

Dr. Jeffrey Hudon, Biblical Archaeology, Session 19, The Last Years of Judah and the Archaeology of Destruction

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This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudon and his teaching on Biblical Archaeology. This is session 19, the Last Years of Judah and the Archaeology of Destruction.

Okay, this lecture is about the last years of the kingdom of Israel and Judah.

And I quote the words of Isaiah here, woe to Assyria, the rod of my anger and the staff in whose hands is my indignation. I send it against a godless nation and commission it against the people of my fury to capture booty and to seize plunder and to trample them down like mud in the streets. Incredible, powerful words by the prophet Isaiah.

Here, we have artists' depictions of Assyrian kings and watching their armies put cities under siege and break through and destroy the great cities of their enemies. We talked about Assyria previously and about their incredible atrocities. Assyria, in particular, was brilliant at psychological warfare.

You think of the siege of Jerusalem under Sennacherib, and Rabshaka comes up on behalf of the Assyrian king and begins to speak to the people. He's standing outside the walls, but speaking to the people in Judean, in Hebrew, not in Assyrian. And Hezekiah's officials yell down, speak to us in Assyrian, we understand that.

But no, he wants the people to, he bypasses the king and the officials. He wants the people to hear what's going to happen to them. And it is a fearful speech that he gives.

This is what will happen: good cop, bad cop. This is what will happen if you surrender. We'll send you to Assyria.

You can build new farms and new houses, sit under your own fig tree, and have a nice, peaceful life. But if you continue to resist, well, this is what they would do. First of all, they would, if you tried to escape the city, they would find you and catch you and impale you on a pole, and that pole would be standing out in front of the walls as a deterrent for others.

Think of a hot dog at a weenie roast on a stick. That would be you. They would also skin you alive, flail you, spread you out, and skin you alive as part of their atrocities.

Or what, there are instances of people being built into walls. I don't quite know how that would work, but it doesn't sound very much fun. And here, of course, we see the passages in Psalms and Isaiah and Hosea, where you have mothers, pregnant mothers, ripped open and the unborn child smashed against a rock while the mother's still alive before she is killed.

Unbelievable evil in their atrocities. But this, again, raised fear, and they ruled by fear, by power and fear. But when they became weak in the seventh century, as we'll see, their decline and fall were quick because of their horrible, horrible reputation in what they did to people.

Foreign policy-wise, they would, again, appear with an army at your border, and they said, become a vassal, give us tribute, and we'll leave you alone. You can do your own thing. If a nation resisted, they would attack the nation and perhaps deport the king and put their own person in charge or a loyal vassal from the population.

If there was any kind of whisper of revolt after that, the whole nation would be, or most of the nation would be deported. The king would be killed. And the Bible is very, very, the Old Testament is very, very clear and very, very graphic on what happened to some of the kings that resisted.

And this again was adopted in the main by the Babylonians as well. So, very, very evil empires. But in that evil, there was also beauty, beauty in their culture, beauty in their architecture, beauty in their pottery, and in their art.

We talked about Tiglath-Pileser in the late 8th century, and we'll unpack this more when we look at the 8th century. He was the first of these Assyrian kings to not just make raids but to actually annex territory, create provinces, and so on. He was kind of the brilliant mastermind behind the Assyrian foreign policy. And this, you can see it states here, 745 to 727 BC.

Again, Shalmaneser and Sargon were successors to Tiglath-Pileser and continued to develop that same policy. Of course, we'll unpack Sennacherib as we talk more about the 8th century. The famous Sennacherib prism, which describes the conquest of Judah, has been found, and various copies of it have been found.

And again, we'll unpack this more in a later PowerPoint. But there's a lot of information and a lot of questions surrounding Sennacherib. His palace was excavated again in Nineveh by Laird.

Inside his palace, the grand gallery that culminated in the throne room, the place of prominent place in his throne room, was dedicated to his conquest of the city of Lachish. And wall mural after wall mural depicted this. And Laird was able to read Lachish in the cuneiform and took off these panels and shipped them.

Again, they were fragmentary; they weren't complete, so they were shipped to the British Museum. And there they remain today. They've been copied and cast, and copies are in other museums, most notably the Israel Museum in Jerusalem.

But the siege of Lachish by Sennacherib was the crowning achievement, because of its place in his palace, of his reign. Now, Lachish, again, was the second largest city in Judah under Jerusalem. Why not Jerusalem? Why not the capital? Why not the main epicenter of Judah? Because he never conquered it.

He doesn't say that, but he never conquered it. Now, this is a, again, a part of the Lachish relief. You can see basically all of the events of the siege and attack depicted at once.

You see the siege machinery, the battering rams up, going up handmade, Syrian-made ramps up to the wall. You can see the defenders throwing down torches, trying to burn them. You can see the defenders on the walls, on towers, fighting for their lives here at the gate.

But you also see captives coming out of the gate with their belongings, again, going off into exile. You see people that are skewered here, who have apparently tried to escape. So, everything is happening at once.

We'll point out something here where this overhang of this tower may be described in 2 Chronicles 26, but we'll talk about that later. So, this is a very, very important depiction of Lachish and the destruction of that city of Judah. Even more importantly, you have depictions of Judeans themselves bowing before Sennacherib.

Here, as he's seated on his throne, his face has been destroyed probably by a later ruler or king, and then going off into exile with their carts and belongings. You can see the typical Judean helmet with covers over the ears. And again, these horrible depictions of people on poles, dead people on poles, and being skewered, their skin is taken off while they're still alive.

Unbelievable. However, a lot of studies have been done on the Lachish reliefs, and it is believed that the artists that created these were actually on site. The details of Lachish that we know archaeologically are accurate enough that drawings, very detailed drawings were made on site.

And then the reliefs were made once the army returned to Nineveh. This is a Lachish, as it appears today. This is one of the Assyrian siege ramps, partially remaining, going up to the summit of the Tell, to the wall.

And there's also remains of a Judean counter-ramp. And here we have the top plan of Lachish, part of the Assyrian ramp that still remains. But also, when the Judeans were seeing what was going on, they collected material from atop the city and built a counter-ramp, raising the wall.

They fought bravely; they fought with everything they had, but ultimately, they were defeated. The breach in the wall took place, and then the whole city fell, and all these atrocities took place. There are depictions on Assyrian reliefs of other cities, of course, many cities that have been captured and put under siege.

And here's a depiction of one of the defenders of the city lowering a chain to try to get under one of the battering rams and flip it over and perhaps flip over the siege machinery. Believe it or not, during the Starkey excavations, they actually found one of these chains that, in the destruction debris of level three of Lachish, may represent one of these attempts to destroy the Assyrian battering ram or break the wooden pole that pounds against the walls. Here's an artist's depiction again of the main gateway at Lachish under attack and probably inaccurate as far as all the foot soldiers there drawing fire and the ladders.

This would have been mostly siege machinery that you see over on the right. But to be honest, nobody can really accurately depict exactly what it looked like, even with the Lachish reliefs, but it was a horrible, terrifying event for both defender and attacker. Lord Byron, of course, made his famous poem about the destruction of Sennacherib after Lachish, Sennacherib, and his army attacked Jerusalem, put Jerusalem under siege, and the angel of the Lord wiped out his entire army.

We'll talk more about these later, but these are some beautiful views of a series of jars that have been discovered throughout Judah and sometimes beyond her borders. These jars are royal jars, clearly, and they're generally this shape, sometimes in a pithos, larger jar, but they have specific stamps on them, seal impressions that have been stamped on their handles. There are two types, a two-winged type and a four-winged scarab here.

There are two main types. They also have some with concentric circles. Some of these symbols appear in both the seal impression and the incised concentric circles.

What do these represent? Well, they're inscribed. By the way, Charles Warren, digging in Jerusalem, was the first to publish these because he found the first ones and published them. But they say *Lamelek* on the upper register, two or four the king or royal property; perhaps you could translate that. And then one of four sites, Soho, Ziph, Hevron, and kind of an enigmatic site called Memshat, here depicted in paleo Hebrew.

Memshat is unknown. The letters of that site are not identifiable with any site. It could be a royal estate, and I believe it's a royal estate near Ramat Rachel in Jerusalem because a tremendous amount of these jars have been found in that area, as well as other evidence, like a rock-cut tunnel and that volute capital found in that tunnel in the Rephaim Valley.

This was a breadbasket of Jerusalem, and it would have been an ideal place for a royal estate with Ramat Rachel as the royal residency overlooking this. But unfortunately, it's not mentioned as such in scripture. Some scholars, such as Aharoni, suggested it was a shortened version, a construct version of Memshelet, but you're missing the Lamed there, which Memshelet would be government or kingdom or something of that sort.

Again, there have been lots of studies done on these. Were they taxes? Were they royal stores or royal vineyards? I, myself, have written on these, and again, as numerous as there are, there are well over 2,000 examples of these, but the questions remain, and different explanations have been forwarded. Nothing conclusive as of yet.

The chronological range of most scholars believe that they were used not primarily but entirely during the reign of Hezekiah, the late 8th century, in part in preparation for Sennacherib's invasion. However, there are so many different variations and stamps that were used; I believe that they existed before that, and of course, were all used either initially or secondarily in preparation for that attack by Sennacherib. I believe they were initiated during the reign of Uzziah because Uzziah had royal vineyards and such, and I think these seem to indicate that.

Now, this is a progression because before these, there were storage jars, similar storage jars, unmarked, but some had thumb impressions in them, and we have these all the way back to the 10th century, if not earlier, found at Khirbet Qeiyafa, and I believe these are royal jars, and this is a progression of stampings, first either no stamp or a thumbprint, and then these seal impressions, some very carelessly done, some very nicely done, and then this progress. Down into the 7th century, after the Assyrians left, the new jars were slightly thinner and longer, elongated, and you have a rosette for the seal impression, rather than these two and four-winged impressions, scarabs or something else, and that seems to fit better with Josiah's reform. Again, the lack of images, or the ending of using any kind of images and just a symbol, seems to fit the reforms of Josiah better.

These are dated to the end of the 7th century, and they were used until the fall of the kingdom, when the Babylonians under Nebuchadnezzar destroyed Jerusalem. The person to read about the rosette inscriptions is Jane Cahill. She had an important article in the Israel Exploration Journal back in 1995 that basically describes the

whole progression of rosette symbols, which again are a later adaptation of the lamelek or royal seal impressions.

So, after Sennacherib came and Jerusalem was saved, and of course, that led to a false theology, royal Zion theology, God will never leave Jerusalem, God will never allow Jerusalem to be destroyed, this is his home, his home is in the temple, his residence, and so Jerusalem is safe. That was, again, putting God in a box, just like the Israelites did when the ark was captured at Ebenezer. And, of course, that failed because in 586, everything was destroyed, including the temple.

But, even though Jerusalem was saved after 701, the entire country was devastated, especially the Shephelah. And if you read the book of Micah, the prophecy of Micah, the prophet Micah, who lived in Moresheth Gath, out there in the Shephelah, out there in the foothills, he recognized this and complained and pointed to the elites in Jerusalem that were living a comfortable life saying, look at us, consider us that have been destroyed and homeless and our cities are burned while you are enjoying your luxurious life. There is a lot of social justice in the prophets.

Anyway, for archaeology, Sennacherib's invasion is a huge boon because you see similar layers of destruction at all these different sites and many more that were all destroyed around the same time. The pottery that's destroyed on the floors at this destruction level seems to match. It's called to this day Lachish III pottery because Lachish was the largest site destroyed.

And so pottery assemblage seems to be found at most sites. There are questions about Beersheba, whether that was destroyed perhaps earlier, perhaps later. But all of these sites are dated to the destruction of 701.

Of course, Sennacherib boasts that he took 46 cities and deported 200,000 people. So yeah, there was a huge effect on the kingdom, and Judah took several decades to recover.

And the king under most of this is Manasseh, who is the most apostate king in the history of the kingdom. But geopolitically, he seems to have done okay. And the kingdom begins to recover.

Now, how do they recover? Their borders have shrank. There are Assyrian garrisons out on the coast. And how do they do this? Well, they grow foodstuffs.

They grow grains and olives and sell those to the Phoenicians, their old allies up north. And so even though the biblical writers compare the sins of Manasseh to the sins of Ahab and Jezebel, there's a kind of a veneer there that you look underneath. And that perhaps implies trade with the Phoenicians as well.

And that's how Judah slowly got back on its feet. But you look at the levels above these levels that existed to the end of the kingdom, not as nice, not as well built. The level two gateway at Lachish is much more flimsy and weak than the level four and three gates that were below them.

And just the material culture is not as vigorous and vibrant as it was in the 8th century. Now, going back into the history of archaeology, we've talked about William Foxwell Albright several times. Again, the doyen of American archaeologists, a brilliant scholar, one of the most brilliant probably in the history of science, made three major mistakes about this time, about this era in biblical history.

The first one was a seal impression that he found at Tel Beit-Mirsim in 1932 and promptly published in JBL with a lot of historical conclusions drawn from it. And the inscription said he believed that Joachim, mistakenly, was a servant of Jehoiakim, the second to the last king of Judah, just before Zedekiah. And so he dated on the basis of this seal, he dated this entire level, stratum, at Tel Beit-Mirsim to 597 BC.

Two mistakes here, or actually three, but it was not Joachim; it was not Jehoiakim; this was a different name, and the stratum did not date to 597 BC; it dated to 701 BC. This was an 8th-century private seal on a jar handle that Albright found, and they have found others since then, one at Ramat Rachel, so he misstated the jar and misstated the name. Thirdly, he created a fictitious Babylonian campaign against Judah in 597 BC.

Why? Because he found two destruction layers at Tel Beit-Mirsim, and since he believed this was Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar came to Jerusalem and deported Jehoiakim, but then left. Albright thought that this was part of a campaign against Judah at this time and destroyed a lot of the cities, and then Nebuchadnezzar came back at 586 or 587-586 and then did it again. Because he had to explain two Iron Age destruction layers, one above the other, he knew one was 586, the top one, but the one underneath, because of this seal impression, he believed dated to 597 because Joachim equals Jehoiakim.

But he was wrong. This lower level, this lower destruction layer, was 701. It was a century earlier.

And so, on the basis of a misreading of a seal, this totally messed up the stratigraphy of the late Iron Age in the Southern Levant for several decades. And it wasn't until the publication of Lachish III by Olga Tufnell in the 1950s that she argued that it's not 587, it's 701 to date all of these jars, and she was followed by Aharoni and finally Ushishkin, and then everybody recognized Albright's error. And so, this is an important point that archaeologists have to remember.

Even though Albright was an authority figure and brilliant, he was also human, and he made mistakes and misreads. Like many of us, he was so excited to try to see connections between the Bible and archaeological finds that he overstated the evidence. Joachim was not Jehoiakim.

It was another person who lived during the time of Hezekiah, not Jehoiakim. So this is often used in archaeological classes, including this lecture today, to show the dangers of misrepresenting or overstating your case without clear evidence. And Albright did that.

And if he were alive today, he would immediately recognize his mistake and embrace Tufnell's and Tufnell's followers. Well, excavations in Jerusalem under Shiloh discovered dramatic evidence on the eastern slope of the Kidron Valley, the western slope of the Kidron Valley, and the eastern slope of the city of David. And what they discovered was a house of Ahiel and a four-room house that is partially reconstructed here.

And here's a top plan or a reconstructed plan of it. This is built right into that earlier step stone structure that was a revetment wall or basically a rampart that supported David's palace. And so, when David's palace went out of use, they actually built a belt of houses against that step stone structure, one of which was this house.

And that included, believe it or not, indoor plumbing. Here is one of the first stone toilets found in Jerusalem. Archaeologists actually excavated the cesspit underneath that toilet and were able to determine some of the sicknesses and parasites that were in people during the final days of Jerusalem.

So, remember Jerusalem was under siege for quite some time. And so, people, there was starvation in the city, a lot of disease. And so, the cesspit gave us a window into some of the sufferings of the people of Jerusalem before the fall to Nebuchadnezzar in 586.

Now, below that house was another room that was uncovered, a burned bulla. These are seal impressions that are held or sealed documents. The documents were papyrus.

They are long gone. They were burned in the destruction of Jerusalem in 586. But at the same time, these pieces, lumps of clay, were cured and actually fired and preserved because of that fire.

Again, we have lots of names, personal names, and titles from these bullae or simply seal impressions that were preserved by fire. So, a very important find. And today that's a popular tourist attraction in the city of David.

The last righteous king, so to speak, in Judah was Josiah. And Josiah expanded the kingdom. Of course, they discovered the book of Deuteronomy in the temple.

It was read before all the people of Judah. And Passover was again celebrated and observed. And that also messengers were sent out to the northern, former northern kingdom, now in Assyrian province.

And others again celebrated that they were still there living in the northern kingdom. So, Josiah did a lot of good things. He destroyed all the high places and centralized worship in Jerusalem at the temple.

Some of the more skeptical scholars will say, well, Josiah was trying to consolidate power through cult centralization at the temple. That may be true, but he was greatly lamented, specifically by Jeremiah, when he died. And how he died was, again, a mystery.

Assyria was on its last legs up in the north. Haran was a small garrison. The Babylonians were advancing.

The pharaoh of Egypt at this time was a pharaoh by the name of Necho, the 26th dynasty. And he recognized that the Babylonian threat that was coming out of Mesopotamia was much more serious than the Assyrian threat. And so he decided to join forces with his former enemy, the Assyrian empire, the rump or the remains of the Assyrian empire, and try to stop the advance of the Babylonians.

He sent a message, kind of a prophetic message, that God is with me. Please let me pass through your territory as I go up and help the Assyrians against the Babylonians. Josiah went to meet Necho at Megiddo.

And it was there that Josiah made his death. We don't know if it was a trick, if it was an ambush, or if Josiah tried to block Necho's advance. It's somewhat vague in the biblical texts.

And there's been lots of articles written on this as well. Megiddo level two represents the time of Josiah. And there is a large fortified building on the edge of the tell at that point.

That could have either been an Egyptian garrison or perhaps a garrison sent up by Josiah to try to block Necho's advance. Josiah did expand the kingdoms, including the kingdom of Judah. There was this important ostrakon found in 1960 by Joseph and published by Joseph Neveh at a site called Mesad Hashavyahu, right on the coast.

It was a coastal fort that was only inhabited just for a short time. And the question was, was it a Judahite fort? This is written in beautiful Hebrew. It's a petition to the official for the return of a cloak.

So clearly, the person in charge read Hebrew. And this could have been Josiah's foothold on the coast for a short time. Again, it is possibly in use to block Necho's advance.

This is a beautifully preserved ostrakon describing a tithe or offering to the temple of three shekels. If you can read that here, the bottom line says the Hebrew word shin for shekel and three slashes for three. Here are the words for the temple or house of Yahweh or the Lord.

And that, again, unfortunately, is not provenance. So, we don't know if that is genuine or not. In 1979, the archaeologist Gabriel Barkay was excavating a cemetery, an Iron Age cemetery, on the slopes of the Hinnom Valley.

He called the site Ketef, or shoulder of the Hinnom, opposite the walls of Jerusalem. It was a very rich complex of rock-cut cave tombs from the late Iron Age. He was excavating, and of course, one after the other had been robbed.

A lot of the stone had been quarried away in later periods. But underneath the burial benches was a repository in most of these burial caves. And the repository is where the bones of the deceased would be placed.

And the biblical term, gathered to your fathers, is very literal. Because once your flesh decayed on the burial bench of your tomb, your family would gather up your bones and put them in a cave underneath the burial bench, with the bones of grandpa, great-grandpa, and so on. So, that repository was the final resting place of the family remains.

And so, they got to one cave, later named Cave 25, and they looked down into the repository, cleared the repository, and it looked like, again, just dirt down there and fallen collapsed ceilings, partial ceilings, partial pieces of the ceiling of the cave repository. So, they cleared that and found out that the kind of a thin slice of the roof of the cave, the repository cave, had collapsed early, shortly after the burial site went out of use, and thus preserved all of the burial goods and bones in that repository. So, it was a huge bonanza of finds.

Almost a thousand artifacts were in that burial cave. And so, Gabi Barkay, who was one of my teachers in Israel, just explained what happened and what they had to do. They had to go to and get more object bags and supplies just to bring out all of these artifacts, pottery and other artifacts, along with the bones, to study them.

And two of the artifacts were small, tiny, small looked like cigarette butts. And so, they found those, carefully excavated those. And by the way, when you find something like this, you have to excavate it until you finish, because if you leave it and come back the next day to finish it, most likely it will be gone by people stealing it during the night.

So, they excavated around the clock and got everything cleared out of that cave. And what they saw in these small little cigarette butts were tiny, rolled-up silver plates, plaques. And so, the laboratories at Tel Aviv University took their time and carefully, you can see the breaks here, carefully flattened these silver plaques into a flat sheet.

And they noticed that there was very, very fine writing on these sheets. And the idea was to, what does it say? Can we decipher the words here? Clearly, Paleo-Hebrew. And, of course, you can see the corrosion on the silver, pure silver plaques, but in poor shape.

Well, somebody was working on these, one of Gabi or his epigraphers were working on this. And they thought they recognized the divine name of Yahweh, the Lord, three times. And, but they couldn't really make out anything else until they were, while they were working on this, a group of rabbinical children, and that had been going to class, came walking by the window, and reciting the priestly benediction.

May the Lord bless you and keep you. May the Lord make his face shine upon you. So on and so on, and grant you peace.

And in that text, in the book of Numbers, the divine name appears three times. And it just, everything fell together. And that person that was studying this text realized that he had before him, the oldest piece of, the oldest fragment of scripture ever found.

Because this scripture, which again is, one is more or less an exact translation, or copy of the priestly benediction. The other one is slightly paraphrased. And these are the oldest, again, biblical texts ever discovered to this day.

Way older, 300 or more years older than the Dead Sea Scrolls, the oldest Dead Sea Scrolls. And so, at the Israel Museum, these have pride of place to this day as the oldest texts. And that was found just outside the walls of Jerusalem in 1979.

Now they were worn, probably by a young girl, as a talisman or good luck charm. Obviously, they were rolled up like tiny little scrolls, cigarette butts, and perforated again because they were rolled up so a string could be placed through them and hung around a neck. The burial caves themselves probably belonged to a priest in the temple.

And so, these were read and worn when the Temple of Solomon was still standing. And a very spectacular find, of course, with direct connections with scripture, of course. And not only that, it shows that the Pentateuch, the Law of Moses, was revered and read, not in the Persian period, but much earlier.

And this again argues for an early date for the Pentateuch as well. Nebuchadnezzar, again, followed his father Nebuchadnezzar as king of Babylon and led armies several times, 605 and 587-86 in particular, to the Levant and did much destruction. One of the important texts relating to Nebuchadnezzar and his successors was found and published by D.J. Wiseman in 1956.

And this is part of what's called the Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings. And it was a short-lived empire. The Neo-Babylonian Empire was short-lived, 605, 612 to 539 B.C. But it made a major impact, especially on the Levant.

Fragments of the 597 texts are there. Unfortunately, the 586 text of the Chaldean Kings is still missing. As we know, Jerusalem and Judah fell for the final time to the Babylonians in 586.

Most excavations in and around Jerusalem show evidence of that destruction to this day. In the Jewish quarter, the very impressive remains of a defensive tower, possibly part of a gate complex, were discovered. These are actually later Hasmonean ruins here.

This is an Iron Age tower. And around that tower were found evidence of destruction and arrowheads that were used by both defenders and attackers when the Babylonians were attacking Jerusalem. Nearly all the people were deported, those that survived, and sent to Babylon.

The temple and all the palaces on the Ophel and on the Temple Mount were destroyed. This was a very sad ending to a very long-reigned or long-lasting kingdom established by David around 1000 B.C. In Nebuchadnezzar's bricks, we talked about some of the importance of the Babylonian Empire. As you can see, Nebuchadnezzar stamped all of his bricks with his own name, which is mentioned there.

And, of course, we talked about the Ishtar Gate on a previous PowerPoint as well, again, partially reconstructed there in the Berlin Museum. Another, again, a review of Stephanie Dalley, a British researcher and Assyriologist, that argues that the fabled hanging gardens of Babylon, and, of course, you see different artistic representations of these, were actually not from Babylon, but actually from Assyria. And here's an Assyrian relief there showing some gardens at Nineveh.

And then, finally, the destruction of Solomon's Temple. This is, again, a modern recreation of what that temple could have looked like. We know, again, the dimensions and a lot of details.

We don't exactly know what it looked like, however. I want to mention this picture here, which shows some restoration work on top of the temple mount of the Al-Aqsa Mosque. And there were some very ancient cedar beams that were replaced a number of years ago.

And those cedar beams were put in storage in East Jerusalem. And somebody did some carbon dating on these cedar beams and found out that they are very ancient. They are so ancient that they date to the time of Herod's Temple.

So, the cedar beams used by the Islamic shrine built very early in the Islamic period, were actually reused cedar beams from Herod's Temple. Is that possible? More than that, other of these beams were dated even earlier. The C14 dating or the radiocarbon dating on those was back in the Iron Age.

The astonishing thing about this is, do we have or was there cedar beams on the temple mount, the Haram al-Sharif in Arabic, supporting a Muslim mosque, that were actually cedar beams that supported Solomon's Temple or palaces? That was an article that appeared in Biblical Archaeology Review. I have not heard anything further on the topic or on the subject. But these beams apparently still exist.

And it would be fascinating to have more tests done on them to confirm that dating. One of the epigraphic finds that we found in Jerusalem was this seal impression of Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe. And you have even fingerprints preserved on the edge of this bole.

So, you have the fingerprints of Jeremiah's scribe preserved until today. I also want to point out something here. And this is the part of the Western Wall, again used to be called the Wailing Wall, the wall that surrounded Herod's Temple Mount.

And you notice something interesting here. These are beautiful Herodian masonry with beautiful edges, carefully carved. But notice some are in very, very good state of preservation.

Some are very weathered and worn. And it's been a contention of some archaeologists that Herod used, when he was building the Temple Mount, building that platform, kind of a sandbox, so to speak, around the temple, that he found older stones from Solomon's Temple and Solomon's walls around the Temple Mount, and re-cut those and reused those in his wall. But because they had been burned during the destruction of Jerusalem by Sennacherib, that weakened the stones.

So, they weathered and broke down much more quickly than the stones that he had cut. So, what we may be looking at here is actual stones from Solomon's Temple and the royal buildings and enclosure that existed during the reign of Solomon and the kings of Israel and Judah, that were reused by Herod in the first century B.C. to build his enclosure wall around the temple. That's the theory, and I think it's a valid one.

Now, who was left after Nebuchadnezzar deported all of the Judeans from Judah and Jerusalem? There's been a long-held belief that the land was empty, that there was nobody left, but there were people left, and that's attested both by scripture and by archaeology. In the cemetery at Ketef Hinnom that Gabi Barkay excavated and found the two amulets, which remained in use throughout the 6th century B.C. During this so-called Babylonian period, there were still people living, dying, and being buried in that cemetery, as well as others. And there have been recognizable pottery and artifacts from this time, including seal impressions that have been discovered.

And of course, during this time, there were Babylonian governors, whose names we know, such as Gedaliah. The Babylonian province capital was not at Jerusalem but at the Mitzpah to the north. So, there was activity and people living here between the restoration period, between the return to Zion, and, of course, before that, the fall of Jerusalem.

Which brings up another point. There was never any kind of mistaken location on where the temple was. People were there.

The ruins of Solomon's Temple were clearly visible when Zerubbabel and the first wave of returnees came back from Babylon. There should be no question in anybody's mind that the second temple was built right on the site of the first temple. And people that returned, that were children when they went into exile, returned as senior citizens, and they remember it as well.

And they cried over the fact that Zerubbabel's temple was so modest compared to Solomon's. But the argument that they didn't know where to put the temple, that they misplaced the temple, those arguments are simply not acceptable. Okay, finally we have the Nabonidus stela again, the final king of the Babylonian Empire that we've mentioned before, who was an absentee king, and his son, Belshazzar, ruled in his stead.

And then, of course, the Cyrus Cylinder, with that edict that allowed the Judeans to go back after their Babylonian exile, to go back and live back in their land, their homeland, Judah, which became, of course, the Persian province of Yehud after the rise of the Persian Empire. Thank you very much. This is Dr. Jeffrey Hudson and his teaching on biblical archaeology.

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