

SPEECH ON JEWISH HISTORY DURING BABYLONIAN CONQUEST OF THE MIDDLE EAST 2500 YEARS AGO

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CAST OF CHARACTERS

NEBUCHADNEZAR

YEHOYAKIM
YEHOYACHIN
TZIDKIYAHU

JEREMIAH
EZEKIEL

DANIEL
MORDECAI



My talk will summarize a 100-year-long period in Jewish history when Babylonia conquered the Middle East 2500 years ago.

These are the cast of characters in my story – they all knew each other, and they all played a role in the story I am about to tell:

- Nevuchadnezar was the Babylon king who visited Jm (Jerusalem) 3 different times, and in his 3rd visit destroyed 1st Temple in Jm,
- these (YEHOYAKIM YEHOYACHIN TZIDKIYAHU) are the last 3 Jewish Kings of JUDEA just before the destruction of the 1st Temple.
- JEREMIAH from the book of Jeremiah of the Bible, and EZEKIEL from the Book of Ezekiel of the Bible are 2 Jewish prophets who preached to the Jews both before and after the destruction of the Temple.
- DANIEL is from the Book of Danial of the Bible.
- MORDECHAI is from the Purim Megillah of the Bible.

To set the stage for this story, let me first give you some background information:

This is a map of the Middle East in the time of King Solomon, who lived about 400 years before Babylonia was a superpower.

In King Solomon's time, the country of Israel was a confederation of 12 tribes, occupying this area (highlighted in yellow & pink)

King Solomon built the Temple in Jm, built palaces, and lived opulently. He paid for all this by levying high taxes. The Jews were sick of the high taxes. So, when King Solomon died, 10 of the 12 Jewish tribes seceded from the union, and formed a new country, which they called ISRAEL (highlighted in yellow). The remaining 2 tribes, of Judah & Benjamin, stayed together called their country JUDEA.

200 years later, Israel was conquered by the superpower Assyria. The Jews in Israel were exiled to foreign countries, and never heard from again, and so are now referred to as the "10 lost tribes". So the only Jewish country left was Judea.

Over the next 150 years, the superpowers of Egypt and Assyria were becoming weaker and losing their grasp on the countries that they had previously conquered, whereas Babylonia was growing & becoming a superpower.

A historical tipping point occurred when a man who was a master at conquest, Nevuchadnezar, was crowned new king of Babylonia. In his first year in power, Nevuchadnezar entered Jm and essentially told the Jewish King Yehoyakim 4 things:

- (1) Judea will switch allegiance from Egypt to Babylonia
- (2) Judea will switch from paying protection money to Egypt, to instead paying protection money to Babylonia
- (3) I will loot treasures from the holy Temple in Jm, and took them away to Babylonia
- (4) I will take the smartest Jewish boys (notably Danial, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego) from Jm to Babylonia, to groom them to grow up to become my advisors.

After Nevuchadnezar left JUDEA, the Jewish King Yehoyakim defied Babylonia and switched his allegiance back to Egypt. That is because the Jewish King trusted in 2 things:

- he trusted that Egypt will defend the Jewish state against Babylonia
- he trusted his advisors' predictions that Babylonia will soon be defeated by the other superpowers

However, the Jewish prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel warned the Jews NOT to defy Babylonia. Over the following 18 years until the Jm was destroyed, these prophets preached, to the Jewish King and to any other Jews who would listen, the following 9 points:

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1- Babylonia will NOT be defeated as false prophets are predicting, but will instead grow stronger and conquer the entire Middle East.

2- Babylonia will destroy Jm & its Temple.

3- The destruction of Jm will be the Jews' own fault, for not following the Torah.

4- The only ways to avert the coming destruction are for Jews to (1) keep the Torah and (2) surrender to Nevuchadnezar.

5- The destruction of Judea will NOT be averted by some miracle from Gd as Jews are hoping.

6- In fact, just the opposite, it is Gd that is orchestrating the ultimate destruction of Jm at the hands of Babylonia.

7- Countries are fooling themselves when they trust Egypt's assurances to defend them against Babylonia

8- In fact, on the contrary, Egypt will not be able to defend its OWN SELF against Babylonia, and will itself be conquered by Babylonia.

9- Babylonia will one day be defeated and the Jews it exiles will return to Israel, but only after 70 yrs.

The Jewish King Yehoyakim was succeeded as king by son Yoyachin, who continued defying Nevuchadnezar and aligning with Egypt

When Nevuchadnezar heard that Judea switched allegiance to Egypt, Nevuchadnezar returned to Jm and did a lot more damage than his first visit. Nevuchadnezar

(1) looted the holy Temple and the royal palace

(2) exiled 10s of 1000s of Jews to Babylonia, including the Jewish King, the Jewish army, the Jewish upper class, and notable Jews like Prophet Ezekiel & Mordecai (of the Purim story)

(3) appointed Yehoyakin's brother Tzidkiyahu as the new king of Judea

After Nevuchadnezar left Judea, the new Jewish King TZIDKIYAHU made the same mistake as his predecessors. Tzidkiyahu defied Babylonia and switched his allegiance back to Egypt, since he trusted that Egypt will defend Judea and he trusted that Babylonia will soon be defeated the other superpowers.

Nevuchadnezar was angry, and visited Judea a 3rd time. This time, Nevuchadnezar besieged Jm. For 3 years, food could not get into the city, and Jews could not get leave. The residents of Jm were starving.

Powerful Jews accused Jeremiah of treason, and threw Jeremiah in a Jm jail

After 3 years of siege, when the situation appeared hopeless, Jewish King Tzidkiyahu and his family fled Jm through a secret passage, but were caught by Babylonia soldiers. The Babylonians executed Tzidkiyahu's sons before his eyes. And blinded Tzidkiyahu, and took Tzidkiyahu in chains to Babylonia.

Then Nevuchadnezar army

- broke through the city walls of Jm

- looted every item of gold/silver/copper from the Temple & royal palace

- burned down the entire city

- exiled all Jews to Babylonia (where some would be executed), except for the poor Jews

- told the remaining poor Jews that they may rebuild their country

- appointed a Jew named Gedalia as governor over Judea. Gedalia was the first ruler of Judea, in over 400 years, who was NOT from the lineage of legendary King David

- left Babylonian soldiers with Gedalia to keep the peace

In a touching event recounted in the Bible, Nevuchadnezar found where Jeremiah was being held in prison in Jm, and released Jeremiah, and essentially told Jeremiah "I know you are a good man – because I heard that you were urging your countrymen to surrender to me which would have avoided all this destruction. So I (Nevuchadnezar) am giving you 2 good options to choose from: You may accompany me to Babylonia where I will take care of you the rest of your life, or you may stay here in Judea and help your countrymen rebuild this country that I just now destroyed." Jeremiah chose to stay in Judea.

After Nevuchadnezar left Judea, a gang, comprised of 10 gentiles and 2 Jews, assassinated (1) the newly-appointed governor Gedalia, (2) 100s of Jews that were with Gedalia, and (3) the Babylonian soldiers that were keeping the peace. The remaining Jews of Judea were terrified that news of the assassinations might incite Nevuchadnezar to annihilate the remaining Jews in Judea. So, the remaining Jews fled to Egypt.

The epilog of this story that all the predictions that Jeremiah and Ezekiel made years earlier all came true.

The most notable one is the following: As Jeremiah predicted: Exactly 70 years after the first exile of Jews to Babylonia, Babylonia was itself suddenly conquered by Persia. The Persian government searched through the treasuries of Babylonia and found golden utensils that were originally used in the Jewish Temple. These were utensils that Babylonia had looted from Jm 70 years earlier. And the Persian government gave those golden utensils to the Jews in Babylonia, and told the Jews in Babylonia that they are now free to return to their ancestral homeland rebuild it. That year, 50,000 Jews left Babylonia & returned to Jm and started building the 2nd Temple.