LET THE STONES SPEAK

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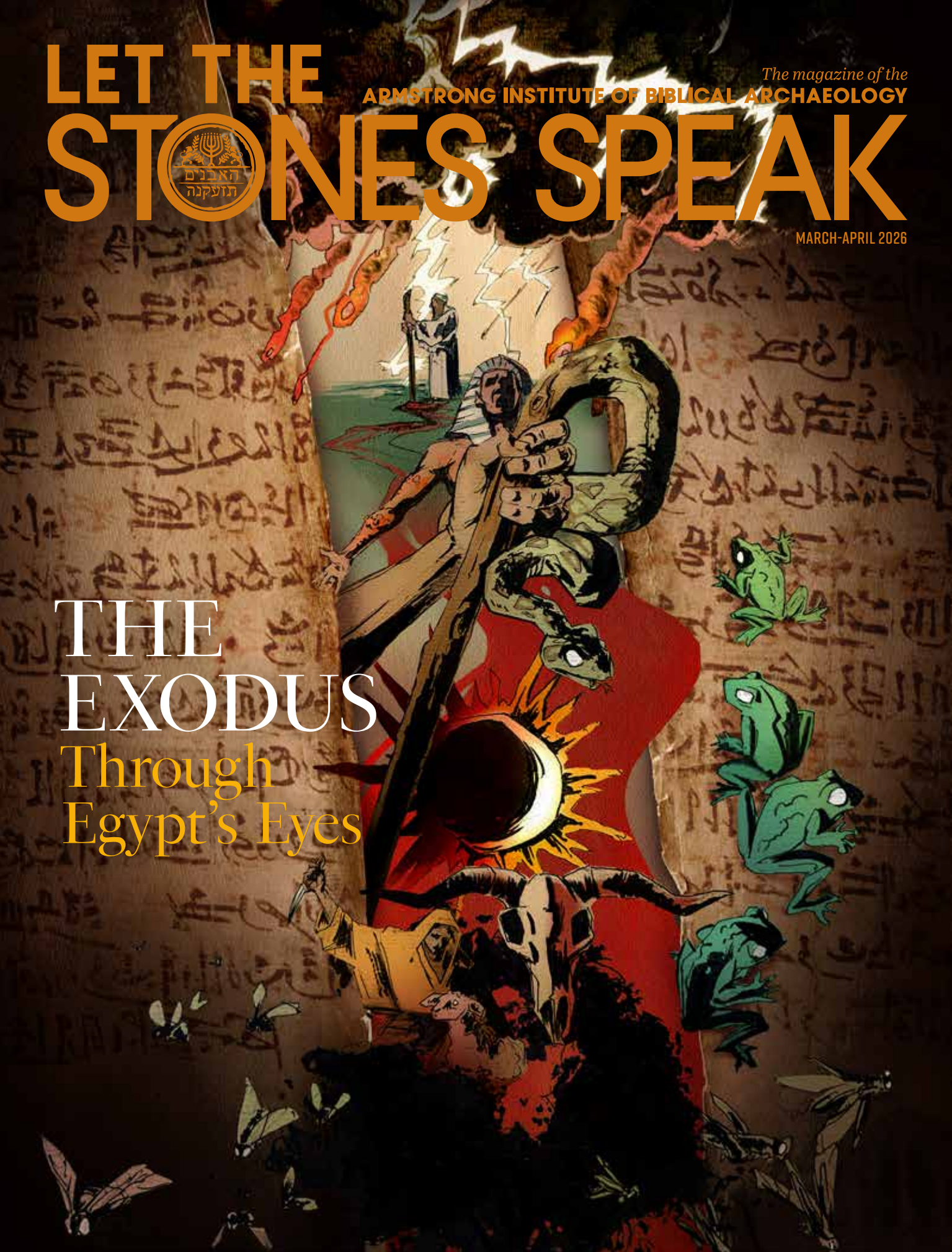

THE EXODUS
Through Egypt's Eyes

LET THE STONES SPEAK

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***Esther Before Ahasuerus*, by Sebastiano Ricci (circa 1730)**

FROM THE EDITOR | GERALD FLURRY

The Courage and Faith of Esther

A special message worth deep consideration in these difficult times

On February 28, the United States and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury against Iran. Since 1979, when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini overthrew the shah of Iran, Iran has been operating as the world's number one state sponsor of terrorism. Iran, largely unchecked and unmitigated, has been permitted to intensify its international trade network of terrorism and develop a nuclear program.

While this nuclear program was significantly crippled after the 12-day war last summer, Iran's ultimate goal did not change. For nearly 50 years, Iran has been pursuing the complete destruction of the Jewish state. Nearly a month into the recent war, its top officials have been taken out and yet it continues to bombard Israel daily with missiles.

One man, in particular, has been acutely aware of Iran's ultimate goal. This was something that weighed heavily on his mind in 2015. It was then that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came to the United States and spoke to our Congress on March 3.

He was trying to get America to consider Iran's quest for nuclear weapons because it also often chants "Death to America." So Netanyahu spoke to Congress about survival—which is a concern for the entire world, especially Israel.

In his speech, Netanyahu spoke about something I'm sure Congress was not expecting: the biblical book of Esther.

"We are an ancient people," Netanyahu said. "In our nearly 4,000 years of history, many have tried repeatedly to destroy the Jewish people. Tomorrow night on the Jewish holiday of Purim, we will read the book of Esther. We will read of a powerful Persian viceroy named Haman, who plotted to destroy the Jewish people some 2,500 years ago. But a courageous Jewish woman, Queen Esther, exposed the plot and gained for the Jewish people the right to defend themselves against their enemies. The plot was foiled. Our people were saved."

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addresses the U.S. Congress on March 3, 2015.

WIN MCNAMEE/GETTY IMAGES

Queen Esther showed us how to solve our problems. She took this grave issue to God. She fasted about it. She asked all the Jews in the capital city—and even her Persian handmaids—to fast about it.

It is worth deeply considering the history of Esther now more than ever. I believe that book has everything to do with continuing God's plan on this Earth, and I believe it is tied to the coming of the Messiah.

Our July-August 2024 issue had several articles on the history surrounding this book of the Bible, proving its historicity (visit *ArmstrongInstitute.org/magazine_issues/16*).

Persia at this time, led by Xerxes the Great, was a world-ruling kingdom. A very evil and influential man, named Haman, was advising Xerxes. Like Iran today, he wanted to destroy the entire Jewish race.

Esther had to get the truth to the king. Yet Esther 4 shows the laws of the king's court and how this could have gotten her killed. But her older cousin Mordecai told her: "'Think not with thyself that thou shalt escape in the king's house, more than all the Jews. For if thou altogether holdest thy peace at this time, then will relief and deliverance arise to the Jews from another place, but thou and thy father's house will perish; and *who knoweth whether thou art not come to royal estate*

for such a time as this?" (verses 13-14). In other words, *Who knows, but could it be that God sent you here for this very purpose?* That was a hard, hard question for Esther to answer. Sometimes God calls individuals to do things they don't want to do. But God also rewards those individuals when they step out in faith and heed His call.

Verse 16 says Esther responded by calling for a three-day fast. Then she said: "[A]nd so will I go in unto the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish." What a courageous woman! She was willing to DIE for her people. How many people on Earth today are willing to die for their people? Willing to give their lives for their own family? What person would stand up like this beautiful queen, and say, "OK, the king has to get this message, and if he kills me, he kills me, but I'm going to get this message to him if I can"? She set out to do exactly that.

This world needs more of the courage and faith of Esther! Are we willing to take a stand and maybe even die for our own people? The prophets who delivered God's message anciently were certainly willing to do so.

It was shortly after this that Ezra went to Jerusalem. He operated during the reign of Artaxerxes, the son of Xerxes. Artaxerxes recognized Ezra as "the scribe of the Law of the God of heaven" (Ezra 7:12).

After Ezra established the law, along came Nehemiah, who, as governor of Jerusalem, had more power than Ezra. He built a wall around Jerusalem—a wall that we were involved in excavating under the direction of the late Dr. Eilat Mazar (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/204*).

What amazing things these men were able to accomplish thanks to what *Esther* did during the previous Persian administration. We really *need* to understand about Esther because she paved the way for building up and protecting Jerusalem! (For more fascinating detail about Esther's connection to Jerusalem, read contributing editor Ryan Malone's article on page 34 of this issue.)

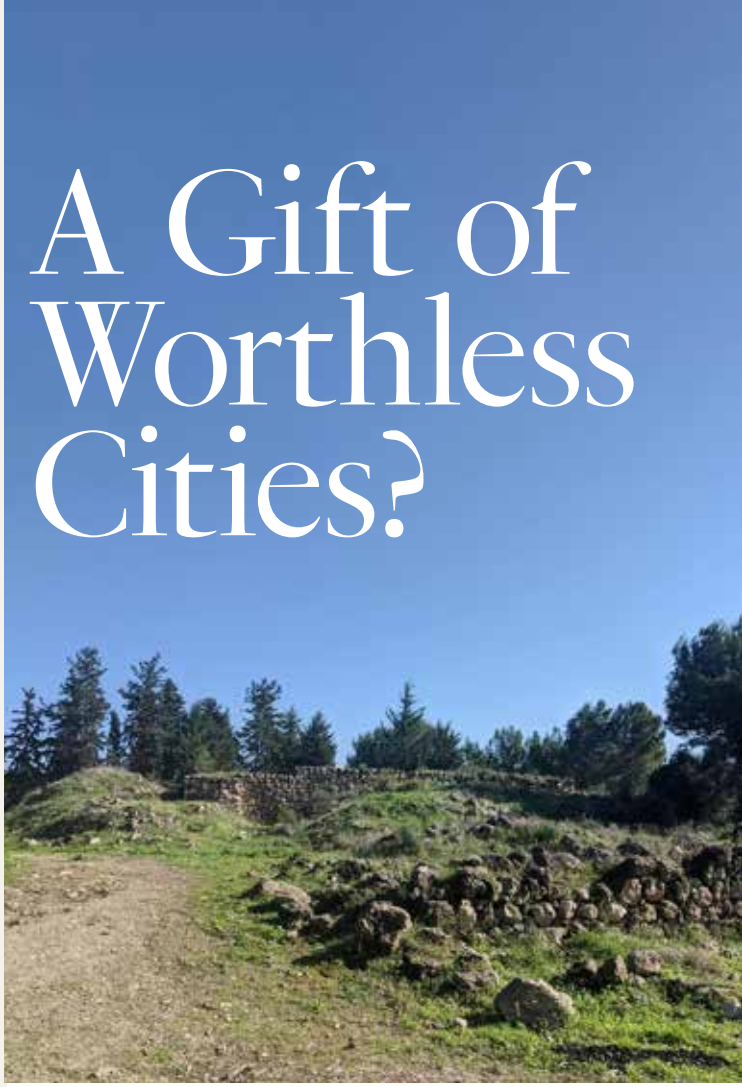
Today, the Jews have neighbors that again want to wipe them off the face of the Earth. How terrible and mad is this world! The Jewish people greatly value the book of Esther. It is a story they are deeply familiar with—one they read every year during the festival of Purim, celebrating the survival of their people.

Surrounded by enemies, the Jewish people can see the need for the spirit of Esther to survive.

What COURAGE and FAITH Esther had—to say, *If I die, I die.* She knew she HAD to do what she believed was God's will! That is the kind of courage, faith and commitment we all need toward God.

What a great lady Esther was, and what a hero she is to the Jewish people—and beyond—even today. ■

A Gift of Worthless Cities?



AARON VAN WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

An underreported excavation gives insight into a transaction between Israel and Phoenicia and the location of biblical 'Cabul.'

BY BRENT NAGTEGAAL

THE 10TH-CENTURY B.C.E. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN Israel and the Phoenicians had all the hallmarks of a robust, friendly alliance. Trade between the two flourished as cedar trees from Lebanon were exchanged for Israel's surplus of grains. King Hiram of Tyre sent his best tradesman to help with Jerusalem's building projects, while Jerusalem sent men to sail the seas alongside Phoenician merchants. 1 Kings 10 indicates they even had a joint navy to protect their maritime networks.

When it came to timber and gold imported from Phoenicia for the new royal quarter in Jerusalem, 1 Kings 9:11 records that Solomon received "according to all his desire." Nothing was lacking. Whatever Solomon needed, he received from Hiram.

In exchange, Solomon gifted Hiram dominion of 20 Israelite cities. "And Hiram came out from Tyre to see the cities which Solomon had given him: and they pleased him not. And he said: 'What cities are these which thou hast given me, my brother?' And they were called the land of Cabul [worthless], unto this day" (verses 12-13). The gift of worthless cities wasn't exactly what Hiram was hoping for. Nevertheless, the book of Kings shows the alliance continued without a hitch.

But what about the 20 cities themselves?

The Bible doesn't name them outside of the term "Cabul" and noting that the land still went by that name four centuries later, at the time of the writing of the book of Kings.

Can we locate any of these cities, and does the archaeology match well with a 10th-century B.C.E. reality?

Locating Biblical Cabul

Locating biblical sites can be extremely difficult. But in this case, some clues simplify the task. The only other time Cabul is mentioned in the Bible is in Joshua 19, when the tribes of Israel were allotted territory inside Canaan. Verses 24-27 describe Cabul as part of a series of towns on the border between the tribes of Asher and Zebulun.

We know that Asher was given the most northwestern tribal allotment, a territory that overlapped with land controlled by the Phoenicians. Thus, even from this standpoint, the account in Joshua harmonizes with the Solomon-Hiram exchange in locating the general region of Cabul as the border between Israel and Phoenicia.

Modern history gives an even greater clue. It is common in Israel for the biblical names of sites to be preserved by the contemporary Arabic names of the site. Today an Arab village called Kabul is situated on the ridge above the plain of Asher, in the same area as biblical Cabul. Is this the same city?

An archaeological survey of the village of Kabul first conducted in 1923 did not yield any Iron Age pottery, casting doubt on its identification as biblical Cabul. In the late 1970s, a new survey of the wider area was initiated on behalf of the Archaeology Survey of Israel under the leadership of archaeologist Zvi Gal. On a nearby hill, just 1.5 kilometers (roughly 1 mile) north of the modern Kabul village, Gal's team investigated the surface level and found an abundance of Iron Age II pottery (circa 1000–586 B.C.E.) as well as impressive remains still visible on the surface. This hill was known as Horbat Rosh Zayit.

The view from the top of the hill was commanding; the entire Plain of Asher was visible from Mount Carmel in the south to the Ladder of Tyre (modern Rosh Haniqra) in the north.

Was this biblical Cabul?

Gal put the evidence together: "So the location was right, the date of occupation was right, and the biblical name was preserved in a nearby Arab village. This is enough, even to a cautious archaeologist, to suggest that we have located biblical Cabul" (*Biblical Archaeology Review,* March-April 1993).

According to Gal, the surface finds were intriguing enough to justify excavation, which began in 1983 and continued in 1984. Subsequent excavations took place between 1988 and 1992.

The excavations were conducted by the University of Haifa and supported by Hebrew Union College and the Israel Antiquities Authority (IAA). Although several areas of the hill were excavated, the most interesting

excavation was conducted at what was identified as a fort, located at the summit of the hill.

The evidence uncovered was impressive.

The final report of the excavation, titled *Horbat Rosh Zayit: An Iron Age Storage Fort and Village,* was published in 2000 by Gal and IAA archaeologist Yardenna Alexandre.

Although the Horbat Rosh Zayit excavation is cited regularly in academic papers, this site has garnered very little attention among the general public. It deserves greater attention, especially in light of its connection to the Bible.

The Fortress

The main objective of the fortress excavation was to examine the massive pile of stones at the center of the site. This heap was clearly evidence of the collapse and degradation of a large building. Once it was fully excavated, a massive fortress was revealed, with preserved wall heights in some locations at 3 meters (10 feet) tall.

Examining the wealth of pottery uncovered, archaeologists identified three specific layers of occupation at the fortress area. The earliest, Stratum III, dated to the first half of the 10th century B.C.E. and was limited to small-scale construction of "flimsy domestic structures." Horbat Rosh Zayit at this time was still a village.

Sometime between the middle to second half of the 10th century B.C.E., construction began on the fortress, which heralded a new vision and large investment in the site. Excavators were able to divide the use of the fort into two phases: Stratum IIb and IIa (the names of these layers should not be confused with the archaeological periods Iron Age IIA and IIB—both phases of construction took place during Iron Age IIA).

Stratum IIb, the earlier phase, included the initial construction of the fort itself, before a much larger fortification wall was constructed around the building. The archaeologists dated this early phase to around 960–920 B.C.E., the time of Solomon's interaction with Hiram of Tyre.

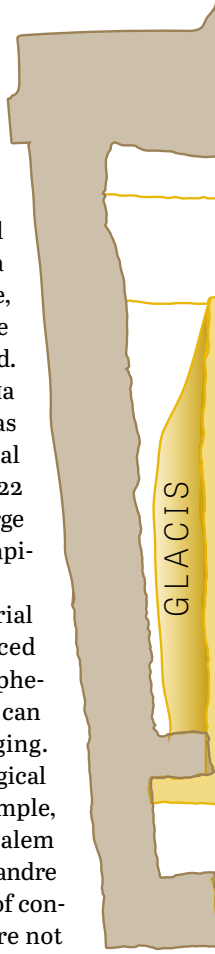
The walls of the fort were almost square, measuring 16 meters by 15.5 meters (52 feet by 50 feet), and were built as the initial core of the structure. The construction style was a mixture of unworked stone and large ashlars laid in header-and-stretcher fashion. The ashlar-constructed corners are magnificent, a telltale sign of the building's importance.

Adjacent to the base of this wall is a sloped stone-built wall known as a glacis that would have added support to the structure. "In effect, the walls of the glacis functioned as fortification walls. They originally rose above the glacis wall, the latter providing consolidation of the walls and additional strength against attack" (ibid). The archaeologists believe the walls would have originally towered 5 meters (16 feet) high, which would give it a commanding view of the entire Plain of Asher below.

Sometime in the late 10th century, this initial phase of the fort was destroyed, possibly by a localized fire. Almost immediately after the fire, the site was rebuilt (Stratum IIa). The walls of the initial phase were reused, and new floors were laid.

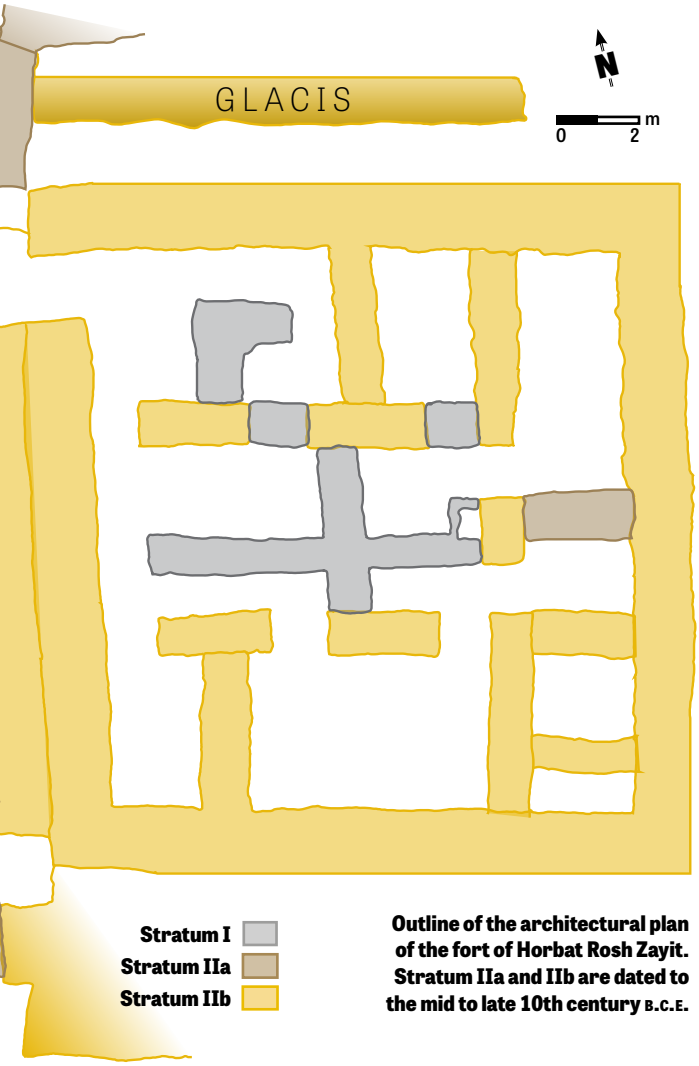
The major architectural change in Stratum IIa (dated by the excavators to 920–880 B.C.E.) was that the fort was reinforced with a large external wall, enlarging the entire compound to about 22 meters by 24 meters (72 feet by 78 feet). This large exterior wall was built over the top of the dilapidated remains of Stratum IIb.

When a structure is reused like this, material from the earlier phase is removed and replaced by material from the latest phase of use. This phenomenon, referred to as the "old-house effect," can make dating the earlier phase more challenging. (The "old-house effect" is present at archaeological sites throughout the southern Levant; for example, Building 100 in the Givati Excavation in Jerusalem and Building 101 at Tel 'Eton.) Still, Gal and Alexandre were able to clearly discern the earlier phase of construction, as well as several features that were not entirely removed during the rebuilding.

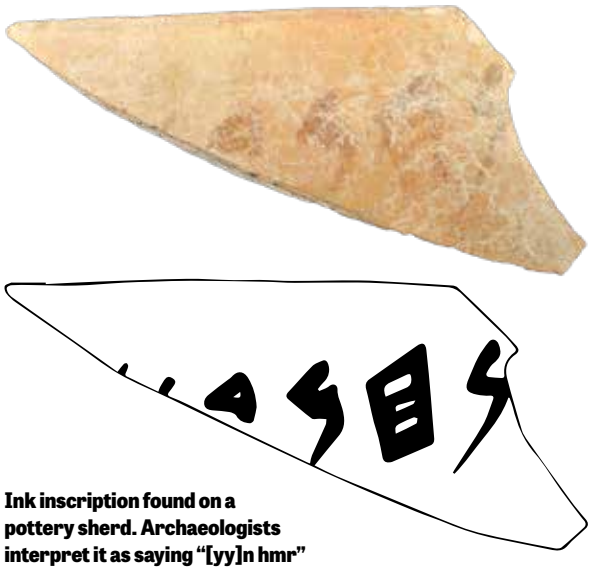


The identification of two distinct phases of construction for the fort during the Iron IIA period was a critical observation. The majority of the finds come from the second phase (Stratum IIa) of use during the decades following King Solomon's rule. The presence of an earlier phase fits well with the time of Solomon's interaction with Hiram. This is perhaps why biblical minimalist Israel Finkelstein, in his review of the Horbat Rosh Zayit final report, stated, "I do not see a compelling reason for a division into two phases in the architecture of the building or in its fortification" ("Chronology Rejoinders," *Palestine Exploration Quarterly,* 2002). By blending the two phases, Finkelstein uses the pottery from Stratum IIa to date the entire fortress to the ninth century B.C.E.

Although a formidable fort defensively, the excavators believe the structure was not built as a military fortress, manned by a garrison. Rather, they consider it a "well-defended storage and administrative center" (op cit). They came to this conclusion based on the scores of metallic agricultural equipment found at the site, as well as the abundance of large storage vessels, some with their ceramic stopper still intact and charred grain within. Some of the clay donut-shaped stoppers are of a similar design to those found in a 10th-century B.C.E. context in Dr. Eilat Mazar's Ophel excavations in Jerusalem (see



Outline of the architectural plan of the fort of Horbat Rosh Zayit. Stratum IIa and IIb are dated to the mid to late 10th century B.C.E.



Ink inscription found on a pottery sherd. Archaeologists interpret it as saying "[yy]n hmr" and is translated as "foaming wine" as found in Psalm 75:9.

The Ophel Excavations to the South of the Temple Mount, 2009–2013: Final Reports, Vol. 1, for more information).

Excavating the interior of the fortress, the team noticed it had two levels, a ground floor and a basement level in each of the four rooms that were excavated down to bedrock. There were no doorways in the lower levels, suggesting the basement was accessed by a ladder or stairs. Dozens of storage vessels—far more than would be expected at a military garrison—were discovered in neat rows inside the cellar. Remarkably, three of these storage vessels were full of carbonized wheat.

Olive oil residues were also found inside the jars. The archaeologists believe the olive oil stored at the site made the fire that destroyed the fort so hot that it had the effect of a limestone kiln inside the rooms. All totaled, over 500 storage jars (complete, restored and rims of different jars) were uncovered at the site, with the majority coming from Stratum IIa. "On the basis of the number of jars found in the rooms and cellars, the storage capacity at the Horbat Rosh Zayit was at least 14,000 liters .... Such an immense storage facility must have been part of a central administrative system" (op cit).

Clearly, this was not a typical domestic building.

But it wasn't *just* the immense number of storage vessels that indicated the agricultural/storage function of the fort. Other finds justified this conclusion, including a large number of agricultural tools such as grinding stones, numerous stone and ceramic weights and jar stoppers.

Around 90 bronze and iron tools were found in the fort, with most extremely well preserved under the layers of burnt limestone. These included plowshares, sickles, ax-heads and some more unique objects, such as an 80-centimeter-long (over 2.5 foot) two-handed saw. The impressive length would allow for cutting logs with a diameter of up to about 40 centimeters (15 inches).

The only weapons found at the site were several bi-bladed arrowheads, which were discovered close to the entrance door. The authors posit these arrows were shot at the fort when it was destroyed sometime in the early ninth century B.C.E. (This original dating of the destruction, however, was partially based on the archaeologists' interpretation that the large storage vessels, known as "hippo" jars because of their bulky shape, were not produced later than the early ninth century; more recent studies of the hippo jars show them being created well into the ninth century, which would likely push forward the dating of the destruction to around the mid-ninth century B.C.E.)

Several of the jar fragments contained inscriptions made with red-brown ink. However, because of the intensity of the fire, only one of the inscriptions could be read with certainty. The inscription reads, *nhmr* (נחמר). Archaeologists interpreted the inscription as the remnants of two words with the first two letters missing,

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"[yy]n hmr." This reading fits well with a biblical reference of a type of wine found in Psalm 75:9, translated as "foaming wine." According to Gal and Alexandre, "the contents of the jars in the storehouse were probably recorded in ink on the jars. This is another expression of the administration function of the fort" (ibid).

The fort lacked any jewelry or toys, which would have indicated the presence of women and children, underscoring that the building did not serve a domestic purpose.

Taken together, the artifacts led the archaeologists to "conclude that the Stratum IIa fort was an efficiently run, well-fortified storage facility and administration center, controlled by a central authority" (ibid).

The question then becomes: Who did the fort belong to?

Israelite or Phoenician?

Perhaps the most interesting discoveries from the fort are the diverse repertoire of vessels related to the Phoenicians. Although most of the pottery is undoubtedly Israelite and compares to that found at Israelite sites such as Megiddo and Hazor, Horbat Rosh Zayit also contains *one of the richest assemblages of Phoenician-style pottery and related imported wares from Cyprus discovered in Israel.* This pottery is represented by both plain types and also "more elaborate bichrome, Black-on-Red, White Painted and Red Slip wares. The finer pottery may have found its way to the fort through commercial activity or with its Phoenician occupants" (ibid).

The presence of both Phoenician and Israelite pottery and wares is unsurprising, considering Horbat Rosh Zayit sits on the border between the two territories. But it makes it difficult to definitively associate construction and operation of the fort with either the Israelites or the Phoenicians. Gal and Alexandre posit two options: "On the basis of the archaeological evidence, this phenomenon may be interpreted as a fort belonging to the Israelite government, with foreign imports, or as a Phoenician fort with strong affinities to the Israelite material culture." Either way, the ceramic assemblage attests to the biblical record of Israelite-Phoenician cooperation and collaboration in this location.

Professor Finkelstein's opinion, conversely, is that the building should be considered "a strong Phoenician farmhouse dating to the ninth century B.C.E." (based on his own chronological model).

This question about the ethnic makeup of the town highlights the difficulty in using archaeology alone to determine dominance—the so-called "pots do not equal people" paradigm. This becomes more difficult when discussing border towns of allies engaged in a strong trade relationship. Again, we would *expect* to find both Phoenician and Israelite wares at sites close to the border. This stands in contrast to the border towns in the Judean Lowlands, where the Israelites and Philistines were often at war. Here it is rare to find a mix of Philistine ware at Israelite-controlled sites.

But among allies, things would be different. Such a scenario is expected between the Israelites and the Phoenicians, and not just along the places of exchange at the border towns but also at sites along the main trade routes between the two powers. This is likely why Tel Rehov, a key Iron IIA trade center 50 kilometers (30 miles) away, also features a similar Phoenician-Cypriot assemblage. Tel Rehov excavator Amihai Mazar drew attention to the largely parallel assemblage between the sites and posited that a trade route ran from the southern Phoenician coast through Horbat Rosh Zayit and eventually arrived at Tel Rehov via Horbat Tevet and Beth-Shean ("On the Relations Between Phoenicia and the Beth-Shean Valley in the Iron Age," 2022).

Based on the similarity of the assemblage at both sites, Mazar believes it was more likely that Horbat Rosh Zayit was not Phoenician-controlled but rather an Israelite "border station or trading center (emporium) on the frontier between Israel and Phoenicia" (ibid).

The King's Gift Discovered?

Based on the archaeology, three different opinions exist about who controlled Horbat Rosh Zayit. But all put it as either the Israelites or Phoenicians within the Iron IIA period. This testifies to the limits of using archaeology alone to reconstruct the history of a place or people. Fortunately, there is a historical source for the land of Israel during this time period that can provide extra clues to what actually took place—the Bible.

Here is where we stand on Horbat Rosh Zayit.

The Bible clearly states that at the time of Solomon there was a powerful alliance between Jerusalem and Hiram of Tyre. That alliance resulted in trade of all manner of goods and, at one time, a transfer of territory from Solomon to Hiram. Hiram wasn't thrilled with the gift, perhaps because of the hilly and rocky terrain of western Galilee, and therefore called the land Cabul.

Almost 3,000 years later, archaeologists excavated a fort next to a modern Arab village, which preserves the name of ancient Cabul. While archaeologists quibble over the exact year of construction of the fort, it was built around the time of King Solomon and continued to be used for about a century. Meanwhile, the site is replete with *both* Phoenician and Israelite wares, exactly the assemblage of artifacts expected of a storage fort on the border town between allies.

Could Horbat Rosh Zayit be biblical Cabul—Solomon's gift to his friend Hiram? ■

JULIA HENDERSON/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY

Eyewitness Account of the Exodus Plagues?

The Ipuwer Papyrus provides a remarkably similar account of calamities befalling Egypt—but what of the date and genre? BY CHRISTOPHER EAMES

THE NILE TURNED TO BLOOD. Pestilence. Blighted livestock. Destroyed crops. Darkness. Frustrated magicians. Widespread death and destruction—including the loss *en masse* of children of both the wealthy and poor. The emancipation of a slave population—oppressors becoming the oppressed, poor becoming rich, gods rendered impotent, and goods once used to worship them now devoted to another.

Sounds like the book of Exodus, right? Actually, this is the testimony of a fascinating ancient Egyptian document known as the *Ipuwer Papyrus.* With so many stark parallels, many believe the Ipuwer testimony is *eyewitness testimony* of the biblical Exodus. Others disagree. The main issue of contention revolves around the *date* and *genre* of the Ipuwer Papyrus.

In this article, we will examine the Ipuwer Papyrus, including its remarkable textual parallels with the biblical account, and address these points of contention. Does this extraordinary ancient document synchronize with the biblical text, or does it represent something else entirely?

The Admonitions of Ipuwer

The Ipuwer Papyrus—also referred to as *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* and officially named Papyrus Leiden I 344 *recto*—is a lengthy ancient Egyptian document inked in hieratic script (cursive, as opposed to hieroglyphic). The document is nearly 4 meters (13 feet) long. This 17-column, 236-line text first came to light in the early 1800s, when it was acquired by Giovanni Anastasi, consul general of the United Kingdoms of Sweden and Norway in Egypt. Anastasi sold the document to the Dutch government in 1828, and it has since become housed in the Rijksmuseum van Oudheden in Leiden.

Despite its unknown provenance, there is no debate as to the artifact's authenticity—not least because it emerged before a full understanding of the hieratic script was known. Neither is there significant debate about the date it was written. Most scholars date it to Egypt's 19th Dynasty, sometime within the 13th century B.C.E. This is due to the Ramesside-style orthography, as well as evidence that the text most likely came from a 19th Dynasty Saqqara tomb known to have housed a significant number of papyri.

What *has* been highly debated is the *original composition* of the text. It is evident that the Ipuwer Papyrus represents a SCRIBAL COPY of a document written centuries prior. When was the original written? This is a hotly debated question.

The text's author is "Ipuwer," a sage who addresses the pharaoh (or perhaps the sun-god Ra/Amun-Re) about the woeful state of the land of Egypt. A series of unfortunate events had befallen Egypt, turning the kingdom upside down. In his classic work *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (1955, edited by James B. Pritchard), Egyptologist John A. Wilson wrote: "It seems clear … that Egypt had suffered a breakdown of government, accompanied by social and economic chaos. … A certain Ipuwer, about whom nothing is known apart from the surviving text, appeared at the palace and reported to the pharaoh the anarchy in the land. Although our manuscript was written in the 19th [Dynasty] … the original belonged to an earlier time," with "language and orthography [that] are 'Middle Egyptian'"—dating somewhere around the early to middle part of the second millennium B.C.E.

In the latter part of this article, we will tackle some of the questions about the dating of the original composition and whether it is possible to harmonize it with the time frame of the biblical Exodus. But first, just how similar is the Ipuwer text to the biblical account?

The following excerpts from the Ipuwer Papyrus are a compilation of Wilson's translation (published in Pritchard's *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*) as well as that of scholar Andre Dollinger (who includes a number of additional, damaged sections that are omitted in Wilson's text) and an additional section from that of Egyptologist Alan H. Gardiner. Note too: Ipuwer's text

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is poetically divided into stanzas, most of which begin with a declaration of surprise or emphasis (per Wilson, *Why, really ...*; Dollinger, *Indeed ...*; Gardiner, *Forsooth ...*).

Egypt Plagued

The biblical account of the plagues famously begins with the turning of the Nile to blood. Near the start of Ipuwer's text is one of his most famous stanzas:

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* the River [Nile] is blood. If one drinks of it, one rejects it ... and thirsts for water. ... [B]lood is everywhere."

BIBLE: "... I will smite ... the waters which are in the river, and they shall be turned to blood. ... [A]nd the Egyptians shall loathe to drink water from the river. ... [A]nd there shall be blood throughout all the land of Egypt ..." (Exodus 7:17-19). "And turned their rivers into blood, So that they could not drink their streams" (Psalm 78:44).

Several biblical plagues, especially the fifth, affected cattle. The Ipuwer text mentions calamity relating to cattle, with the possible implication of such a shortage in the land that the Egyptians began to appropriate "cattle of the destitute" (slaves?) as well as find substitute sacrifices.

IPUWER: "*Behold,* the king's men thrash around among the cattle of the destitute. ... [G]eese ... are presented to the gods instead of oxen."

BIBLE: "Behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thy cattle ... there shall be a very grievous murrain. And the Lord shall make a division between the cattle of Israel and the cattle of Egypt; and there shall nothing die of all that belongeth to the children of Israel" (Exodus 9:3-4).

Pestilence (sixth plague) likewise features in both the biblical account and the papyrus.

IPUWER: "[P]estilence is throughout the land .... There are no remedies for it; noblewomen suffer like maidservants .... Remember to immerse ... him who is in pain when he is sick in his body."

Significant emphasis is made in the biblical account to the destruction of Egypt's agriculture, especially by the seventh plague (the storm) and by the eighth (locust swarms). Ipuwer likewise records agricultural devastation.

BIBLE: "[I have] smitten thee and thy people with pestilence .... [B]oils were upon the magicians, and upon all the Egyptians" (Exodus 9:15, 11). "... He spared not their soul from death, But gave their life over to the pestilence" (Psalm 78:50).

The seventh biblical plague was a devastating storm of epic proportions. The Ipuwer Papyrus not only refers to a storm, it records that it fell on *some* in Egypt, not others.

IPUWER: "*Behold,* he who had no shade is now the possessor of shade, while the erstwhile possessors of shade are now in the full blast of the storm."

BIBLE: "[A]nd the Lord sent thunder and hail ... such as had not been in all the land of Egypt since it became a nation. ... Only in the land of Goshen, where the children of Israel were, was there no hail" (Exodus 9:23-24, 26).

In conjunction with this biblical storm, "fire" from heaven is described.

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* doors, columns and floor planks are burned up .... [T]he fire has mounted up on high."

BIBLE: "[A]nd fire ran down unto the earth .... So there was hail, and fire flashing up amidst the hail, very grievous ..." (Exodus 9:23-24). "He gave them ... flaming fire in their land" (Psalm 105:32).

The disparate level of suffering and separation across Egypt may also be alluded to elsewhere in the papyrus. Ipuwer specifically highlights destruction falling upon Upper Egypt, the southern region inhabited by "native" Egyptians (as opposed to Lower Egypt, made up in large part by the Delta region of Goshen). This separation is highlighted in the biblical text.

IPUWER: "*Indeed,* the ship of the southerners has broken up; towns are destroyed and Upper Egypt has become an empty waste."

BIBLE: "And I will set apart in that day the land of Goshen, in which My people dwell .... I will put a division between My people and thy people ..." (Exodus 8:18-19; verses 22-23 in other translations).

Significant emphasis is made in the biblical account to the destruction of Egypt's agriculture, especially by the seventh plague (the storm) and by the eighth (locust swarms). Ipuwer likewise records agricultural devastation.

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* the desert is spread throughout the land. ... Lacking are grain [and] irtyw-fruit .... *Indeed,* that has perished which yesterday was seen, and the land is left over to its weakness like the cutting of flax. ... *Indeed,* trees are felled and branches are stripped off.

... [N]either fruit nor herbage can be found .... *Indeed,* everywhere barley has perished."

BIBLE: "[T]he hail smote every herb of the field, and broke every tree of the field. ... And the flax and the barley were smitten .... [A]nd [locusts] did eat every herb of the land, and all the fruit of the trees which the hail had left; and there remained not any green thing, either tree or herb of the field, through all the land of Egypt" (Exodus 9:25, 31; 10:15).

Ipuwer possibly even alludes to the loss of light (ninth plague) in Egypt.

IPUWER: "The land is not light [or, *without light*]."

BIBLE: "[A]nd there was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt ..." (Exodus 10:22).

Small wonder the assessment of the land as "destroyed."

IPUWER: "[I]t is the destruction of the land."

BIBLE: "And Pharaoh's servants said unto him: '... let the men go, that they may serve the Lord their God, knowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?'" (Exodus 10:7).

Amid all the devastation, both texts document magic and magicians as making a faltering appearance.

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* magic is exposed. *Go-spells* and *enfold-spells* are made ineffectual" (Wilson translation; Dollinger reads, "spells are frustrated").

BIBLE: "And the magicians did so with their secret arts ... but they could not .... Then the magicians said unto Pharaoh: 'This is the finger of God ...'" (Exodus 8:14-15; verses 18-19 in other translations).

Widespread Death and Mourning

In the biblical text, the first nine plagues crescendo into the 10th, the death of the firstborn. The death angel, it is recorded, visited every household in Egypt. Widespread death is a point of particular emphasis in the Ipuwer Papyrus.

IPUWER: "[D]eath is not lacking, and the mummy-cloth speaks even before one comes near it. ... *Indeed,* men are few, and he who places his brother in the ground is everywhere. ... There are really no people [Egyptians] anywhere. ... What shall we do for cedar for our mummies? ... *Indeed,* every dead person is a well-born man. ... *Why, really,* the children of nobles are dashed against the walls. The once prayed-for children are now laid out on the high ground. ... *Why, really,* the children of nobles are abandoned in the streets. ... *Why, really,* many dead are buried in the river. The stream is a tomb .... *Why, really,* crocodiles sink down because of what they have carried off—men go to them of their own accord [commit suicide] .... *Behold,* a man is slain beside his brother."

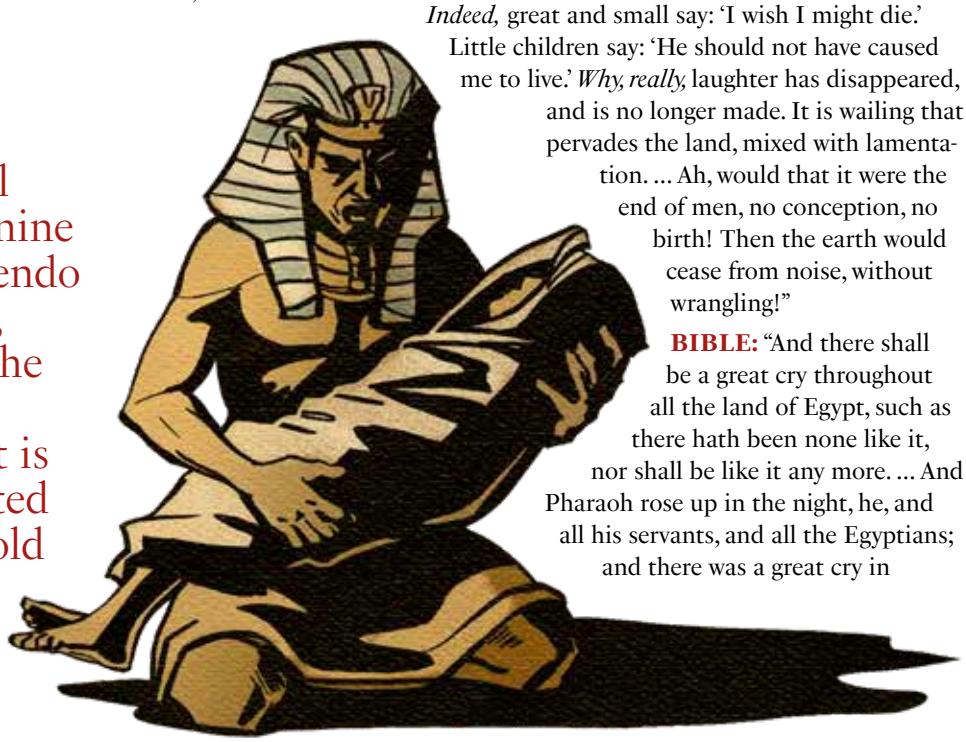
BIBLE: "[T]he Lord smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the first-born of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the first-born of the captive that was in the dungeon .... [T]here was not a house where there was not one dead" (Exodus 12:29-30).

Such widespread death is naturally accompanied by widespread mourning.

IPUWER: "A man of character goes in mourning because of what has happened in the land. ... *Why, really,* the face is pale. ... There is no man of yesterday. ... All is ruin! ... *Indeed,* hair has fallen out for everybody .... *Indeed,* great and small say: 'I wish I might die.' Little children say: 'He should not have caused me to live.' *Why, really,* laughter has disappeared, and is no longer made. It is wailing that pervades the land, mixed with lamentation. ... Ah, would that it were the end of men, no conception, no birth! Then the earth would cease from noise, without wrangling!"

BIBLE: "And there shall be a great cry throughout all the land of Egypt, such as there hath been none like it, nor shall be like it any more. ... And Pharaoh rose up in the night, he, and all his servants, and all the Egyptians; and there was a great cry in

In the biblical text, the first nine plagues crescendo into the 10th, the death of the firstborn. The death angel, it is recorded, visited every household in Egypt.



Egypt .... [And] they said: 'We are all dead men'" (Exodus 11:6; 12:30, 33).

Emancipation

Exodus 12 through 14 describe the mass emancipation of Israel after the final plague. Ipuwer records something very similar.

IPUWER: "Every town says: 'Let us banish many from us.' ... Those who used never to see the day have gone out unhindered."

BIBLE: "[W]hen [Pharaoh] shall let you go, he shall surely thrust you out hence altogether. ... And the Egyptians were urgent upon the people, to send them out of the land in haste ..." (Exodus 11:1; 12:33).

"Foreigners have become people everywhere," continues Wilson's translation, with the footnote that "[t]he term 'men, humans, people,' was used by the Egyptians to designate themselves, in contrast to their foreign neighbors, who were not conceded to be real people." This emancipation is received with great joy among the slave class, in sharp distinction to the fear and dread of their oppressors.

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* nobles are in lamentation, while poor men have joy. ... *Behold,* he who knew not the lyre is now the owner of a harp. He who never sang for himself (now) praises the goddess of music."

BIBLE: "[T]he children of Israel went out with a high hand in the sight of all the Egyptians, while the Egyptians were burying them that the Lord had smitten among them ..." (Numbers 33:3-4). "... Shout unto the God of Jacob. Take up the melody, and sound the timbrel, The sweet harp .... He went forth against the land of Egypt ..." (Psalm 81:2-3, 6; verses 1-2, 5 in other translations).

In remarkable parallel to the biblical text, Ipuwer records—with significant emphasis—that the emancipation of the slave class occurred alongside a "despoiling" of the wealthy.

MISSING PLAGUES?

IT'S A REASONABLE QUESTION: If the Ipuwer Papyrus *is* referring to the Exodus plagues, why are some left out? The text contains no explicit reference to "frogs" (the second plague), "gnats/lice" (the third plague) or "flies" (the fourth plague), for example.

Keep in mind that significant portions of the text are damaged and missing. More important, however, is the fact that this is a post-catastrophe poetic lament—not a bulletin reporting of to-the-minute events. In many ways, the text is comparable to the biblical Psalms, *which also only list certain plagues.* Psalm 78, for example, omits plagues three, six and nine; Psalm 105 omits plagues five and six. Furthermore, each lists the plagues nonsequentially: Psalm 78 lists plagues one, four, two, eight, seven, five, ten; Psalm 105, plagues nine, one, two, four, three, seven, eight, ten.

Thorough and sequential narrative prose is hardly to be expected from poetic songs. The same holds true of the Ipuwer Papyrus—the poetic lament of an Egyptian bard, painting a more general picture of the catastrophe to have befallen Egypt. ■

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* poor men have become the possessors of treasures. He who could not make himself a pair of sandals is now the possessor of riches .... *Indeed,* gold and lapis lazuli, silver and turquoise, carnelian and amethyst, Ibhet-stone and [?] are strung on the necks of maidservants. ... Gold is lacking. ... *Indeed,* the poor man has attained to the state of the Ennead [deity] .... [H]e who could not make a coffin for himself is now the possessor of a treasury. ... *Behold,* the owners of robes are now in rags. But he who never wove for himself is now the owner of fine linen. ... *Behold,* the bald-headed man who had no oil has become the owner of jars of sweet myrrh. *Behold,* she who had not even a box is now the owner of a trunk. She who looked at her face in the water is now the owner of a mirror."

BIBLE: "Speak now in the ears of the people, and let them ask every man of his neighbour, and every woman of her neighbour, jewels of silver, and jewels of gold. ... And the children of Israel ... asked of the Egyptians jewels of silver, and jewels of gold, and raiment. And the Lord gave the people favour in the sight of the Egyptians, so that they let them have what they asked. And they despoiled the Egyptians" (Exodus 11:2; 12:35-36).

PLAGUE WARS?

The duration of the 10 plagues is a point of debate. While the text is not explicit, clues in the biblical text lead to estimates ranging from months to a year (e.g. Exodus 9:31). During this time, discontent would surely have been fomenting among the populace. Is it too much to imagine that Egypt was without uprising at this time?

It's easy to focus on the obstinance of Egypt's pharaoh and overlook the mindset of the Egyptian population. Interestingly, by the end of the seventh plague, Pharaoh's advisers beg him to let the Israelites go. "[K]nowest thou not yet that Egypt is destroyed?" (Exodus 10:7)—an extraordinary statement from one of the rank and file to the deified ruler of Egypt.

While the Bible is not explicit, Jewish tradition—rooted in a clue found in Psalm 136—holds that this discontent indeed culminated in armed insurrection among the Egyptians against the Pharaoh and his men—something known as the "War of the Egyptian Firstborn."

Psalm 136:10 states: "To Him that smote Egypt *in their first-born ....*" This is commonly taken to refer simply to the death of the firstborn—but the turn of phrase here is slightly different from that commonly found in other passages, such as Psalm 78:51 ("smote all the first-born"), Psalm 105:36 ("smote also all the first-born") and Psalm 135:8 ("smote the firstborn"). Psalm 136:10 can also be translated "*with* their firstborn" (Geneva Bible, Bishop's Bible, Coverdale Bible, Douay-Rheims). Notably, it is also the sense given in the early Greek Septuagint.

Building off this verse, various midrashim expound that many of Egypt's firstborn witnessed the Israelites' mass gathering of lambs for slaughter in advance of Passover (Exodus 12). Finding out the reason for the sacrifice, "[t]he firstborn, having already witnessed the first nine plagues occur exactly as Moses had warned, approached Pharaoh and his generals and demanded that the Jews be freed immediately. When Pharaoh refused, the firstborn took up arms against Pharaoh's troops, killing many of them," summarizes the article "War of the Egyptian Firstborn" (Chabad.org). "This event is alluded to by the psalmist, who sings: '... who smote the Egyptians with their first born' (Psalm 136:10)."

Some sense of such an event, or a discontented uprising in general, may be reflected in the Ipuwer Papyrus itself. Egyptologist John A. Wilson's translation reads: "A man regards his son as his enemy. ... None can be found who will stand in their places. ... Every man fights for his sister, and he protects his own person. ... How is it that every man kills his brother? The military classes which we marshal for ourselves have become barbarians ...." To which Wilson commented, "It would seem that Egypt's own troops were disloyal."

There may even be allusion in the biblical text to certain *Israelites* taking up arms during the Exodus events—a fascinating subject for another day, including Exodus accounts from the classical Egyptian historians Manetho and Chaeremon. Psalm 78, for example, mentions in the context of the Exodus that the "children of Ephraim were as archers handling the bow" (verse 9). Similarly, the Ipuwer Papyrus states near the beginning of the text: "Men of the Delta marshes [including the territory of Goshen] carry shields .... [T]he bowman is ready." ■

Naturally, the liberation of slaves would have left a massive void in Egypt's workforce—and Ipuwer relates such a thing.

IPUWER: "*Why, really,* they who built pyramids have become farmers. They who were in the ship of the god are charged with forced labor. ... *Why, really,* the Nile is in flood [overflows], but no one plows .... *Behold,* nobles' ladies are now gleaners, and nobles are in the work-house. ... *Behold,* cattle are left free-wandering, for there is no one to take care of them."

The point Ipuwer makes about "free-wandering" cattle, with "no one to take care of them," is especially interesting. The biblical text describes Israel as a veritable nation of cowboys, with a special talent as "keepers of cattle." When they first arrived in Egypt, the Israelites were charged with raising Pharaoh's herds, a job normally regarded as an "abomination unto the Egyptians" (Genesis 46:34; 47:6).

Faith Lost, Faith Regained

Studying the events surrounding the Exodus, it quickly becomes evident that God is both reacquainting the Israelites with the God of their forefathers *and* waging war "against all the gods of Egypt" (Exodus 12:12). Numbers 33:4 records, "[U]pon their gods also the Lord executed judgments" (see infographic, page 16).

The broader text of Ipuwer's is a rebuke of both the pharaoh and Egypt's chief god, Ra/Amun-Re. It also highlights the impotence of other deities.

IPUWER: "[The god] Khnum fashions men no more .... *Indeed,* the hot-tempered man says: 'If I knew where God is, then I would serve Him.' ... Khnum groans because of his weariness. ... Ptah ... [w]hy do you give to him? There is no reaching him. ... *Behold,* men have fallen into rebellion against the Uraeus [cobra-goddess] .... Behold, the [deified guardian] Serpent is taken from its hole."

Further down is the line from Dollinger, "*Behold,* he who did not know his god now offers to him with incense of another." This is interesting in light of the Israelites' lack of knowledge in the God of their forefathers (e.g. Exodus 3:13; 6:3; Joshua 24:14), as well as their request for supplies from the pharaoh in order to sacrifice to Him (e.g. Exodus 10:25).

Demise of the Pharaoh Himself?

One particularly cryptic passage in Ipuwer's text appears to concern the pharaoh himself. From Wilson's translation: "*Behold now,* something has been done which never happened for a long time: *The king has been taken away by poor men."* Wilson speculates this as referring to a royal tomb robbery. Dollinger gives a different sense: "The king has been deposed by the rabble."

These translations are suspiciously close to the sense given in the biblical account—of a pharaoh drawn away after the departing "poor" (Exodus 14:5-8; Psalm 136:15), with both him and his kingdom "overthrown."

Another cryptic passage appears shortly after. From Dollinger: "*Behold,* Egypt is fallen to pouring of water, and he who poured water on the ground has carried off the strong man in misery." This strong man carried off in misery may likewise be a reference to the king, "taken away by poor men." But who is this mysterious pourer of water, who brought about his—and Egypt's—demise? Could it be a reference to Moses himself?

The Exodus account identifies *Moses*—long prior to any of the plagues—as "he who poured water on the ground." Exodus 4 reads: "[I]f they will not believe ... neither hearken unto thy voice, that thou shalt take of the water of the river, and *pour it upon the dry land;* and the water which thou takest out of the river shall become blood upon the dry land" (verses 8-9)—this was to be the sign that Moses was chosen by God.

The Source of the Trouble

Whom does Ipuwer ultimately blame for the source of the trouble that befalls Egypt? The latter part of his text addresses this question. Once again, it is in poetic form—and unfortunately, the last two columns are entirely unreconstructible—but a certain picture begins to emerge. From Dollinger's translation: "He brings coolness upon heat; men say: 'He is the herdsman of mankind, and there is no evil in his heart.' Though his herds are few, yet he spends a day to collect them, their hearts being on fire. Would that he had perceived their nature in the first generation; then he would have imposed obstacles, he would have stretched out his arm against them, he would have destroyed their herds and their heritage." *Would that whoever let these people and their herds into Egypt have stopped them from the outset.*

Elsewhere, Ipuwer states: "What the ancestors foretold has arrived."

This rather remarkably parallels the account of the *Israelite* entrance into Egypt's Delta, with "their cattle, and their goods, which they had gotten in the land of Canaan" (Genesis 46:6)—the initial symbiotic relationship with the inhabitants of Egypt—their eventual enslavement and the ultimate collapse of Egypt—all elements that *were* foretold to the ancestors (e.g. Genesis 15:13-16).

But What About the Date?

When comparing the Ipuwer Papyrus with the biblical account, the similarities are, in a word, astonishing. It seems plain that both texts record the same event.

There is, however, significant dispute over this association. The key contention is over the speculated date for the original composition of the Ipuwer Papyrus: It is generally dated to a time *earlier* than any of the common dates for the biblical Exodus, which generally fall within Egypt's New Kingdom Period (especially between the 15th to 13th centuries B.C.E.; see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/350* for more detail).

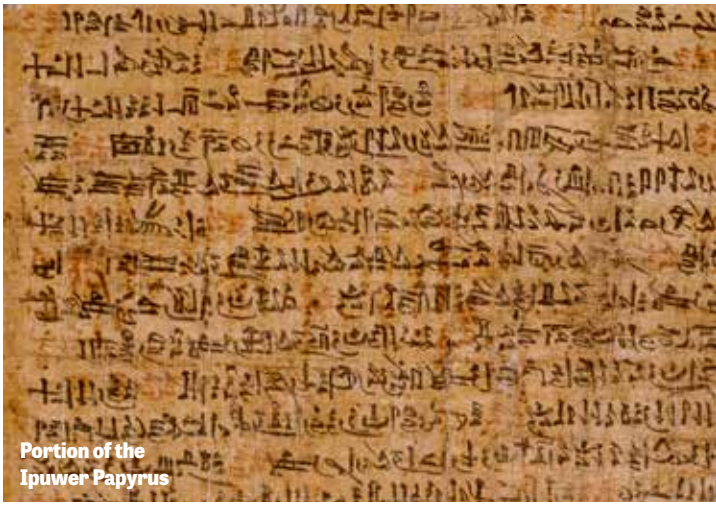
A typical view of the text among scholars, especially early on, was that it describes a period of upheaval between Egypt's Old Kingdom and Middle Kingdom periods—a time known as the First Intermediate Period (circa 2160–2040 B.C.E.). This very early date was a key reason for Dr. Immanuel Velikovsky's infamous development of a radical new chronology, down-dating Egyptian history across the third and second millenniums B.C.E. by up to 600 years in aligning the text to the 15th century B.C.E. This novel chronology quickly gained public support. Yet over the decades, a continual unraveling of the theory eventually led to its abandonment by many proponents (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1216*). An alternative, less-extreme (and similarly popular) revisionist view is promoted by David Rohl, who down-dates the history of Egypt across the second millennium B.C.E. by roughly 300 years. Yet his chronology likewise comes with difficulties and contradictions (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1156*).

I am not against chronological revisionism with merit—especially for Egypt's earliest periods (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1288*). Yet Egyptian chronology from the early second millennium B.C.E. onward is by now generally well cross-corroborated and harmonized, with comparatively small margins of error (decades, rather than centuries). But does correlating Ipuwer and the Exodus require chronological realignment at all?

18th Dynasty Ipuwer?

This is a question archaeologist Dr. Titus Kennedy tackles in his 2022 *Bible and Spade* article "Ipuwer vs. the Exodus Plagues." In his article, Kennedy makes a case for dating the text to within the 18th Dynasty (circa 1550–1292 B.C.E.)—more specifically, within the earlier part of the 18th Dynasty—around the 15th century B.C.E.

"First, it is noted that the poem contains numerous linguistic features of a late form of Middle Egyptian, meaning it does not appear to fit into a composition time of the First Intermediate Period or the Middle Kingdom," Kennedy wrote. Note that Middle Egyptian language is not restricted to the Middle Kingdom Period (circa 2040–1700 B.C.E.), but rather continues on until circa 1350 B.C.E.—near the end of the New Kingdom Period's 18th Dynasty. "[A]rchaisms in paleography and orthography appear to be consistent with the Second



Portion of the Ipuwer Papyrus

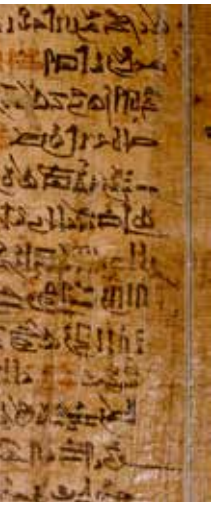
Intermediate Period or the 18th Dynasty. Gardiner, in a translation and study of Ipuwer, also noticed New Kingdom spelling and grammar elements and even remarked that the text could be from the early 18th Dynasty (ca. 16th-15th century B.C.)."

Sir Alan H. Gardiner's 1909 publication *The Admonitions of an Egyptian Sage From a Hieratic Papyrus in Leiden* noted: "It is true that we have no means of telling in what style of language literary texts of the early 18th Dynasty were written; and it is of course possible that our text may have been composed while the Hyksos were still in the land." While preferring an earlier date, he noted that the "view that our Leiden papyrus contains allusions to the Hyksos has the better support from the historical standpoint .... It is doubtless wisest to leave this question open for the present."

Kennedy continued to list points in favor of a later composition: "Mention of *kftjw* (Crete), however, is known first from the early 18th Dynasty in Papyrus Ebers, pushing the possible date of Ipuwer into the New Kingdom and the 18th Dynasty. The New Kingdom preposition *r-Ht* ('under the authority of'), which is not attested in the Middle Kingdom ... [may] echo the time when the text was composed, meaning no earlier than the 18th Dynasty. ...

"Another line that could have links to the composition date mentions that the Medjay are 'well disposed toward Egypt' .... The Medjay essentially became a police force at the beginning of the New Kingdom in the 18th Dynasty," he wrote. Further, "Asiatics [Levantines, including Israelites] are also presented as a serious threat, and the extreme negative attitude of the Egyptian mind toward Asiatics suggests the likelihood of either the period when the Hyksos ruled Lower Egypt or the 18th Dynasty."

Ipuwer, in his text, longs to return to a time of pyramid-building. "It is indeed good when the hands of men build pyramids ...." At face value, this may be seen as fitting well with the period just following the golden age of



pyramid-building—the Old Kingdom Period (including the pyramids dominating the Giza Plateau). Yet it is worth remembering that pyramid-building continued on into the mid-second millennium B.C.E.—*up until the early 18th Dynasty,* with the Pyramid of Ahmose (mid-late 16th century B.C.E.) as the last royal Egyptian pyramid built.

Of particular interest in the question of dating is the very name of our bard, *Ipuwer.* This is a name in vogue from the 19th century B.C.E. through to the 15th century B.C.E., with one notable example from the early 15th century B.C.E. (during the co-regency of Hatshepsut and Thutmose III). More interestingly, the name also appears on the now-lost Daressy fragment—a portion of a 19th Dynasty tomb portraying "influential people in Egyptian history"—"kings, high priests, viziers and a group of 'royal scribes' that included Ipuwer, who was given the title 'overseer of singers,'" wrote Kennedy. He noted the positioning of this figure relative to the others: "Ipuwer appearing in the lower section of the Daressy fragment, apparently indicating that he belonged to a period later than those of the Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and Middle Kingdom," yet "prior to the 19th Dynasty," during which time he was portrayed. It seems obvious that this notable Ipuwer must have been none other than the protagonist of this legendary text—"a famous bard or poet from the past whose works were known and sung." Conversely, Kennedy noted that such an Ipuwer is *not* mentioned on the "Eulogy of Dead Writers" from the 20th Dynasty, "which covered authors of the Old Kingdom, First Intermediate Period, and Middle Kingdom (Papyrus Chester Beatty IV). Therefore, it seems that Ipuwer was recognized as living in either the Second Intermediate Period or the 18th Dynasty."

He concluded: "*The Admonitions of Ipuwer* seems to have been either rewritten with phrases and words that came into use during the 18th Dynasty or originally composed during the 18th Dynasty. ... When an examination of specific words and phrases used in *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* is added to the evaluation, a composition in the 18th Dynasty appears to be the convergence point."

And as we have argued at length elsewhere, it is precisely during this 18th Dynasty—specifically, within the 15th century B.C.E.—that the biblical data converges for the date of the Exodus (see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/350, /762, /882, /1129, /1144*).

A Generic Lament?

In modern scholarship, the intriguing and compelling comparisons between the Ipuwer Papyrus and the biblical text are increasingly irrelevant. Broader consensus now sees the Ipuwer Papyrus not as reflective of some catastrophic real-world historical event but rather as generic Middle Kingdom lament literature. This change in perspective is "due to modern trends in historiography and hermeneutics, the lack of historical parallels in Egyptian historical documents, and the vague information on chronological setting," wrote Kennedy.

Prof. Joshua J. Mark subscribes to this view of the text as part of a didactic "wisdom literature" genre, though grants that Ipuwer's text stands out above others in its extreme portrayal of the state of Egypt. "This urgent tone of the text, combined with when it was first translated, led a number of scholars in the 20th century to conclude that it was historical reportage, not literature; this theory, however, has been discarded," he wrote. "Scholars working on these texts in the 19th and 20th centuries were operating from the old paradigm of the Bible as history, and so, except in cases of texts concerning obvious mythological themes and characters, literary works were taken as historical. ...

"*The Admonitions of Ipuwer* stands as a complex and incomplete work of Egyptian literature. The beauty of the piece comes from the recognition of the reader who understands that one's present misfortunes are nothing new. People throughout time have experienced the same doubts, frustrations and fears that one knows in the present day. This concept may not seem to offer very much comfort, but there is consolation in knowing that what an individual was able to survive over 3,000 years ago is equally survivable in the present. ...

"To claim that literature, or scripture, must be 'true' to be relevant diminishes the worth of such works collectively. ... *The Admonitions of Ipuwer* is a poignant expression of one writer's experience of life at a given time. Understood in this way, as literature, the work continues to speak through the centuries; misinterpreted and propagandized as history, the piece is meaningless because the 'history' it represents never happened as depicted" ("The Admonitions of Ipuwer: A Tale of Chaos and the Importance of Government").

Yet is this answer—so typical of "modern historiography and hermeneutics"—satisfactory?

Is Ipuwer's dramatic text merely a symbol for our daily struggles in life? *The Nile turned to blood. Pestilence. Crops destroyed. Well-born children dead. Magicians frustrated. Slaves emancipated. Egyptians despoiled.* And what about all the parallels with the biblical text? Should we simply ignore the extraordinary similarities between the biblical text and the Ipuwer Papyrus as the product of mere coincidence?

That is a question every reader will have to answer for themselves. ■

‘Against All the Gods of Egypt’

The 10 plagues of Egypt constitute one of the strangest collections of miracles in the Bible: water turned to blood, legions of frogs, dust turned to lice, boils—nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible do we see such a peculiar display of divine judgment. Have you ever wondered why?

In Exodus 12:12, God says, “[A]gainst all the gods of Egypt I will execute judgments: I am the Lord.” Numbers 33:4 states, “[U]pon their gods also the Lord executed judgments.” With as many as 2,000 different deities, Egypt had arguably the most eclectic mix of gods and goddesses in the ancient world. Each of the plagues would have represented a serious affront to these gods and their powers.

The following is a list of the biblical plagues, identifying exemplar Egyptian deities symbolized in and rendered powerless by each. (This list is by no means comprehensive. For more detail on this subject, see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/329*.)

Water to Blood

“[A]nd all the waters that were in the river were turned to blood.”
(Exodus 7:20)

- OSIRIS (god of agriculture, Nile as his “bloodstream”)
- KHNUM (creator-deity and god of Nile source)
- HAPI (god of annual flooding)
- TAWERET (goddess of pure water)
- HATMEHIT (goddess of fish)

Death of Livestock

“[T]here shall be a very grievous murrain. ... [A]nd all the cattle of Egypt died ....”
(Exodus 9:3, 6)

- HATHOR (cow-goddess, mother of pharaoh)
- APIS (bull-god, son of Hathor and manifestation of pharaoh)
- MNEVIS (bull-god of the sun)
- BAT (cow-goddess of heaven)
- BUCHIS (bull-god of war)
- HESAT (cow-goddess of milk)
- MEHET-WERET (cow-goddess of Ra)

Boils

“[There] shall be a boil breaking forth with blains upon man and upon beast, throughout all the land of Egypt.”
(Exodus 9:9)

- SEKHMET (goddess of epidemics)
- THOTH (god of medical knowledge)
- ISIS (goddess of healing)
- NEPHTHYS (goddess of health)
- IMHOTEP (deified physician)

Hail and Fire

“[T]he Lord sent thunder and hail, and fire .... And the hail smote ... every herb of the field, and broke every tree ....”
(Exodus 9:23, 25)

- NUT (goddess of the heavens)
- SHU (sky-god of stability)
- MAAT (cosmic order)

Frogs

"[F]rogs came up, and covered the land of Egypt."
(Exodus 8:2; verse 6 in other translations)

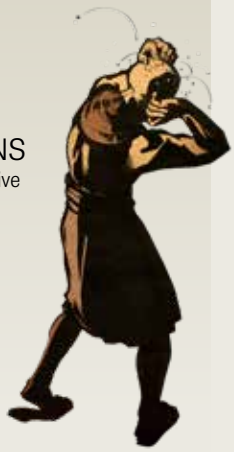
HEQET
frog-goddess of midwifery, childbirth and resurrection

Dust to Lice

"... Aaron ... smote the dust of the earth, and it became lice in man, and in beast; all the dust of the land became lice ...."
(Exodus 8:17; King James Version; note the Hebrew word for "lice" is unclear, and may refer to fleas, sandflies, gnats, ticks or mosquitoes)

GEB
(earth-god)

PRIESTS/ MAGICIANS
(who had intensive anti-lice rituals)



Swarms

"[A]nd there came grievous swarms ...."
(Exodus 8:20; verse 24 in other translations; note, the Hebrew text does not directly indicate the insect)

WADJET
(protector against insects)

KHEPRI
(scarab-god)

IUSAASET
(scarab-goddess)

Locusts

"[L]ocusts went up over all the land of Egypt .... [A]nd they did eat every herb of the land ...."
(Exodus 10:14-15)

NEPER
(grain god)

RENENUTET
(harvest goddess)

Darkness

"[T]here was a thick darkness in all the land of Egypt three days."
(Exodus 10:22)

RA
(sun-god, Egypt's ultimate deity)

Death of Firstborn

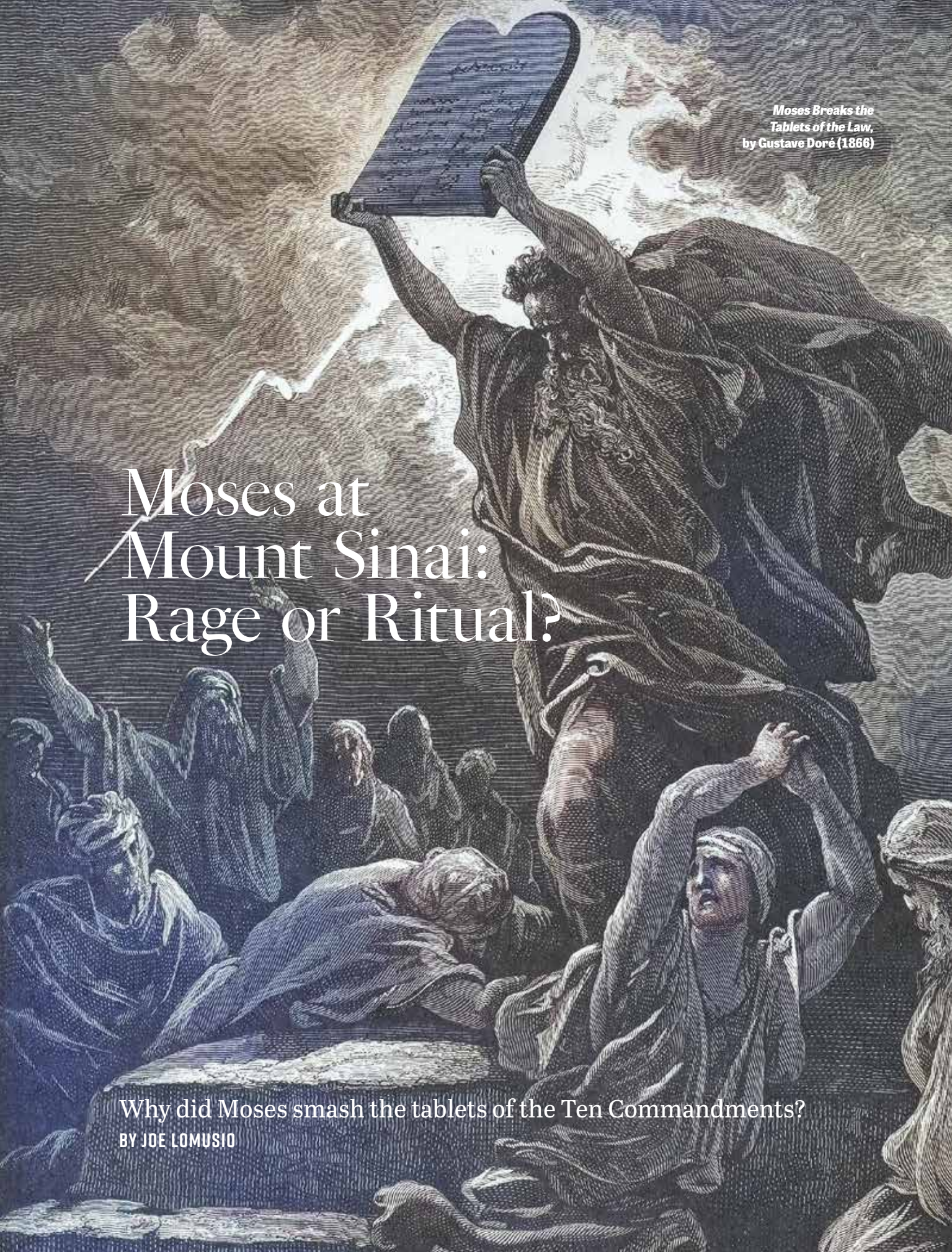
"For I will go through the land of Egypt in that night, and will smite all the first-born in the land of Egypt, both man and beast ...."
(Exodus 12:12)

PHARAOH
and family (considered gods)

HORUS
(great son deity)

ANYTHING AND EVERYTHING ELSE
(including protective and representative animals)

JULIA HENDERSON/ARMSTRONG INSTITUTE OF BIBLICAL ARCHAEOLOGY (10)



Moses Breaks the Tablets of the Law, by Gustave Doré (1866)

Moses at Mount Sinai: Rage or Ritual?

Why did Moses smash the tablets of the Ten Commandments?

BY JOE LOMUSIO

The following is an abridged version of "Moses at Mount Sinai: Was It Rage or Ritual?" (2024) by Dr. Joe LoMusio, professor of Old Testament and Hebrew at Haven University, California. You can read the unabridged version at Academia.edu/115744107.

It's one of the most vivid scenes in the Bible. Three to four months after delivering the Israelites out of Egypt, God invited Moses up to Mount Sinai for a special purpose: "Come up to Me into the mount and be there; and I will give thee the tables of stone, and the law and the commandment, which I have written, that thou mayest teach them" (Exodus 24:12).

The remainder of Exodus 24 describes a dramatic and glorious scene. A cloud rested upon the mountain for six days, representing the glory of God. On the seventh day, God called out to Moses from the cloud. "And the appearance of the glory of the Lord was like devouring fire on the top of the mount in the eyes of the children of Israel. And Moses entered into the midst of the cloud, and went up into the mount; and Moses was in the mount forty days and forty nights" (verses 17-18).

At the end of the 40 days, God delivered two tables of stone to Moses, on which God etched the law with His own finger (e.g. Exodus 31:18; Deuteronomy 4:13; 5:22; 9:9-10). This was a deeply important and sacred event. And yet it's in this context that the ancient Israelites perpetrate some of the most egregious sins—against a law they had already committed to obeying (Exodus 19:8; 20:1-17).

"And when the people saw that Moses delayed to come down from the mount, the people gathered themselves together unto Aaron, and said unto him: 'Up, make us a god who shall go before us; for as for this Moses, the man that brought us up out of the land of Egypt, we know not what is become of him'" (Exodus 32:1). Aaron gave in and did as the Israelites asked.

"And the Lord spoke unto Moses: 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them …" (verses 7-8).

As Moses descended the mountain, he could hear the revelry. With each step, the merrymaking echoed louder and louder, until he not only could hear the festivities, but could see exactly what was taking place. "And it came to pass, as soon as he came nigh unto the camp, that he saw the calf and the dancing; and Moses' anger waxed hot …" (verse 19).

What happened next is one of the most famous scenes in the Bible. Moses took the stone tables he received from God "and he cast the tables out of his hands, and broke them beneath the mount" (verse 19). A typical understanding of this text is that this action was done in a fit of rage. Moses, so angered by the Israelites' disobedience and disloyalty to the God who just delivered them from slavery, threw the tables down as an outburst of intense emotion.

It is clear that Moses was angry when he smashed these tablets. But could there be more to this account than meets the eye? Could there be another explanation for why Moses threw the divinely etched tables of stone?

'Recurring' Rage?

The overwhelming majority of scholars and commentators have very little in-depth to say about this incident. Most simply chalk it up to a momentary fit of rage by the great man Moses, and quickly move on to discuss the golden calf and Israel's idolatry.

We cannot discount that Moses was angry. The narrative clearly affirms that he was. Exodus 32:19 records that "Moses became extremely angry" (New English Translation), he "became enraged" (Christian Standard Bible), "he became furious" (Good News Translation), "his anger burned" (New International Version), his "anger burned hot" (English Standard Version). But the question is—did he destroy the tablets because of that anger?

When you read what many have to say about this text (scholars and laymen alike), you quickly get the impression that all there was to this salient moment is that Moses simply lost his temper, and his anger got the best of him, causing him to act rashly and irrationally. This causes some to feel as though they have to scold

Moses, like Adam Clarke: "[W]e must not excuse this act; it was rash and irreverent …" (*Commentary and the Critical Notes on the Old Testament*). John Calvin chastised Moses as well: "In breaking the tables, however, he seems to have forgotten himself; for what sort of vengeance was this, to deface the work of God? Howsoever detestable the crime of the people was, still the holy covenant of God ought to have been spared" (*Commentaries on the Last Four Books of Moses*).

Still others feel they should offer an excuse for Moses and justify his actions.

Hebrew professor Robert Alter's assessment is that Moses, upon seeing the sordid scene in front of him, causes his wrath to flare, and he responds in "a paroxysm of anger, flinging and smashing" (*The Hebrew Bible, Vol. 1*). A paroxysm is a "recurrence of symptoms (as of a disease)" (*Merriam-Webster*).

Are we really content with chalking up the whole affair to a recurring temper tantrum?

Consider other occasions where Moses got angry, or could have gotten angry, and didn't respond with "a paroxysm of anger"—he didn't lose it. In Exodus 11:8, he leaves Pharaoh's court "in hot anger," but the narrative does not indicate he lost his temper. Exodus 16 records the congregation complaining about their diet. That would have been a good time for him to start hurling pots and pans in every direction, but he does not. Later, when the children of Israel murmur incessantly and even want to select a new leader to take them back to Egypt, rather than throwing things in anger, Moses humbles himself and throws himself to the ground in prayer before God and the congregation (Numbers 14:5).

Indeed, Moses's ability to restrain himself during these continuously trying times is nothing short of astounding. He ought to be (and is) commended for his composure. Numbers 12:3 describes Moses as the meekest man on Earth. So, why now, at the base of Mount Sinai, are we fixated on purported anger management issues—seeing his destruction of the tablets as a result of losing his temper?

Ritual?

I believe we need to consider the possibility that Moses was here enacting, at least partially, an Egyptian execration ritual. This would make sense given his formal Egyptian upbringing, as well as the impact he knew such a demonstration would have on the Israelites, who had been raised on Egyptian culture and rituals.

The word "execration" derives from the Latin verb *exsecrari,* which means "a curse," and implies "to put under a curse." *Exsecrari* itself is the combination of the prefix *ex* ("not") and the noun *sacer* ("sacred"). Hence, an execration was something that was not sacred and therefore cursed.

1. Execration texts on smashed pot sherds

2. The inscription on this clay figurine lists Egypt's enemies, amongst them Jerusalem. The figurine in the shape of a kneeling prisoner was smashed in a ritual execration ceremony.

3. Two execration figures

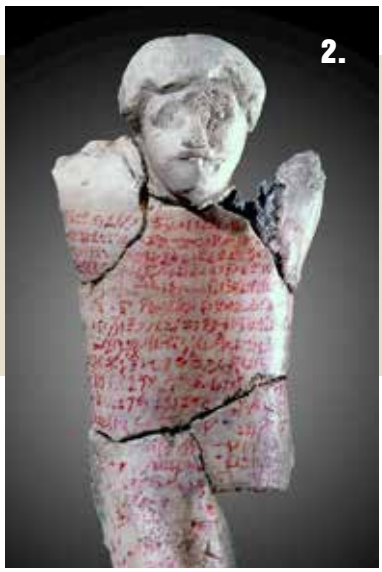
Kerry Muhlestein offers a helpful summary of what the typical execration ritual entailed: "The execration ritual was the process by which one could thwart or eradicate one's enemies. Usually, the ritual object(s) [such as representative figurines, pottery vessels or tablets bearing the names of enemies] would be bound … then the object was smashed, stomped on, stabbed, cut, speared …" ("Execration Ritual," *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*).

Robert K. Ritner provides an overview of Egyptian execration practices: "Although the texts vary widely in complexity, ranging from individual figures to elaborate assemblages, their unity of purpose and general similarity of technique have defined them as a corpus. Unlike the 'prisoner motif' which presents only generalized images of foreigners, the execration texts are quite specific in their intended victims. For by the addition of names, the pot or figurine becomes a substitute image of those victims" (*Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilization,* No. 54).

Even though rather well known throughout the ancient Near East, execration acts are referred to only a few times in the Hebrew Bible. There is the suggestion that the first two chapters of the Prophet Amos reflect an execration influence. There may also be "execration ritual" encoded statements in texts such as Exodus 15:6-7: "Your right hand, Lord, was majestic in power. Your right hand, Lord, *shattered the enemy.* In the greatness of your majesty, you *threw down* those who opposed you. You unleashed your burning anger; it consumed them like stubble" (NIV). Note also Psalm 2:9, "You will break them with a rod of iron, you will *dash them to pieces like pottery"* (NIV).

One particular reference, in the book of Jeremiah, seems very clear. Jeremiah 19:1-10 can be summarized by noticing the reference to taking a flask in verse 1 and then breaking it in verse 10. However, there is no reference to writing any inscription on the pottery vessel. "Although there is no inscription on the pottery mentioned in Jeremiah 19, the ritual action is the same as in the Egyptian ceremony—identifying a group of people to be cursed with an item to be broken and then breaking that item to curse those people," Michael


1.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3.

S. Donahou writes in *A Comparison of the Egyptian Execration Ritual to Exodus 32:19 and Jeremiah 19.*

The text in Jeremiah makes it abundantly clear that the pottery flask Jeremiah is breaking is equated to the city of Jerusalem and the people of Judah: "This is what the Lord Almighty says: I will smash this nation and this city just as this potter's jar is smashed and cannot be repaired" (Jeremiah 19:11; NIV). Therefore, the link between the flask and the people and the city of Jerusalem itself, is unmistakable.

Jeremiah's execration moment is intended to be highly symbolic—of that, there can be little doubt. Certain punishment was on the horizon for Judah and Jerusalem, and Jeremiah was pointing to that which would befall them. According to the *World Biblical Commentary,* "Even though Jeremiah is commanded to carry out a symbolic action, it remains just that—symbolic. YHWH's actions will complete what Jeremiah's only symbolized." Jeremiah's execration-type reenactment, though symbolic, was powerful, and would have resonated with an audience familiar with this well-known practice throughout the ancient Near East.

Jeremiah is instructed to break the flask in the presence of the elders and priests so that they would be startled by the image and apply the warning of God's Word and the impending destruction that was to come upon Jerusalem. "Then break the jar while those who go with you are watching" (Jeremiah 19:10; NIV). Donahou suggests that "the action reported by Jeremiah in breaking the flask to symbolize the breaking of the people and Jerusalem does have many similarities with the actions of Egyptian pharaohs and priests" (op cit).

This brings us again to Moses on Mount Sinai.

Why are scholars and commentators so reluctant to see a connection between what Jeremiah was doing and what Moses did on Mount Sinai? Surely, the similarity between the two must be understood as to the intended effect. Donahou concludes his discussion of Jeremiah 19, writing: "While there may be some differences between the execration ritual of the ancient Egyptians and the activity recorded in Jeremiah 19 .... Both rituals point to the breaking action as representative of what the divine actor will do, or wants to do to those who have disturbed the proper order of things. The shattering of pottery is not merely a reflection of what the law-breakers have done but serves as a warning that the offenders will be 'broken' sometime in the near future for their transgressions."

This applies to our situation at the base of Mount Sinai in Exodus 32, with the shattering of an object as a reflection of what "the law-breakers have done"—those who have "disturbed the proper order of things." Moses saw immediately how the proper order of things was upended by those who had broken their fledgling covenant with God. Jewish scholar Nahum Sarna wrote in his commentary on Exodus that Moses's action in shattering the tablets was done not out of anger at the people or as an impetuous act but as symbolic of the breaking of the covenant between the people and God (*Exploring Exodus*).

The symbolism involved must be something both Moses and the people would have understood. After all, you cannot successfully symbolize something that your audience doesn't know anything about. There had to be some point of reference. There had to be an antecedent to his action. And there was—the Egyptian execration ritual.

More Ritual Than Rage

If an alternative view of why Moses broke the tablets is that he was enacting a symbolic execration ritual, and that view is credible exegetically, there needs to be some strong arguments marshaled to support such an idea. Accordingly, I offer the following points to consider:

1) Moses was raised in the very highest levels of Egyptian culture, adopted by Pharaoh's daughter and raised in the royal courts of Egypt. He was the adopted

grandson of a pharaoh. He had unlimited access to wealth, education, power and prestige. He would have been well schooled in all the finery of Egyptian culture. We are told that "Moses was educated in all the wisdom of the Egyptians and was powerful in speech and action" (Acts 7:22; NIV). Growing up, the "treasures of Egypt" were all around him (e.g. Hebrews 11:24-26). He would have known their ways, words, rites and rituals. And certainly, that would include a knowledge of the execration ritual, which was a common practice spanning a majority of ancient Egyptian history.

2) Moses would have known that the Egyptian execration practice of writing upon a piece of pottery or figurine and then smashing it was a symbolic act of *violence.* Scott Noegel writes concerning these physical acts of ritual violence performed in written texts: "Arguably the most famous example of this is the account of Moses smashing the tablets of the covenant upon seeing the Israelites worshiping a golden calf" (*The Ritual Use of Linguistic and Textual Violence in the Hebrew Bible and Ancient Near East*).

3) It seems improbable to think that Moses would destroy such a valuable treasure as the two tablets in a momentary fit of rage. Noegel makes another valid point: "Indeed, if breaking the tablets was merely an expression of anger, why does God not take vengeance on Moses? After all, he was never commanded to break them and they were not just any tablets—they were commandments inscribed literally by the 'finger of God'" (ibid).

4) Moses told the people that what he did was "before your eyes" (Deuteronomy 9:17). We can assume that means what he did was for effect. Casting down the tablets would have been an undeniable, nonverbal indictment of the Israelites. Without hearing anything Moses might have said, they would have known exactly what he was doing. After all, they too grew up in Egypt and certainly were aware of the Egyptian practice of execration. It was intended to cast a curse, to invoke fear, and result in catastrophe for those on the receiving end.

5) I do not believe Moses intended his reenactment (as it were) of an execration act to curse or destroy Israel. We see his great compassion for the people on several occasions and how he interceded for them. His intention was to shock them into realizing what they had done was a terrible sin (Exodus 32:30) and probably that they should not be surprised if there were consequences to pay. And, indeed, there were! Three thousand were slain that very day (verses 25-28). Exodus 32 concludes on a rather ominous note: "So the Lord plagued the people because of what they did with the calf which Aaron made" (verse 35; New King James Version). This chain of events seems to underscore the reality of what his casting down the tablets/execration act was all about.

6) Noegel offers several features that point to the ritual nature of what Moses did at Sinai. The first is the use of "breaking" as the method of destruction, and "the intensified grammatical form of the Hebrew verb for breaking appears elsewhere in conjunction with ritual destruction of idols, unsanctified altars and unclean vessels" (ibid). This breaking of the tablets was just one act in a chain of ritual acts—the golden calf burned in a fire, ground into powder, the powder mixed into water, and the Israelites forced to drink it. An additional feature was that the event takes place at the foot of the mountain, which was declared to be sacred, consecrated ground (Exodus 19:23). "Thus, the method and location of the destruction, coupled with the chain of other ritual acts that immediately follow, suggest that the breaking of the tablets also served a ritual function," Noegel concludes.

7) Of this sequence of startling events, none may be more bizarre than that which is recorded following Moses casting down the tablets. "And he took the calf which they had made, and burnt it with fire, and ground it to powder, and strewed it upon the water, and made the children of Israel drink of it" (Exodus 32:20). If the commentators have little to say about the tablets being broken, they have even less to say about this Mosaic concoction the people had to drink. Perhaps Moses followed up his enactment of the Egyptian execration act with the equally well-known rite of *swallowing.*

This Egyptian practice was intended to "acquire familiarity" in which the person performing the rite was "taking in" or "comprehending" something (therefore, literally "swallowing" it). The practice was so well known, that the Egyptian verb "to swallow" came to mean "to know." It would mean that you knew something, that you therefore now owned something, that you took possession of the knowledge of something.

Perhaps Moses had the Israelites "swallow" the mixture of water and powder to own their sin in worshiping the golden calf and "know" what they had done—to fully comprehend it. Ritner points out that the development of "swallowing" in ancient Egypt stands in contrast to the Western metaphor of "gullibility," and that it signified intimate knowledge not foolish belief (op cit). It occurs to me that Moses accomplished both. That is to say, his action forced the children of Israel to own the knowledge of what they had done and to realize just how egregious their sin was.

8) The reference in Exodus 32:31-33 to blotting out names is also something that can be understood in connection with aspects of the execration ritual. It was understood that the one targeted by the execration would be erased from history. Joshua Mark commented on this, mentioning that execration letters were used, for instance, against the heretic Pharaoh Akhenaten:

SEE **RITUAL** PAGE 36

Crown Jewel in the Desert

The book of Isaiah states: 'The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: but the word of our God shall stand for ever.' No artifact proclaims this more than the Great Isaiah Scroll.

BY NICHOLAS IRWIN

Qumran Cave 4

It was a routine day with a remarkable outcome. When Mohammed ed-Dib, a young Bedouin living in the hills of the northwestern edge of the Dead Sea, rose one fateful summer morning in 1947, he could never have imagined he was about to make one of the greatest discoveries in biblical archaeology. Certainly, that wasn't his goal. How could it be? He wasn't an archaeologist. He wasn't searching for the next great find. He wasn't curious what treasures were hiding in the hills of Qumran.

He was simply searching for a lost goat.

Yet that mundane task led him to the discovery of an ancient library containing the oldest manuscripts of the Bible ever found—the Dead Sea Scrolls.

The history of the scrolls' discovery is remarkable and intriguing, and it couldn't have come at a better time. As inspiring as that history is, however, what is most important is the message of the scrolls. As Israel Museum, Jerusalem, celebrates the Great Isaiah Scroll, the longest and most well preserved of the corpus, with a new exhibition, it's important to remember the words recorded within the book of Isaiah. Although the message was recorded by the namesake prophet nearly 3,000 years ago, it is relevant for us today.

A Stone's Throw Away

When Mohammed ed-Dib noticed one of the goats from his herd was missing, he began searching the desert hills and limestone cliffs of Qumran. Finding a goat in this region was not a simple task. A key feature of these cliffs is an abundance of caves. His goat could be anywhere.

To save time, he threw stones into the caves, hoping this would startle the goat and cause it to run out. Each and every cave, however, was empty, until he reached what is now called Cave 1.

Throwing a stone into the narrow opening of Cave 1, ed-Dib heard, not the bleating of a goat, but an unusual, and entirely unexpected sound—so unexpected it caused him to flee in fear that he had stumbled upon a *jinn,* or genie.

Ed-Dib returned the next day with two of his cousins and discovered that the sound he heard was the shattering of a clay vessel. Cave 1 contained several of these vessels, most of which were empty, but a few had parchment and animal skin scrolls within them. All totaled, the Bedouins discovered seven scrolls that day.

Ed-Dib and his cousins took the scrolls to antiquities dealers in Bethlehem. They sold four scrolls to Khalil Iskander Shahin ("Kando") and three to Faidi Salahi.

In turn, Kando sold his four scrolls to Archbishop Athanasius Samuel, head of the Syrian Orthodox Monastery of St. Mark in Jerusalem. Unsure of what he now had in his possession, Archbishop Samuel invited John C. Trever, then director of Jerusalem's American Schools of Oriental Research, to study and take pictures of the manuscripts. Trever quickly realized the value of the scrolls, which included a complete manuscript of the book of Isaiah—known today as the Great Isaiah Scroll.

Even before Trever, one man elsewhere in Jerusalem had already identified the significance of the three other scrolls and, in doing so, subjected himself to much personal risk.

Timing Is Everything

In late 1947, an Armenian antiquities dealer alerted Hebrew University professor Eliezer Sukenik about the discovery of the scrolls. Although Jewish-Arab tensions were high, Sukenik traveled to the fenced border between East and West Jerusalem to meet with the Armenian dealer. The dealer passed a fragment of one of the manuscripts through the fence. Sukenik recognized the style of the text but wanted to study it further. He eventually identified the text as Hebrew from the Second Temple Period.

Aroused with excitement, Sukenik wanted to see the scrolls themselves. However, traveling into Arab-occupied Bethlehem at this time, when tensions between

Eleazar Sukenik examines one of the Dead Sea Scrolls.

Arabs and Jews were high, would put his life at risk. For Sukenik, the potential value of these scrolls was worth it.

"I went over more 'leathers.' The very idea overwhelms me, but it might be one of the greatest discoveries ever made in this country—one that is beyond our dreams," Sukenik wrote in his journal.

He made the journey to Salahi's shop on Nov. 29, 1947.

"My hands shook as I started to unwrap one of them," Sukenik recorded. "I read a few sentences. It was written in beautiful biblical Hebrew. The language was like that of the Psalms, but the text was unknown to me. I looked and looked, and I suddenly had the feeling that I was privileged by destiny to gaze upon a Hebrew scroll which had not been read for more than 2,000 years."

This was an incredible moment for Sukenik. But it wasn't the only life-changing event of the day. That evening, the United Nations General Assembly voted in favor of establishing a Jewish state.

"While I was examining these precious documents in my study, the late news on the radio announced that the United Nations would be voting on the resolution that night—whether or not Israel would be allowed to become a nation," Sukenik wrote. "It was past midnight when the voting was announced. And I was engrossed in a particularly absorbing passage in one of the scrolls

Great Isaiah Scroll

MISCELLANEOUS FOR SALE

"The Four Dead Sea Scrolls"

Biblical Manuscripts dating back to at least 200 BC, are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group.

Box F 206, The Wall Street Journal.

***Wall Street Journal* advertisement, June 1, 1954**

when my son rushed in with the shout that the vote on the Jewish state had passed. This great event in Jewish history was thus combined in my home in Jerusalem with another event, no less historic—the one political and the other cultural."

The timing could not have been more perfect. One of the scrolls Sukenik purchased was a fragmentary manuscript of the book of Isaiah. As German scholar Alexander Shick stated in a recent *Let the Stones Speak* interview, this history brings to mind a scripture in Isaiah 66: "Who hath heard such a thing? Who hath seen such things? Is a land born in one day? Is a nation brought forth at once? …" (verse 8). In many ways, the modern Jewish state of Israel was brought forth in a day—with a vote on Nov. 29, 1947. How remarkable and inspiring that Sukenik was examining one of the oldest manuscripts of the book of Isaiah on the very day the State of Israel was born.

The Race to Purchase

Sukenik purchased his three scrolls for Hebrew University. These included the War Scroll, the Thanksgiving Scroll, which reads similarly to the book of Psalms, and a less complete manuscript of the Isaiah Scroll. But what of the four other scrolls—Community Rule, Genesis Apocryphon, commentary on Habakkuk and the Great Isaiah Scroll? These were still in Archbishop Samuel's possession.

By 1948, they were no longer in Israel. When Israel's War of Independence broke out following the UN vote, Samuel took the scrolls to New Jersey to keep them safe.

In 1954, Samuel placed an ad in the *Wall Street Journal;* he was looking for a wealthy buyer for the scrolls. The ad, titled "The Four Dead Sea Scrolls," stated: "Biblical manuscripts dating back to at least 200 B.C. are for sale. This would be an ideal gift to an educational or religious institution by an individual or group."

Prof. Yigael Yadin, Sukenik's son, happened to be in America on a lecture tour at the time of the ad. He sent an urgent letter to Theodor "Teddy" Kollek, Israeli director general to the prime minister, informing him that the scrolls were available for purchase. The asking price was $250,000 (nearly $3 million in today's value). That was a large sum for the newly formed State of Israel to pay.

The prime minister and minister of finance eventually approved the purchase, which was subsidized by American philanthropist David S. Gottesman. The first seven scrolls, including the Great Isaiah Scroll, were now the property of Israel.

The Complete Corpus

Between 1947 and 1956, nearly 1,000 scrolls were discovered in 11 different caves throughout Qumran. Every book of the Hebrew Bible is accounted for in the Dead Sea Scroll corpus, except for the book of Esther (although there is evidence for even this book among the scrolls; read *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1099* for more information).

The scrolls of this corpus of biblical and secular works are traditionally dated to between the second century B.C.E. and second century C.E. However, new research suggests "broadly speaking, it now seems that the oldest scrolls date to the fourth century B.C.E., and there is a larger amount than we thought from the third century B.C.E." ("Dead Sea Scrolls May Be Older Than We Thought, AI-Based Study Says," *Haaretz*). These scrolls predate the next oldest complete, or near-complete, biblical Hebrew texts by 1,000 years. (For more information on the dating of the Dead Sea Scrolls, read *Let the Stones Speak* contributing editor Christopher Eames's article at *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1235*.)

The most complete of the Dead Sea Scrolls is the Great Isaiah Scroll. It is over 7 meters (24 feet) long and one of the oldest. This scroll has recently been making headlines because, for the first time since 1968, it is back on display in its entirety at Israel Museum,

Jerusalem. This scroll is, as Israel Museum described in its official exhibition brochure, "the crown jewel of the Dead Sea Scrolls."

A Message of Good Tidings

On the evening of February 23, Israel Museum hosted a special ceremony to open the Isaiah Scroll exhibition, titled "A Voice From the Desert." My colleague Christopher Eames and I were privileged to attend this invite-only event at which Israeli President Isaac Herzog spoke.

It was fascinating to see the scroll in person. The fact that this ancient manuscript, longer than most two-story buildings are tall, has survived 2,000 years is remarkable. The history of its discovery is intriguing. The most important aspect of the Great Isaiah Scroll, however, isn't its length or how well preserved it is. On that 2,000-year-old parchment is an incredible message of hope for the Jewish people and all mankind, as recorded by the Prophet Isaiah around 2,700 years ago.

There are many scriptures and prophecies within the book of Isaiah that we could highlight. But when observing the scroll on February 23, the one section I kept coming back to was Isaiah 40. It's certainly apropos, given that the exhibition title comes from that chapter (e.g. Isaiah 40:3). That chapter also contains a very important message that ties into the discovery of the scroll.

As verse 8 states, "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: But the word of our God shall stand for ever." The Great Isaiah Scroll is made of parchment—a material that withers and fades over time. But the message on that parchment is forever. That is what is most important about this discovery, and that is the most important takeaway from the Israel Museum exhibition.

"Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God. Speak ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins" (verses 1-2; King James Version). This scroll was discovered just before Israel was embroiled in the War of Independence. It went back on display just days before Israel went to war against Iran in Operation Lion's Roar—a war that has taken the scroll out of the exhibition and back into a secure location. Much of Israel's modern history is a history of war—that's what makes the Jewish people so resilient, a trait I have come to respect and admire since moving to Israel in 2024.

But as Isaiah prophesied, a time is coming when "her warfare is accomplished"! Sirens will no longer wail. Families will no longer have to seek shelter. That is a message of hope, recorded by the Prophet Isaiah, that the Jewish people and the whole world needs. "Despite being occasionally mislabeled as a 'prophet of doom,' so much of the Prophet Isaiah's message is uplifting and positive," *Let the Stones Speak* editor in chief Gerald Flurry wrote in the September-October 2023 issue. "And he delivered his message with all the strength and excitement he could muster. At the Armstrong Institute of Biblical Archaeology, we identify with Isaiah and his 'good tidings.'"

Why? Because as the Dead Sea Scrolls reveal, biblical archaeology itself contains a message of good tidings. We deal with the past, but so much of that points to the future. Archaeology supports the veracity of the Bible, but the Bible isn't simply a book about the past; it's a book about what lies ahead.

Behold Your God

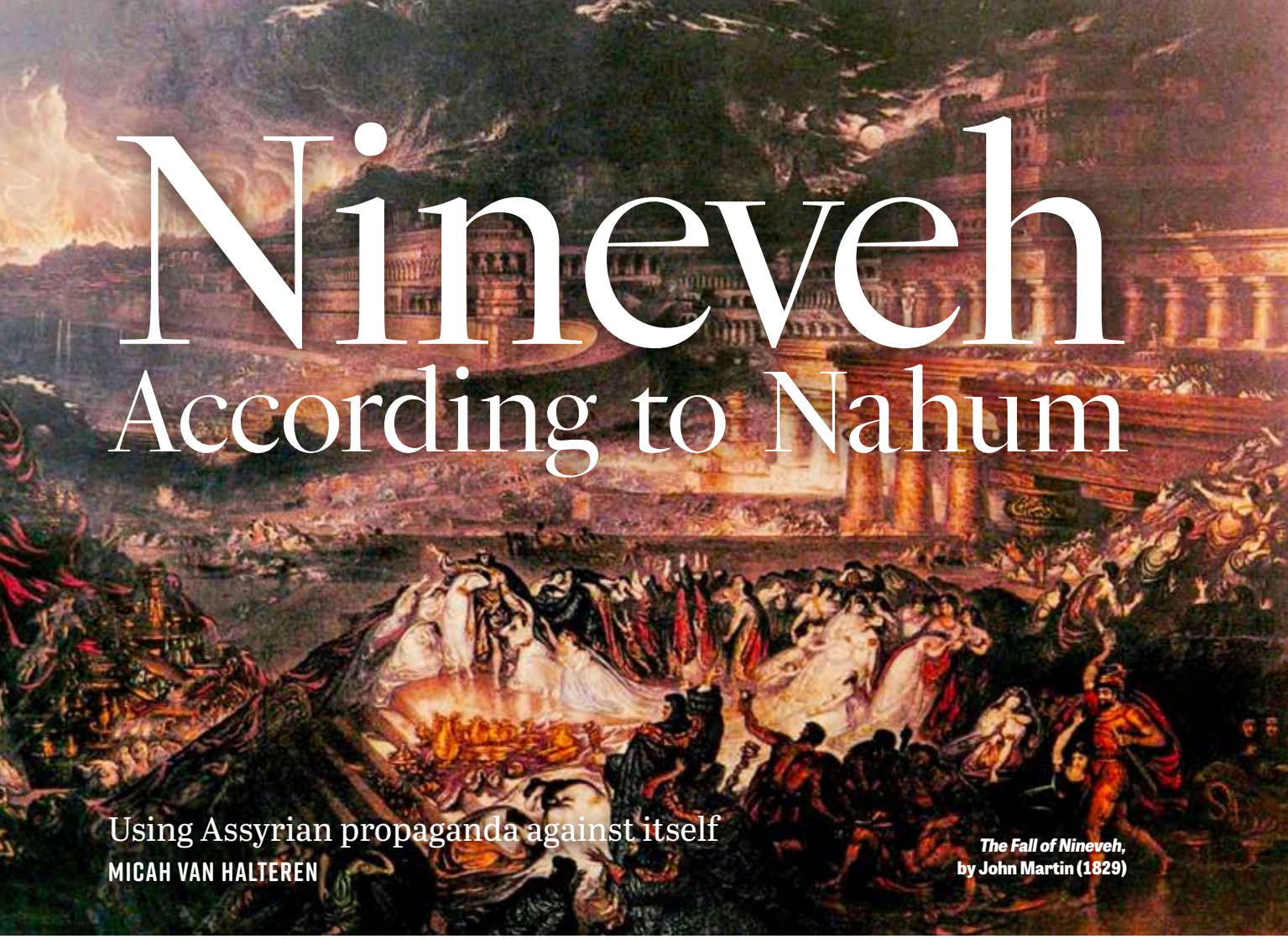
In his 2023 article, Mr. Flurry highlighted one of the key scriptures in the book of Isaiah: "O thou that tellest good tidings to Zion, Get thee up into the high mountain; O thou that tellest good tidings to Jerusalem, Lift up thy voice with strength; Lift it up, be not afraid; Say unto the cities of Judah: 'Behold your God!'" (Isaiah 40:9). Whether it's the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Tel Dan Stele, Hezekiah's bulla or countless other finds, Mr. Flurry has said the message of biblical archaeology is "Behold your God!"

"Jerusalem and the State of Israel are filled with history and events that declare, 'Behold your God!'" Mr. Flurry wrote. "Traveling that land is like walking through the Bible. There are biblically significant archaeological excavations, artifacts and ruins all over the country. In its own way, each of these declares, 'Behold your God!'" ("One Man and a Vision of Jerusalem," *Let the Stones Speak,* January-February 2026).

It's inspiring to stand in Israel Museum and observe the Great Isaiah Scroll. It's moving to know the history of the scroll and how intimately the Dead Sea Scrolls are tied to the establishment of the State of Israel. The timing truly was perfect.

Perhaps now, the timing is perfect again, for this "voice from the desert" to go on display as Israel wages a war against Iran and terrorism. As the Prophet Isaiah declared, there is coming a time when "her warfare is accomplished." It is a time when "they shall beat their swords into plowshares, And their spears into pruninghooks; Nation shall not lift up sword against nation, Neither shall they learn war any more" (Isaiah 2:4). That is a message of incredible hope.

The Great Isaiah Scroll truly does trumpet, "Behold your God!" ■



Nineveh According to Nahum

Using Assyrian propaganda against itself

MICAH VAN HALTEREN

The Fall of Nineveh, by John Martin (1829)

The story of Jonah is universal in Western culture and religion. Called by God to visit Nineveh and warn the city of its impending doom, Jonah attempted to flee to Spain, was swallowed by a massive fish, and after three days in its belly, was vomited onto a shore near Nineveh. Realizing that resistance was futile, Jonah delivered God's message: "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown" (Jonah 3:4). Remarkably, and in one of the most unique turn of events in history, Assyria's king and his subjects repented.

We explored the historical reality of Jonah in our article "Is the Book of Jonah 'Entirely Ahistorical'?" from the January-February 2022 issue. In this article, we will examine the historical reality behind a lesser-known biblical book and prophet, but one connected to Nineveh.

Appearing on the scene about 100 years later, this Judean prophet was also commissioned to deliver an "oracle," or warning, to the Assyrians, and specifically to the "mistress of sorceries"—Nineveh. Like his prophetic forebear, this man's writings align remarkably well with extra-biblical records uncovered by archaeology.

Meet Nahum

While the book of Nahum is a literary marvel, the prophet himself is one of the most elusive in the Bible. The only biographical information we are expressly given is that he was an Elkoshite and that he wrote his short letter against the city of Nineveh (Nahum 1:1; see sidebar, page 32).

Using historical references and context, we can know *when* the book was written. Nahum refers to Ashurbanipal's sacking of Thebes (No-Amon) in Egypt (Nahum 3:8-10), which we know from other historical sources occurred around 663 B.C.E. Nahum refers to this event in the past tense, indicating his book was written sometime after. The book itself prophesies Nineveh's destruction, which occurred in 612 B.C.E., giving a roughly 50-year window for its composition.

Nahum, therefore, was written during the reign of one of three Judean kings: Manasseh, Amon or Josiah. In Nahum 1:15, the prophet encourages Judah to "keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows," a narrative that fits best with either Manasseh's reforms after his repentance or Josiah's reforms after his 12th year as king (e.g. 2 Chronicles 33:15-17; 34:3).

Since Nahum forecasts Judah's deliverance from Assyrian oppression (Nahum 1:13), authorship during Manasseh's reign (696–642 B.C.E.) seems most likely (e.g. 2 Chronicles 33:11). Assyrian power and influence had diminished substantially during the reign of King Josiah, making a reference to deliverance less pertinent (though it could still be possible). The second-century C.E. Jewish treatise *Seder Olam Rabbah,* or "Great Order of the World," puts Nahum during Manasseh's reign.

Assyria's king at this time was Ashurbanipal (669–631 B.C.E.).

Relief depicting Ashurbanipal hunting lions

Nineveh Like Thebes

With the time frame established, let's consider if descriptions from Nahum synchronize with ancient Assyrian records.

In Nahum 3:8-9, the prophet writes: "Art thou better than No-amon, That was situate among the rivers, That had the waters round about her; Whose rampart was the sea, and of the sea her wall? Ethiopia and Egypt were thy strength, and it was infinite; Put and Lubim were thy helpers." The Assyrians conquered No-Amon, the ancient name for the Egyptian city of Thebes, in 663 B.C.E. during Ashurbanipal's first campaign against Pharaoh Tanutamon.

On the Rassam Cylinder, Ashurbanipal recorded, "With the support of (the god) Aššur and the goddess Ištar, I conquered that city (Thebes) in its entirety." The king also describes the great booty he carried back to Nineveh. Nahum's writings show that the prophet was not only aware of Thebes's destruction, he also knew some of the details concerning the conflict (see sidebar, page 31).

According to Bible historian Edward D. Andrews, the account in Nahum 3:8-9 aligns with Assyrian records. The prophet's description, he wrote, "reveals multiple layers of historical accuracy. It correctly describes Thebes' geographical features (surrounded by water and fortified by the Nile), her foreign alliances (Cush—i.e. Nubia; Put—likely a Libyan tribe), and the subsequent devastation" ("The Capture and Exile of the Egyptian City of Thebes by the Assyrians").

Biblical scholar Frederick Tatford wrote in his book *Prophet of Assyria's Fall:* "Thebes was excellently situated; it was almost surrounded by the waters of the Nile and the river branched out into four channels at this point; an artificial lake (the 'sea' mentioned by Nahum), a mile long and 1,000 feet wide, with a large embankment, was a formidable barrier against any enemies."

"The city was strongly fortified, and it was deemed impregnable," Tatford continued. "Its strength was infinitely greater than that of Nineveh. Military alliances with the neighboring countries of Ethiopia and Libya ensured the safety of No-Amon. Yet as the Assyrians would be fully aware, the city had only comparatively recently been laid low."

Most notably, Nahum's description of the sacking of Thebes clearly shows his awareness of the geopolitical situation of the time, including Egypt's alliances and the military achievements of the Assyrians. Had Nahum been composed much later, as some postulate, it's unlikely the author would have been so apprised of regional politics.

Much like Thebes, Nineveh had an elaborate water system as part of its defenses. This included the juncture of the Tigris and Khosr rivers and a moat surrounding its walls. Nahum's description that Nineveh was "like a pool of water" is accurate and reflects a familiarity with Nineveh (Nahum 2:9; verse 8 in other translations). Nahum implies that a failure of this defensive system is what would cause the breach of the city (verse 7; see verse 6 in other translations).

"The convergence between Assyrian inscriptions, biblical texts and archaeological findings in this case is especially notable," wrote Andrews. "The sacking of Thebes was a major event in ancient history, and the fact that a minor Hebrew prophet could reference it

Nahum 2:12 concludes: "Where the lion and the lioness walked, and the lion's whelp, and none made them afraid." Such a scene is illustrated on a wall relief in the capital. The unusually peaceful relief shows a lion and lioness quietly resting in one of the beautiful gardens of Nineveh. Perhaps Nahum had exactly this scene in mind when he wrote these condemning words.

Relief of lions resting in a garden

accurately—both in timing and detail—speaks volumes about the credibility of the biblical record."

This is only the beginning of the evidence attesting to Nahum's credibility.

The Lion King

"Where is the den of the lions ...?" the poetic prophet asks about Nineveh (Nahum 2:12; verse 11 in other translations). Lions were a major part of Assyrian culture, and history records the Assyrian kings were regarded as mighty lion hunters.

As it happens, Ashurbanipal was notoriously obsessed with lions. His annals record an "unprecedented number of lion hunts," according to biblical Hebrew professor Gordon Johnston. He called Ashurbanipal "the most illustrious lion hunter in all Assyrian history and the last powerful Assyrian 'lion' king" ("Nahum's Rhetorical Allusions to the Neo-Assyrian Lion Motif," 2001).

Lions were common predators in the wilderness areas around Nineveh. The king, as protector of his people, would go outside of the city to hunt them. Ashurbanipal didn't just hunt lions outside the city, however. Wall reliefs at his northern palace show that he had lions captured and reared inside the city. He would stage lion hunts in a controlled environment, making Nineveh quite literally a "den of lions." These staged hunts were sometimes conducted as religious rituals to receive blessings from the gods.

In one of the rooms of the northern palace, the king is illustrated in several wall scenes preparing for the hunt, shooting lions with arrows, piercing them with a spear, and stabbing them with a sword. These reliefs were intended to impress foreign emissaries and officials and fill them with respect and fear. They also functioned as propaganda for his own people, portraying the king as the divinely appointed protector of his subjects.

"Ashurbanipal was the Assyrian king who engaged in royal lion hunts more frequently than any other. He

Banquet of Ashurbanipal relief

was the last known Assyrian king to sponsor a lion hunt, and he was the only Assyrian king other than Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 [B.C.E.]) to depict royal lion hunts in his palace wall reliefs. Therefore, it seems more than coincidental that Nahum would use lion motifs that parallel the unique proclivities of Ashurbanipal," Johnston wrote (emphasis added throughout).

Ashurbanipal attributed his fearless ferocity and courage in battle and hunting lions to his gods, Ashur and Ishtar. In a May 2025 press release, archaeologists revealed a recently uncovered wall carving at his northern palace that shows the king standing between Ashur and Ishtar. This new discovery can be linked to the text on one of Ashurbanipal's cylinders, where the king says: "Among men, kings, and among the beasts, lions were powerless before my bow. I know the art of waging battle and combat. ... A valiant hero, beloved of Assur and Ishtar, of royal lineage, am I."

Since the kings attributed their power to their gods—including in these lion hunts—the prophet's language somewhat followed the principle in Exodus 12:12, but against all the gods of Assyria.

MANASSEH AT THEBES

Archaeological evidence reveals that one of the kings who joined Ashurbanipal on his campaign against the Egyptians in 663 B.C.E. was none other than King Manasseh of Judah.

The Rassam Cylinder, found at the northern palace at Nineveh, lists Manasseh as one of the 22 kings who sent troops to support Ashurbanipal's campaign against Pharaoh Tanutamon. "During my march (to Egypt) 22 kings from the seashore, the islands and the mainland, Ba'al, king of Tyre, Manasseh (*Mi-in-si-e*), king of Judah (*Ia-ti-di*) ... servants who belong to me, brought heavy gifts (*tdmartu*) to me and kissed my feet. I made these kings accompany my army over the land—as well as (over) the sea-route with their armed forces and their ships," the cylinder records. Manasseh, therefore, helped the Assyrians conquer Thebes, the city of the god *Amon*. Interestingly, Manasseh's son, Amon, was 22 when he began to reign (circa 640 B.C.E.; 2 Kings 21:19). This means he was conceived or born around the time his father supported Ashurbanipal against No-Amon, or Thebes. Biblical scholar Gordon Franz believes the idolatrous Manasseh named his son after this city and its god ("Nahum, Nineveh and Those Nasty Assyrians," *Bible and Spade,* Fall 2003).

A more interesting question is: If Manasseh went to Thebes, could Nahum himself have been among the Jewish men who accompanied him? Nahum's writings do read like an eyewitness account. He certainly could have based his writing on accounts from other records or witnesses. And what's more powerful than describing events your audience would be familiar with *and* that you witnessed yourself?

Rassam Cylinder

Is it far-fetched to think Nahum was among the Jews Manasseh took with him on his campaign with Ashurbanipal against Egypt? Perhaps Nahum was being trained at the Assyrian royal court (see sidebar, page 32). ■

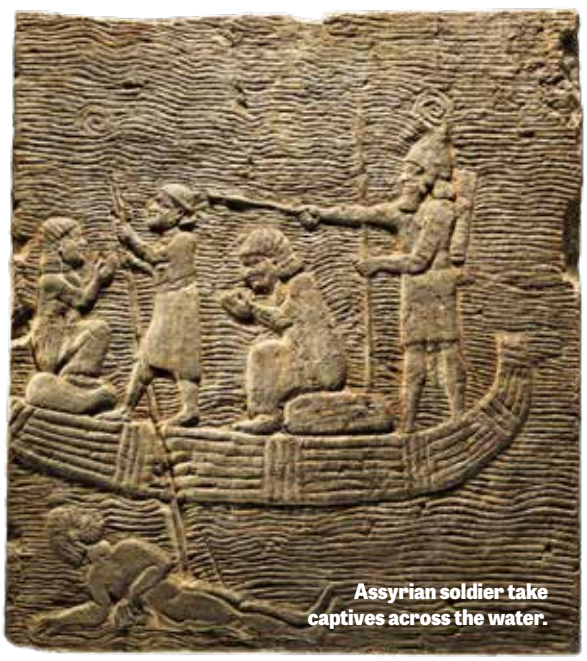
Assyrian records show soldiers of the empire being compared to lions. We also see this in the biblical text. The Prophet Isaiah witnessed the Assyrian conquest of the northern 10 tribes of Israel in the late eighth century B.C.E. and described Assyria's military: "Their roaring shall be like a lion, They shall roar like young lions, yea, they shall roar, And lay hold of the prey, and carry it away safe, And there shall be none to deliver" (Isaiah 5:29). Nahum uses similar language, calling the Assyrian soldiers "young lions" (Nahum 2:12, 14).

"They would indeed be like lions," Johnston writes, "not on the prowl but as prey in a lion hunt!" (op cit).

Nahum 2:12 concludes: "Where the lion and the lioness walked, and the lion's whelp, And none made them afraid?" Such a scene is illustrated on a wall relief in the capital. The unusually peaceful relief shows a lion and lioness quietly resting in one of the beautiful gardens of Nineveh. Perhaps Nahum had exactly this scene in mind when he wrote these condemning words.

Although lion imagery was not uncommon in the general Near East, Johnston writes that "Nahum's use of these lion motifs is probably not merely common stereotypical Semitic imagery but specific rhetorical allusions to the use of the lion motif in Neo-Assyrian literature and art, particularly its use by the last powerful Neo-Assyrian king, Ashurbanipal ...."

In his article "Nahum, Nineveh and Those Nasty Assyrians," archaeologist and biblical scholar Gordon Franz wrote that these allusions show "Nahum was keenly aware of the culture that he was writing to and was able to effectively use it to convey a powerful message from the Lord" (*Bible and Spade,* Fall 2003).



Assyrian soldier take captives across the water.

The reliefs show Assyrian soldiers throwing bodies into the river, taking inventory of casualties by counting severed heads, flaying skin, grinding bones, pulling tongues out and rape.

Lions or Locusts?

Lions were not the only animals used by Nahum to describe the Assyrians. "Thy crowned are as the locusts, And thy marshals as the swarms of grasshoppers, Which camp in the walls in the cold day, But when the sun ariseth they flee away, And their place is not known where they are" (Nahum 3:17).

This scene, too, has a parallel on one of the reliefs from Ashurbanipal's palace. After having put down the Elamite rebellion at the battle of Til Tuba and capturing their king (circa 653 B.C.E.), Ashurbanipal is depicted resting on a couch with his queen in his royal garden. On the left of the relief, the head of Elamite King Teumman is hanging on a tree—a gruesome reminder of Assyrian cruelty and powerful propaganda. Near the severed head is the depiction of a grasshopper about to be devoured by a bird. Inscriptions from Ashurbanipal speak of the rebellious Elamites as a "dense swarm of grasshoppers." Ashurbanipal used the bird to symbolize the Assyrians. Yet in Nahum's prophecy, the Assyrians are the locusts.

This language is also common in Assyrian conquest metaphors. "Just as Assyrian kings compared their massive armies to a swarm of locusts, Nahum depicted the numerous Assyrian troops and their allies to a swarm of locusts," Johnston writes. "However, Nahum reversed the imagery in an ironic manner. First, the Assyrian troops would flee in battle just as a swarm of locusts takes to flight at the dawn. Second, Assyria's numerous allies would turn on her in her moment of weakness, plundering the wealth of Assyria like a swarm of devouring locusts."

Nahum utilized what Franz terms as a "reversal of fortune." Instead of hunting the lions, the Ninevite soldiers are now the lions being hunted, and instead of their enemies being locusts, they are the locusts forced to flee.

Cruelty

The same scene highlights another facet of Nineveh's society that Nahum targeted—its cruelty. "Woe to the bloody city!" he wrote (Nahum 3:1). Assyrian

cruelty is well attested throughout the centuries, and Ashurbanipal was one of Assyria's most violent kings.

According to Ariel Bagg of the University of Heidelberg, "brutality scenes" are depicted on 19 of the 54 Ashurbanipal scenes ("Where Is the Public? A New Look at the Brutality Scenes in Neo-Assyrian Royal Inscriptions and Art," 2016). The reliefs show Assyrian soldiers throwing bodies into the river, taking inventory of casualties by counting severed heads, flaying skin, grinding bones, pulling tongues out and rape.

Nahum also records Assyria's brutality. In one passage, the prophet reverses the Assyrian custom of raping their captive women. He writes, "Behold, I am against thee, saith the Lord of hosts, And *I will uncover thy skirts upon thy face, And I will shew the nations thy nakedness, And the kingdoms thy shame"* (verse 5). The Balawat Gates of King Shalmaneser III (858–824 B.C.E.) bear several depictions of captive women with their skirts lifted and positioned next to naked Assyrian warriors in a scene we'd rather not have stuck in our minds.

Then, in verse 10, Nahum describes more of the cruelty done to the Thebans: "Yet was she carried away, She went into captivity; *Her young children also were dashed in pieces* At the head of all the streets ... And all her great men were *bound in chains*." One of the wall reliefs, titled "An Egyptian Fortress" at the British Museum, possibly displays the Thebes' capture. The relief shows Ethiopian captives being led away from the city with chains around their ankles; three children are depicted on the relief. Nahum describes the terrible fate that likely awaited these children.

"Were the Assyrians as brutal as they presented themselves in the written and iconographical sources?" Bagg asks. "The answer is no, they were *more brutal,* because we do not know all the details, and the reality must have surpassed by far the descriptions in words or the depictions."

The evidence so far makes clear that Nahum's familiarity with the Ninevite palace depictions and the Assyrians themselves informed his writings.

Corpses, Flooding, Figs and Much More

A lot of what we know about the fall of Nineveh comes from the Babylonian work the Fall of Nineveh Chronicle. According to C. J. Gadd, an early 20th-century British Museum Assyriologist, this document is "our earliest and best authority for the events" around the fall of Assyria's capital.

Nineveh was a massive city at the time of its fall. Multiple chariots would have been able to ride beside one another on its 15-meter-thick (50 feet) walls, aligning with Nahum's statement that "[t]he chariots rush madly in the streets, They jostle one against another in the broad places ..." (Nahum 2:5; verse 4 in other translations).

The prophet recorded that Nineveh's fall was as bloody as its own conquests. Nahum 3:3 says there would be "a multitude of slain, and a heap of carcases; And there is no end of the corpses, and they stumble

NAHUM'S NATIVITY

Biblical scholars marvel at how familiar the Prophet Nahum was with the customs, art and even the literature of the Assyrian Empire. He understood Assyria so well he incorporated Assyrian lingo and culture into his prophecy against it. This observation has raised the question of Nahum's origins. Several suggestions have been furnished.

Nahum 1:1 says the prophet came from Elkosh. The exact location of this city is debated. The most common suggestions are either in Al-Qush, north of Nineveh, where the so-called Tomb of Nahum is located, or someplace in the southern kingdom of Judah. A few have also proposed Capernaum at the Sea of Galilee due to its name meaning "Village of Nahum."

Researcher Bob Becking from the University of Utrecht believes, based on historical examples, that Nahum might have been raised as a young, elite Jewish hostage at the Assyrian court in Nineveh who was sent back to Judah to serve the empire's interests ("Who Was Nahum? A Wild but Informed Guess," 2025).

Could it be that Nahum, as a young Jewish servant trained in Assyria, walked through the halls of Ashurbanipal's palace and throughout Nineveh and later based his writings on what he saw? Wall reliefs were one of the main means of Assyrian propaganda against foreign emissaries and officials who entered the royal court. Perhaps these foreigners included Nahum, who powerfully and fearlessly reversed this propaganda on the Assyrians' heads, utilizing facets of their own language and culture. While we can only speculate, it is an intriguing possibility. ■

upon their corpses." As a testament to Nineveh's violent and murderous fall, over 16 skeletal remains, potentially the defenders of the city, were discovered under the Halzi Gate.

Returning to the comparison with Thebes and the city being a "pool of water," it is debated whether the prophet's reference to a flood (Nahum 1:8) should be taken literally or as a figure of speech. Various scholars have suggested that the writings of the Greek historian Diodorus Siculus (90–30 B.C.E.) contain historical references to the fall of Nineveh. He wrote that the swelling river "flooded part of the city, and cast down the wall to a length of 20 stades."

There are some facts Diodorus gets wrong, however. He wrote that the siege lasted three years instead of three months, mistook the river Tigris for the Euphrates, and gave a different name (Sardanapalus) for the Assyrian king during the fall. These errors cast doubt on his accuracy as a historical source.

Regardless of whether the flood language was literal or figurative, the imagery still fits within the Assyrian context of the time. At the time, Ashurbanipal wrote that he "completely conquered that city [Thebes], and smashed it like a flood" ("Nahum's Rhetorical Allusions to Neo-Assyrian Conquest Metaphors," 2002.) Similar language was used by other Assyrian kings.

Alongside flooding, Nahum uses another simile to predict Nineveh's fall, one that would also have made sense to Assyrians at the time: "All thy fortresses shall be like fig-trees with the first-ripe figs: If they be shaken, they fall into the mouth of the eater" (Nahum 3:12). Figs were prevalent in both Judah and Nineveh, as shown on the Lachish reliefs and the Assyrian Mashki Gate. As such, both Jews and Assyrians would have known that when a fig tree is shaken the ripe figs easily fall off, symbolizing the swift and almost effortless destruction of the mighty city. The Fall of Nineveh Chronicle says that the city fell after a brief but "heavy" three-month siege.

What about the riches of Nineveh? Bible students might recall that a century earlier, King Sennacherib had collected a large tribute from Judah's King Hezekiah (2 Kings 18:14-16). Add that to the wealth brought in from the sacking of Thebes, and no doubt Nineveh was a trove of treasures for a conquering army. Nahum, aware of the riches of that city, wrote to the invaders, "Take ye the spoil of silver, take the spoil of gold; For there is no end of the store, Rich with all precious vessels" (Nahum 2:10; verse 9 in other translations).

According to the Fall of Nineveh Chronicle, that is exactly what happened. The Babylonian and Median armies "carried off the vast booty of the city and the temple and turned the city into a ruin heap."

Several literary parallels can be made to the threatening imagery in the Assyrian vassal treaties and conquest annals of Esarhaddon (680–669 B.C.E.) and Ashurbanipal (669–631 B.C.E.). Esarhaddon, in particular, made treaties with King Manasseh containing similar language to Nahum, leading Johnston to believe that these were purposeful rhetorical allusions—not mere coincidence. They include breaking the yoke of vassalage (Nahum 1:13), darkness (verse 8), destruction of seed and name (verse 14), punishment of prostitutes (Nahum 3:5-7), calling enemy warriors women (verse 13), delivering an incurable wound (verse 19) and others. Those can be added to the aforementioned conquest metaphors, such as lions, locusts and floods.

While some of the imagery is also used in other Near Eastern writings, it was most prominent in the Assyrian records, particularly of Ashurbanipal and Esarhaddon. Scholar Bob Becking from the University of Utrecht also points to several Assyrian loanwords that Nahum substituted for Hebrew, placing the prophet in an Assyrian context.

The Only Logical Conclusion

Some scholars claim that Nahum was written long after Nineveh's fall, perhaps in the Herodian Period (first century B.C.E.)—the period the earliest Dead Sea Scroll segments of the book were dated to. There is one big problem with this claim.

Unger's Bible Dictionary says: "In 612 B.C. the ancient capital of the Assyrian Empire was so completely obliterated that *it became like a myth* until its discovery by Sir Austen Layard and others in the 19th century." Very little was known about Nineveh and Assyrian society. Had Nahum not been present in the seventh century B.C.E., the prophet would never have been able to write such a fantastic literary marvel filled with loanwords, metaphorical allusions and historical events.

And so the weight of evidence piles up in favor of the Bible's historical credibility. Knowledge of historical geopolitical events, Assyrian royal culture and even language mirroring Assyrian documents put Nahum's composition in the last decades of Assyria's domination.

Skeptics would like to believe that the Bible was composed much later than the events it describes. However, it's undeniable that the archaeological record clearly shows that the prophet's writings are historically accurate and reveal an awareness of the society he was writing to.

Was Nahum written in the Assyrian period? The weight of evidence answers, somewhat emphatically, yes! ■

The Curious Connection Between Esther, the Number 40 and Jerusalem

Timing that ties the beloved queen to the beloved city

BY RYAN MALONE

For all its unique qualities, the book of Esther provides a number of details that connect the reader to other passages in the Hebrew Bible. It points to the captivity of Jerusalem that occurred under the reign of Jeconiah at the start of the sixth century B.C.E. (Esther 2:6). It points the reader to the genealogy of Benjamin (verse 5), as well as a probable Amalekite line known as the Agagites (Esther 3:1) from where the story's villain hails.

The book illuminates the tradition of fasting and the biblical practice of humbling oneself in sackcloth and ashes. And despite its complete omission of God's name, it still has a thoroughly religious flavor; for example, it describes people of Persia becoming Jews, which, since biologically impossible, means a conversion in a RELIGIOUS sense: people adopting the practices of the Jewish religion.

There is another connection between Esther and a certain passage of Hebrew scripture—and this highlights the biblically significant number 40.

For the story's Jewish component, the narrative introduces us first to Mordecai (Esther 2:5)—the only individual name in the Bible given the designation "the Jew." (The Hebrew word for "Jew," in all other places, describes a group of people or a singular, but unnamed, Jewish person.) His name was, at that point, a non-Jewish name, so his repeated designation as "Mordecai the Jew" is logical. It is important to the unfolding of events, not only that he is a Jew, but that he is KNOWN as a Jew.

We are introduced to him so we understand that "he brought up Hadassah, that is, Esther, his uncle's daughter ..." (Esther 2:7).

It's All in the Name

There is no more perfect name than "Esther"—having a meaning in BOTH the Persian language and Hebrew. In Persian, it meant "star," and the Hebrew is a form of the word "hidden." In Ezekiel 39:24, God says, "I hid My face from them." The word "hid" is spelled the same way as Esther (אסתר).

It is critical to the story that Esther's Jewish heritage remain hidden, but some also presume this is a nod to God Himself hiding in the details of the story—despite the fact He is not explicitly named.

The implication in Esther 2:7 is that she, though first named Hadassah, goes by Esther—a name given immediately without any explanation. No Gentile is mentioned as having given her this name. By contrast, in cases like Daniel and his three friends, "the chief

of the officers gave" these Jewish boys NON-Jewish names (Daniel 1:7). But the narrative persists in using Daniel's Jewish name going forward. This happened to Joseph too, yet he is almost never referred to as "Zaphnathpaaneah." The point is, we know *how* they were given those name changes and that it was done *by* a Gentile.

Here, we are introduced to "Hadassah" and then immediately told she's "Esther." The second name is given just before she enters the custody of the palace's "keeper of the women" (Esther 2:8). *But why give her original Jewish name at all?* Mordecai is ONLY known by his foreign name.

Something intriguing is *hiding* in the name Hadassah, which is used only once in the Bible. It is a variant of the word for "myrtle"—a tree (or perhaps larger shrub) that is unique to the Holy Land. We are to presume Esther's parents named her after a tree that did not exist in Persia.

The word for "myrtle" (from which "Hadassah" is derived) is found in only a few places—usually in verses listing a variety of trees (either for tabernacle-making, as in Nehemiah, or in two prophecies Isaiah related to a prophesied paradise).

Where the "myrtle" features most prominently, however, is in a prophecy of Zechariah. "I saw in the night, and behold a man riding upon a red horse, and he stood among the myrtle-trees that were in the bottom; and behind him there were horses, red, sorrel, and white" (Zechariah 1:8).

Zechariah proceeds to quote the "angel that spoke with me," whom he called "the man that stood among the myrtle-trees" (verses 9, 10). He again specifies that he was speaking with "the angel of the Lord that stood among the myrtle-trees" (verse 11).

The angel in the myrtle tree then recounts history related to Jerusalem lying waste for 70 years (verse 12). This messenger passes on a message from the Eternal, saying: "I am jealous for Jerusalem and for Zion with a great jealousy .... I return to Jerusalem with compassions .... [T]he Lord shall yet comfort Zion, and shall yet choose Jerusalem" (verses 14, 16-17).

The message this angel in the myrtle tree is passing to Zechariah revolves around the future of Jerusalem! This continues well into the next chapter. In fact, for all the visions of the first six chapters, it appears that Zechariah is talking to THIS angel, who is on a red horse among the myrtle trees.

Esther's original Jewish name points us to these opening chapters of Zechariah, which contain great hope for Jerusalem and Judah. It creates a connection between this queen and this location. But there is an even more remarkable link.

Exactly 40 Years

Consider the timing of this vision: "Upon the four and twentieth day of the eleventh month, which is the month Shebat, in the second year of Darius ..." (Zechariah 1:7). This would have been around February 519 B.C.E. Where does that place this vision in relation to the events in the book Esther?

As explained in our July-August 2024 issue, these events occurred during the reign of Xerxes the Great, whom is none other than the "Ahasuerus" of this biblical book. (The historicity of this is laid out in that issue.) Xerxes ruled from October 486 to August 465 B.C.E.

Esther 2:16 is clear on the exact timing when Esther enters the story and the exact month she entered the palace of King Xerxes: "the tenth month, which is the month Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign." The author is giving us events as related to the Jewish calendar.

There is a difference between the Persian and Jewish method of counting a monarch's reign. Persians counted from spring to spring. So when Xerxes began reigning in October 486, that period to the spring of 485 was the "accession year," and then spring 485 to spring 484 was year 1 of his reign.

Jews counted regnally from fall to fall. So the accession year was October 486 all the way to the fall of 485; the fall 485 to the fall of 484, then, was year 1. (This method of counting is clear in how the months and regnal years are described in Nehemiah 1-2.)

In short, year 7 of Xerxes's reign, from a Jewish writer's perspective, would be the fall of 479 to the fall of 478. The 10th month on the Jewish calendar would be around January 478.

But Esther 2:12 says Esther would have been in the custody of the royal court for around 12 months, meaning she ENTERED THE SCENE around January or February 479 B.C.E. This was *exactly 40 years, perhaps to the very month, week or even day, since Zechariah's epic vision of the angel in the myrtle tree.*

Her original Jewish name, as well as this duration, makes a CONNECTION, tying her back to a series of prophecies that centered around Jerusalem itself.

Rebuilding Jerusalem

Esther most certainly would have had an impact on Xerxes's successor, Artaxerxes. This was the king who allowed Nehemiah passage back to Jerusalem to rebuild its walls in 444 B.C.E. As explained in our July-August 2024 issue, Nehemiah 2:6 contains a likely reference to Esther as "the queen" sitting next to Artaxerxes (i.e. the queen mother; see *ArmstrongInstitute.org/1100* for more information). This is the SAME Artaxerxes who interacted with the scribe *Ezra* several years before Nehemiah.

Ezra 7 describes a decree Artaxerxes gave Ezra. This was in the first month of the seventh year of Artaxerxes's reign (verses 7, 9—around the spring of 457 B.C.E.). The incredible decree, recorded in Aramaic in verses 12-26, mentions God 16 times. Four times it says He is the God of heaven. It mentions His laws five times and His house six times. Artaxerxes mentions Jerusalem six times and the altar once.

The silver and gold Ezra returned with was donated by the king and his seven counselors (verse 15). Ezra was to collect more from Babylon's subjects, which was to be used primarily to buy animals for sacred offerings at the temple (verses 16-17).

"Whatsoever is commanded by the God of heaven [he does *not* say, by Ezra], let it be done exactly for the house of the God of heaven; for why should there be wrath against the realm of the king and his sons?" (verse 23). This question implies that Artaxerxes had a certain fear of what would happen to him and his dynasty if he doesn't assist Ezra.

This king knew a great deal about the cultic operations of the Jewish religion—seeing them as requirements of a particular deity. He operated with a certain fear of not fulfilling those requirements himself.

Connections

Forty years after Zechariah's vision, which contained hope for Jerusalem, a young Jewish girl entered

RITUAL
FROM PAGE 22

"As in the case of Akhenaten, one would attempt to completely blot the person's name from history. The final purpose was nothing less than erasing an individual from existence both in this world and the next. Without a name or likeness for people to remember there was no way one could continue to live" ("Spiritual Defense—Execration Rituals in Ancient Egypt").

Noegel also makes an important connection between this passage and the breaking of the tablets: "The effacing of any name from this heavenly register is equal to the permanent destruction and existence of that person, in the same way, that the ritual destruction of the two tablets aimed to sever the Israelites from the divine word permanently" (op cit).

The point is, there is a chain of events that occurs in Exodus 32 that has Egyptian ritual overtones and that was triggered by the first event—the smashing of the tablets. And none of them had anything to do with Moses's anger.

9) A point often overlooked is that it would seem Moses had time to think about what he would do as he came down the mountain. We should see that his actions were not so much spontaneous as they were calculated.

Many are convinced that Moses became angry spontaneously at seeing the dancing and the worshiping of the golden calf and his actions were spurred by that critical moment only. Yet God had already told him what was going on and what to expect. Before Moses comes down the mountain and smashes the tablets, we read: "And the Lord spoke unto Moses: 'Go, get thee down; for thy people, that thou broughtest up out of the land of Egypt, have dealt corruptly; they have turned aside quickly out of the way which I commanded them; they have made them a molten calf, and have worshipped it, and have sacrificed unto it, and said: This is thy god, O Israel, which brought thee up out of the land of Egypt'" (verses 7-8).

In light of this, it is worth considering Moses's action was premeditated. On his way down the mountain, he encounters Joshua, who had been dutifully waiting for him. Joshua tells Moses that the noise coming from the camp sounded like the noise of war. But Moses knew better and replied, "It's not the sound of winners shouting. It's not the sound of losers crying. It's the sound of a wild celebration that I hear" (verse 18; God's Word Translation).

Moses had time to consider what he would witness when he came down the mountain. As he contemplated the sin he was about to observe, wouldn't he, as the human leader of the Israelites, also have considered how he was going to respond?

10) It is interesting to note that in his own words recounting that fateful day, Moses does not say anything about being angry, or that he cast down and broke the tablets because of his frustration and temper. "So I turned and came down from the mount, and the mount burned with fire; and the two tables of the covenant were in my two hands. And I looked, and, behold, ye had sinned against the Lord your God; ye had made you a molten calf; ye had turned aside quickly out of the way which the Lord had commanded you. And I took hold of the two tables, and cast them out of my two hands, and broke them before your eyes" (Deuteronomy 9:15-17).

Given his honesty and humility, which is illustrated throughout his career as the nation's greatest prophet and human leader,

a process that led to her becoming queen of the world-ruling empire of the time. After she passed from the role of queen consort to queen mother, her influence impacted the next king, who was instrumental in ensuring two of Jerusalem's most prominent post-exilic leaders, Ezra and Nehemiah, could fulfill their God-ordained roles.

The name Hadassah, though only used once in the Bible, connects Esther to a hope-filled prophecy about Jerusalem. This reality reinforces the fact that this Jewish-born queen of Persia played a key role in the restoration of Jerusalem, including contributing to the beautifying of Jerusalem's second temple and the wall that hedged the beloved city. ■

one would think that, if Moses had destroyed the precious tablets of God due to his anger, he would have readily owned up to it.

The Conclusion of the Matter

I am convinced that we should not fail to see the connection to Egyptian culture and practices in these early narratives recorded in the book of Exodus, and perhaps none more than this Mount Sinai story. Donahou is correct in asserting: "There are two key factors that point to the execration ritual as the antecedent to the activity reported in the narrative of Exodus 32: the Egyptian setting of the entire book and the vocabulary found in this passage. … One can certainly see a literary and cultural connection between ancient Israel and ancient Egypt."

A final point should be to acknowledge that Moses knew that casting down the tablets would not destroy their message. He knew that they were the "tables of the testimony" (Exodus 31:18), the "tablets of the covenant" (Deuteronomy 9:9), and the "words of the covenant" (Deuteronomy 29:1). They were the "ten words" (Exodus 34:28), understood to be the "ten living words." In them is life and blessings when believed, death and curses when rejected—as at the foot of Mount Sinai that fateful day. ■

FEEDBACK

Thank you for your amazing magazine. I believe your work is the best of the best, providing high-quality information online, free magazines and great podcasts that are always with me while at home or driving in Israel.

YEHUDA VESHOMRON, ISRAEL

Thank you so much for your archaeological work and the magazine! I read and enjoy your archaeological publications. Your pictures of Sodom and the article are fantastic! Thank you so much for your work. I love biblical archaeology!

CALIFORNIA, UNITED STATES

Just wanted to let you know you are doing a wonderful work and I have enjoyed reading the articles online, especially the one about Moses! I shared it with a Coptic Egyptian, and he loved it and could not believe that Moses's identity was hidden under their noses all this time. I am fascinated by Bible history and proving it through historical evidence and would love to be part of something like this.

UNITED KINGDOM

I have just finished part one of the remarkable *Let the Stones Speak* on the kingdom of David and Solomon. It has been such an enjoyable experience that I wanted to thank you. It is not only informative but so creatively written that I felt like I was getting a personalized tour. I'm looking forward to part two!

NORTH CAROLINA, UNITED STATES

I've really enjoyed the magazine (immensely, in fact!) and have also been loving your YouTube videos. They've been so helpful in piecing together Old Testament history and deepening my understanding of God's truth. Thank you for making all of this wonderful, free content available.

TEXAS, UNITED STATES

LET THE STONES SPEAK

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