

## **Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 9, The Geopolitical Arena, Part 2**

© 2204 Jeffrey Hudon and Ted Hildebrandt

This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 9, The Geopolitical Arena, Part 2.

Following the Assyrian Empire, the fall of the Assyrian Empire in 612, the Neo-Babylonian Empire essentially took its place and claimed all of former Assyrian territory for its own, making a series of campaigns to the west and again, expanding into Egypt. Unlike the Assyrians, however, the Neo-Babylonian Empire only lasted for a few decades.

Now, important Babylonian names are mentioned in scripture. First of all is Merodach-Baladan. Merodach-Baladan was a Babylonian leader who constantly was fomenting revolt against Assyria in the 8th century.

He sent emissaries to Hezekiah, and Hezekiah again showed them his capabilities, armories, and so on. But Merodach-Baladan disappeared into the Shadal-Arab, never to be heard from again. Babylonian King Nabopolassar revolted against Assyria successfully and then began marching on Assyrian territory, conquering the ancient capital of Asher first and then Nineveh in 612.

It was his son Nebuchadnezzar, the famous Nebuchadnezzar, who took the crown in 605, defeated the rump of the Assyrians and the Egyptians, and took over the Levant and Egypt. After this, a series of deportations took place from Judah and just like the same basic techniques used by the Assyrians were adopted by the Babylonians. Now the last king, after the Babylonians defeated and conquered Judah and destroyed Jerusalem and most of the Judean population was exiled, the Babylonian exile back to Babylon, a series of weak rulers succeeded Nebuchadnezzar, and the last of these was Nabonidus, who again a weak king and his son became de facto ruler over Babylon.

His name, Belshazzar, of course, was the king who had Daniel come to his debauchery-filled banquet and read the writing on the wall in Daniel chapter 5. And, of course, Babylon fell that very evening to the Medes and the Persians. It fell to mention, though, that Babylon is first mentioned in Genesis 10.10 as being founded by Nimrod. So, it goes way back into the early parts of Genesis.

For its short duration, Babylon had tremendous beauty and architecture and civilization. This is the famous Ishtar Gate, one of the seven wonders of the ancient world. Artist's reconstruction of that.

It's partially reconstructed in the Berlin Museum, which we have here. This is a ceremonial gate, as you can see here by an artist's rendition on the upper left-hand corner. Again, glazed bricks with lions and different mythical creatures of the Babylonian religion emblazoned on the walls.

Beautifully reconstructed again on display in Berlin. One of the questions that archaeologists have had about ancient Babylon was, where was the fabled hanging gardens of Babylon that the king of Babylon built for his wife, who was used to a mountainous terrain, not the flat Tigris-Euphrates valley? One of these, again, there's various suggestions. Robert Koldewey, the German archaeologist that excavated Babylon, suggested one place.

And D.J. Wiseman, back in 1984, suggested the outwork close to the Euphrates River. Nobody really knows. However, recent work by Stephanie Dowley, a British Assyriologist, suggests that the historians who mention the hanging gardens are all classical in date.

Greek historians. She believes they got it wrong and that the gardens they're talking about are not Babylonian but rather Assyrian. Perhaps Nebuchadnezzar or Ashurbanipal is represented instead.

So, this is an open question, and a lot of people would shed a lot of tears if the hanging gardens of Babylon became the hanging gardens of Nineveh. But according to Dowley, this is probably what it originally was, and there were no actual hanging gardens in Babylon proper. Now the depiction on the upper right is an Archimedes screw, which actually gives the ability to flow water upwards, to raise water to a higher level, and then that way to irrigate gardens.

And that's the way that these gardens were apparently irrigated. However, the invention of this device is later, so we don't know if the Assyrians or Babylonians had technology like this or if it was later invented and then perhaps transposed back in the literature back to the Assyrians or Babylonians. Again, this is an artist's depiction of Nabonidus and his queen on a tour of the city of Babylon.

And again, like Nineveh, incredibly, the grandeur and spectacle of these ancient cities were something to behold. Babylon again fell in 539 to the Assyrians under Cyrus the Great, or excuse me, to the Persians under Cyrus the Great. The Persians created an empire that was even larger than the Assyrian or Babylonian empire, ranging all the way into the Indus Valley, all the way to Egypt, Asia Minor, and even parts of Europe.

Again, across the Isthmus or the Bosphorus and Dardanelles into northern Greece in the Balkans. So, a tremendous empire, and this lasted until 333 BC, so about 200 years. Cyrus the Great, who again conquered Babylon, had an edict the following

year that allowed all captives, all deported peoples, the ability to go back to their nations or countries or regions of origin and resettle.

And so, groups of Jews, the first group under Zerubbabel and later waves followed, went back to Judah, went back to Jerusalem, and began to rebuild their lives. However, those were probably in the minority, the faithful remnant that went back to Judah. Most Jews had assimilated into Babylonian culture, and then, of course, easily transitioned into Persian culture.

Their daughters and sons were comfortable there, and so they remained in Persia. It was the groups that went back who yearned for the life that their ancestors lived in the Holy Land, in Judah, that again rebuilt Jerusalem, rebuilt the temple, and started to rebuild their lives back in their homeland. Now, that series of provinces was established under the Persian Empire.

The province of Yehud, Judah, was again kept the name of the ancient kingdom. That was overseen by Jewish governors, one of whom, of course, was Nehemiah. Now, on a global scale, later Persian kings repeatedly attempted to expand their empire by invading Greece unsuccessfully.

But again, one of them, Xerxes, apparently is the king Ahasuerus of the Book of Esther. Most scholars believe that those two are equated. Persia and its rulers became increasingly corrupt, and the empire actually disintegrated from the center.

And it was only due to Alexander and his army that continued to attack and defeat increasingly larger Persian armies, first in Asia Minor at the Granicus River, then Issus and Arbela, and the Persian Empire just imploded. And the once great Persian Empire that gave us sayings like, rain, snow, or sleet will not stop the mail, and so on, fell into ruin and was destroyed. This is the ruins of Persepolis, the Persian capital.

Those would have, originally you see the columns standing there. Those would have been supplemented by wooden columns, probably cedars of Lebanon and other wood. And all the superstructure was wood.

That all was burned by the destruction of that city by Alexander. But you see here a monumental stairway with depictions of Persian nobles climbing up into the palace. Artist's depiction of Cyrus the Great entering Babylon after its capture and his tomb at Pasargadae.

Basargadeh was an extensive palace and garden facility that was excavated by David Stronach and written up. An incredible site in modern Iran. Again, giving us just a taste of what the glory of Persia was.

This is one of the copies of the Cyrus Cylinder, again, the Edict of Cyrus, which allowed captives to return to their homelands after being in captivity for so long. There are some more pictures of Persepolis and Susa, which was an auxiliary capital, and again, the events of the Book of Esther took place there. Now, in the provinces during the Persian period, coinage became widespread.

And the first Jewish coins were actually minted in Jerusalem. And this is one of them here. This is greatly expanded.

These silver coins were about the diameter of the head of a 16-penny nail, extremely tiny, about half the diameter of a dime, pure silver. And this says in paleo-Hebrew letters, Yehud, with a sprig of grain here on the other side. And modern-day Israeli shekel coins copy one of these variations of the Yehud coin.

This one, according to the inscription, was found near Jericho. More than that, Persian period seal impressions on storage jars mentioning Yehud and other variants have been found. These are collected by two scholars and published.

So, there was an official collection system for taxes or agricultural products that was regulated and used via these storage jars during the Persian period in Judah. And again, an artist's rendition of the final destruction of Persepolis by Alexander the Great in 331 BC. Thank you very much.

This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudson in his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 9, The Geopolitical Arena, Part 2. Thank you.