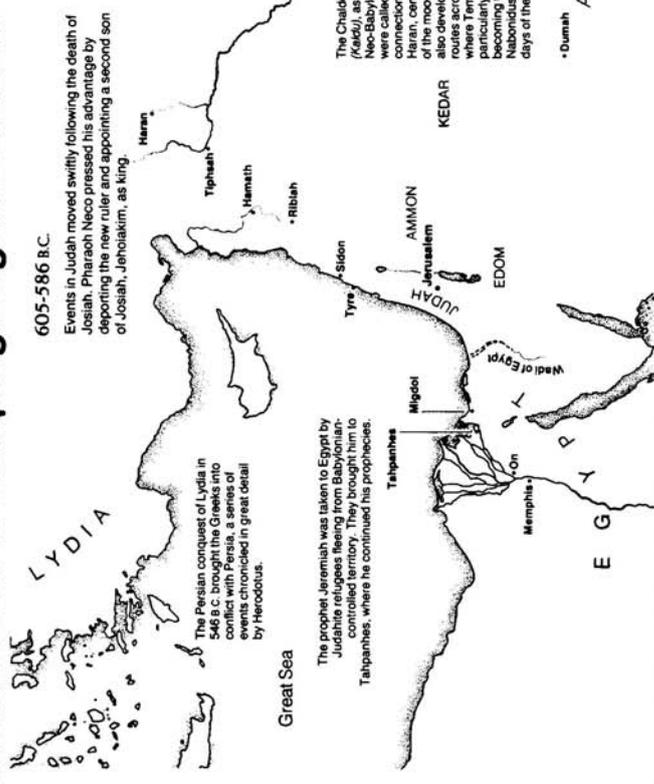


The Medes yielded to the Persian conqueror Cyrus by 549 B.C. a decade later the Neo-Babylonian empire fell to the Persians as well. Cyrus initiated a major policy shift, creating an enlightened and humane government that allowed Aramaic-speaking people, including Jews, to hold official posts.

The Chaldeans (Kaldai), as the Neo-Babylonians are called, traced their origin to the moon-god Sin. They also developed the trade routes across North Arabia, where Tema was particularly important, becoming the residence of Nabonidus during the last days of the kingdom.

The Persian conquest of Lydia in 546 B.C. brought the Greeks into conflict with Persia, a series of events chronicled in great detail by Herodotus.

The prophet Jeremiah was taken to Egypt by Judean refugees fleeing from Babylonian conquest. They brought him to Tahpanhes, where he continued his prophecies.



DESTRUCTION OF JERUSALEM 586 B.C.
Zedekiah, the last king of Judah, was appointed by Nebuchadnezzar, but he also rebelled. Jerusalem was attacked and besieged for two years. Facing starvation, the desperate king with his army fled by night "through the gate between the two walls" (2K [25:4] toward the Arabah, but both were overtaken in the plains of Jericho.

Zedekiah was captured and was dragged off in chains to Riblah, where he saw his sons slaughtered before he was blinded and taken to Babylon. One month later (in 586 B.C.) the Holy City of Jerusalem was ransacked and burned. Numerous high officials were executed, the temple furnishings were broken up and carried off, and the people were exiled.

Lured by a tent of Pharaoh's army, the Babylonians withdrew temporarily. When the Egyptians retreated, however, the Babylonians returned with a vengeance to Jerusalem.

