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The Kingdom of Judah: Politics, Prophets, and Scribes in the Late Preexilic Period

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Chapter 11

THE KINGDOM OF JUDAH: POLITICS, PROPHETS, AND SCRIBES IN THE LATE PREEXILIC PERIOD

Aaron P. Schade

The purpose of this chapter is to define the general condition of the kingdom of Judah on the eve of her destruction in 586 B.C.¹ This will be done within the context of the social and political climate of the day and in relation to foreign interactions between Judah and her neighbors. An examination of both internal and external affairs will more clearly portray the final days of the kingdom of Judah and afford a historical context for the prophetic messages and opposition that prophets such as Jeremiah and Lehi encountered there. Contemporaneous individuals, places, and events, coming from both biblical and extrabiblical sources, will be discussed, along with early accounts of Lehi's ministry in Jerusalem as contained in the Book of Mormon.

One may wonder how the Book of Mormon can contribute to this type of study. The historical content of the Book of Mormon actually becomes an invaluable tool in the study of preexilic Judah as it sheds light on typically enigmatic and problematic areas of understanding. Throughout this chapter various cultural and social aspects that are portrayed in the Book of Mormon will be

viewed in conjunction with what is known in current scholarship in relation to the respective topics. These topics include political and social attitudes, persecutions of prophets, and scribal traditions in Judah in the late preexilic period.

Historical Overview

In order to more fully comprehend the social and political atmosphere in which prophets such as Lehi and Jeremiah ministered, it is necessary to define the effects of the reign of Josiah (one of the most righteous kings in Judah's history). This will thus act as a starting point for the discussion of the kingdom of Judah in the days preceding her destruction.

Josiah ruled as king of Judah from 640 to 609 B.C.² He came to the throne at the age of eight following the murder of his father Amon (2 Kings 21:23–24; 22:1), and the affairs of the kingdom were probably run by others in the royal court until he became of age. It should be remembered that the previous years had been difficult for Judah and that parts of the country had been razed by the Assyrians only decades earlier. Though it had not suffered the fate of the kingdom of Israel in 722 at the hands of the Assyrians, in 701 Sennacherib had invaded the region, destroying many of the kingdom's cities and deporting thousands along the way.³ Though the effects of this invasion had been felt for decades, by the end of Josiah's reign some of these cities were rebuilt and reoccupied. By the beginning of his kingship, Assyria's grip on Judah had weakened, and Josiah witnessed a relative degree of freedom that afforded him and the kingdom of Judah some political and economic success in this period.⁴

The kingdom's political success was built on the back of a religious revitalization instigated by Josiah. Josiah's famous religious reform began around 628/627 B.C.⁵ This was the approximate time of a Babylonian revolt against Assyria, under

whom Judah was still a vassal.⁶ This was also a time in which civil conflict brewing in Assyria would eventually lead to a civil war there a few years later. The eye of the Assyrians was thus cast away from Josiah and toward affairs closer to home. This Assyrian absence gave Josiah some room to maneuver.

One of the significant events that sparked Josiah's religious revival (according to the king's account) included the finding of "the book of the law" in the temple (2 Kings 22:8),⁷ giving way to Josiah's reforms.⁸ Josiah implemented a policy of centralized temple worship confined to the Jerusalem temple and overthrew idolatrous practices throughout the kingdom. A description of his reform states:

Hezekiah's policy may have been consistent, and consistently less fanatical than Josiah's. No report indicates that Hezekiah centralized the rural priests in the capital (2 Chron. 31.15–20). Conversely, Josiah executed the priests of Samaria (2 Kgs 23.20), and herded those of Judah into the temple (2 Kgs 23.8–9). Josiah seems to have taken the business of centralization a good deal more seriously than Hezekiah. Unlike Hezekiah, he allegedly suppressed all worship outside the temple, not just sacrifice outside Jerusalem and the state forts.⁹

Josiah valiantly attempted to abolish idolatry during his religious reforms, but by the time of the ministries of Jeremiah and Lehi, idolatrous practices had again begun to permeate Judean mentality. The reliance on the God who had delivered their ancestors out of Egypt (which Josiah had attempted to reinstate among his people) had disappeared. The Lord described their obstinate nature and mentality with these words and warning:

Stop before your feet are bare and your throat is parched. But you said, "No; I am desperate. I love foreign gods and I must go after them." As a thief is ashamed when he is found out, so the people of Israel feel ashamed, they, their kings,

their princes, their priests, and their prophets, who say to a block of wood, “You are our father” and cry “Mother” to a stone. On me they have turned their backs and averted their faces from me. Yet in their time of trouble they say, “Rise up and save us!” Where are the gods you made for yourselves? In your time of trouble let them arise and save you. For you, Judah, have as many gods as you have towns. (Jeremiah 2:25–28 Revised English Bible)

Thus many were turning to idolatry for religious consolation.¹⁰ The Lord lamented, “I planted you as a choice red vine, a wholly pure strain, yet now you are turned into a vine that has reverted to its wild state!” (Jeremiah 2:21 REB).¹¹ Despite Josiah’s efforts, the hearts of the people failed to turn toward the Lord, and idolatrous attitudes would again show their face in the kingdom of Judah.

Josiah was also able to expand the realms of his domain.¹² His expansionist efforts were fueled by his religious reforms: “Josiah was able to launch his annexation policy only after initiating his reform (around 628 B.C.; cf. II Chron. xxxiv 6), and he seems to have gained control solely over the former Assyrian province of *Samerina* and to have established a corridor reaching the coast in the northern Shephelah.”¹³ In the days of Manasseh the Assyrians had opened extensive markets into Judah, many of which may have been located on or near Judah’s borders.¹⁴ Now, with Assyrian influence diminishing within his borders, Josiah was able to take full advantage of the established commercial activity. He broke up lineage compounds within the kingdom and established state trade within his borders.

In the late seventh century, the clans having been demolished, nothing but the nominal sovereignty of Assyria impeded royal plans for expansion. A certain amount of retribalization had no doubt occurred. Against these, even while embracing the ideology of the lineages, Josiah di-

rected his reforms—and against any cultural elements that reinforced symbolically the cohesion of the lineage against the state. The state’s relations with the nuclear family and more specifically with its adult male heads were direct, now unmediated—precisely individual.¹⁵

Josiah pursued religious reforms, economic recovery, and expansion that would forever mark him as one of the greatest and most righteous kings Judah had ever seen. His untimely death brought serious consequences and retrogression in the kingdom of Judah.

Josiah was killed by Pharaoh Necho II at Meggido in 609 B.C. This occurred as the Egyptians were marching north to assist their ally (Assur-uballit II of Assyria) who was falling to the Babylonians and the Medes in western Mesopotamia.¹⁶ “His sudden death and the hasty departure of Necho from the land left a vacuum, which was well used by the supporters of Jehoahaz, who crowned him in place of his father.”¹⁷ During the next four years (609–605 B.C.), Judah was under Egyptian domination until the Babylonian victory at Carchemish in 605. After Jehoahaz’s¹⁸ short three-month reign in 609, he was imprisoned in Necho’s headquarters in Riblah. Egypt then set Jehoiakim,¹⁹ brother of Jehoahaz, upon the throne, and he reigned for the next eleven years in Judah (609–598 B.C.; 2 Kings 23:33–34).

Jehoiakim becomes a pivotal figure in the study of the early history of the Book of Mormon, as he reigns almost to the beginning of Lehi’s ministry in Jerusalem. During his reign the Babylonians defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish (605 B.C.), up until which time Judah had been an Egyptian vassal.²⁰ Nebuchadnezzar (605–562) succeeded his father (Nabopolassar) shortly thereafter (605), and in that year Nebuchadnezzar and the Babylonians invaded the area of Palestine. Judah then became a part of their domain sometime around 604/603.²¹ Concerning

this period, Abraham Malamat commented: “With the decline of the mighty empire of Assyria, toward the end of the seventh century BC and the striking victories of the young Nebuchadnezzar in the summer of 605 BC, a most reluctant Judah was swept into the ensuing confrontation that erupted between the Neo-Babylonian empire and Egypt,” and “The small state of Judah, located at the particularly sensitive crossroads linking Asia and Africa, was influenced more than ever before by the international power system, now that the kingdom’s actual existence was at stake.”²² This would eventually create severe tension among various factions (pro-Babylonian vs. pro-Egyptian) within the kingdom of Judah.

Following a stalemate battle between Egypt and Babylon (winter of 601/600), Jehoiakim decided to revolt against Babylon. This was probably encouraged by Egypt, who was nudging Judah to defect to the Egyptian camp.²³ For the next two years the Babylonians recuperated and eventually took action against Jehoiakim in 598 (at which time he died).²⁴

Following the death of Jehoiakim, his son Jehoiachin reigned for just over three months before he was deposed by Nebuchadnezzar (597). Thousands²⁵ (including his officials) were exiled with him to Babylon.²⁶ This deportation would take a terrible toll on the kingdom, leaving doubts and uncertainty among the people and leadership.²⁷ It is probably not a historical coincidence that amid this time of deportation and chaos Lehi began his official ministry, as guidance and direction were desperately needed (1 Nephi 1:4).

“King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon advanced against the city [Jerusalem], while his troops were besieging it. Thereupon King Jehoiachin of Judah surrendered to the king of Babylon, along with his mother, his courtiers, his commanders and his officers. . . . He [the king of Babylon] carried away all Jerusalem, and all the commanders, and all

the warriors . . . and he carried away Jehoiachin to Babylon; and the king's mother, the king's wives, his officials, and the chief men of the land, he took into captivity from Jerusalem to Babylon" (2 Kings 24:11–12, 14–15).²⁸

Jehoiachin's uncle, Zedekiah (also known as Mattaniah), was pronounced the new crown prince of Judah in 597 B.C.²⁹ He reigned until the kingdom fell to the Babylonians in 586. In 587 the final siege of Jerusalem began, and by this time most of the kingdom of Judah had fallen.³⁰ Though the Egyptians moved forward to aid Zedekiah, they retreated and "Judah found herself in a highly vulnerable position. From both a diplomatic and military point of view, Judah was left in the lurch and had to face the Babylonian might alone—'all her friends have dealt treacherously with her' (Lam. 1.2)."³¹ The Babylonians eventually breached the walls of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. Zedekiah escaped, but the Babylonians captured him near Jericho and took him to Riblah where they killed his sons and princes in front of him, put out his eyes, and threw him in prison in Babylon until he died there (Jeremiah 52:10–11).³²

Judah had faced many difficulties leading up to her destruction, and the final years of her existence have been summarized as follows:

In the last two decades of its existence, the rapid pace of the international scene demanded of the Judean rulers exceedingly skilful manoeuvring in order to cope with kaleidoscopic situations. A series of no less than six critical turning points in Judah's foreign policy can be discerned, marking drastic shifts in loyalty from one major camp to the other—all within these twenty years. In other words, the political orientation of Judah alternated radically at an average frequency of every three years. In reacting to external temptations, the little kingdom eventually succumbed not only to international intrigues, but to her own risky policies as well.³³

Such was the social and political climate of this late preexilic period in Judah's history, in which Lehi and Jeremiah commenced their ministries.

Many Prophets and Their Messages³⁴

After examining the external, political circumstances leading up to the time of Judah's destruction, we can turn our attention to more internal affairs. This includes prophetic messages that swayed people's political orientation and allegiances. Prophets were viewed as predictors and were looked to for answers in political binds. In the case of Judah, the people had to wade through the rhetoric of sycophants and "false prophets" while trying to endure the usually unflattering words of the "true prophets." To the dismay of Judah, in the end, popularity lost out to reality and destruction ensued.

In the final days of Judah, many prophets prophesied among the people (1 Nephi 1:4 and Jeremiah 25:4). This was in accordance with the Lord's efforts to lead his people into the paths of repentance. Amos 3:7 states, "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but he revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." In God's work, blessings and consequences of disobedience are always clearly defined, and ample opportunities to repent are always extended. A few of the prophets preaching such a message in Jerusalem at this time included Jeremiah and Lehi.

The life of the prophet Jeremiah began in the reign of Josiah and ended at a time postdating the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem in 586 B.C. when he was taken against his will to Egypt (Jeremiah 43:5–7). The opening verses of the book bearing Jeremiah's name begin: "The words of Jeremiah the son of Hilkiah, of the priests that were in Anathoth in the land of Benjamin: To whom the word of the Lord came in the days of

Josiah the son of Amon king of Judah, in the thirteenth year of his reign” (Jeremiah 1:1–2). These verses describe Jeremiah’s priestly heritage and situate him within the reign of Josiah. The Lord declared to Jeremiah, “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, and I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations” (Jeremiah 1:5).

Lehi (the first prophet of the Book of Mormon) resided in Jerusalem with his family sometime around 600 B.C. The first mention of a concrete historical reference is “in the commencement of the first year of the reign of Zedekiah, king of Judah . . . and in that same year there came many prophets, prophesying unto the people that they must repent, or the great city Jerusalem must be destroyed” (1 Nephi 1:4). This would have been just after King Jehoiachin was exiled to Babylon, Jerusalem had suffered its first capture at the hands of the Babylonians, and Zedekiah had been installed by Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon (i.e., 597 B.C.).³⁵ When Lehi was called as a prophet “he was carried away in a vision” (1 Nephi 1:8) and after seeing much he was given a book to read (1 Nephi 1:11).³⁶ Such miraculous revelations and events marked the beginning of these prophets’ ministries, but in the heat of international politics, the people seemed to close their eyes to the messages of deliverance the Lord was trying to send them through his chosen servants.

The Lord does not work by surprises, and this leads us to what the prophets were teaching. The Lord spoke to Jeremiah:

And thou shalt say unto them, Thus saith the Lord; If ye will not hearken to me, to walk in my law, which I have set before you, To hearken to the words of my servants the prophets, whom I sent unto you, both rising up early, and sending them, but ye have not hearkened; Then will I make

this house like Shiloh, and will make this city a curse to all the nations of the earth. (Jeremiah 26:4–6)

Lehi's calling from the Lord to minister among the people came in the form of a revelation³⁷ in which he was commanded to read a book; the following is part of what he read: "Wo, wo, unto Jerusalem, for I have seen thine abominations! Yea, and many things did my father read concerning Jerusalem—that it should be destroyed, and the inhabitants thereof; many should perish by the sword, and many should be carried away captive into Babylon" (1 Nephi 1:13). Lehi then proceeded to prophesy among the people (1 Nephi 1:18). The message of the previously cited prophets was simple: repent and follow the prophets or be destroyed.

Beyond repentance, Jeremiah was also teaching that Judah was to submit to the Babylonians because they were not going to defeat them (Jeremiah 34:1–9; 36:29). "Jeremiah, who regarded Nebuchadnezzar as 'God's chosen rod' (of chastisement) realized that the opportune moment had passed: now only voluntary submission to the Babylonians could save Judah; it was the choice between 'the way of life and the way of death' (Jer. 21:8–9)."³⁸ To make things more difficult for the people, at this time when "true prophets" of God were receiving divine direction to warn the people of Judah to repent, as well as to surrender themselves peacefully over to the Babylonians, others were preaching the safety and impregnability of Judah. One such "false prophet" who was attempting to dissuade the people from submission was Hananiah.³⁹ When the prophet Jeremiah had placed a wooden yoke around his neck (symbolic of captivity), Hananiah took it and broke it in front of the people as he "falsely" prophesied safety from the assaults of the Babylonians. Jeremiah was then instructed of the Lord to "Go and tell Hananiah, saying, Thus saith the Lord; Thou hast

broken the yokes of wood; but thou shalt make for them yokes of iron. . . . Then said the prophet Jeremiah unto Hananiah the prophet, Hear now, Hananiah; The Lord hath not sent thee; but thou makest this people to trust in a lie” (Jeremiah 28:13, 15). Encouraged by such false prophets and prophecies, many in Jerusalem seemed to believe (because of the miraculous delivery the city had experienced when faced with the Assyrian onslaught of 701 B.C. [2 Kings 18–19; Isaiah 36–37] and probably to some degree when Judah was spared in 722 when Israel was conquered) that Jerusalem truly was indestructible and still under the protection of the Lord. In order to counter such false deliveries Jeremiah desperately and compassionately pled with his people:

Why will ye die, thou and thy people, by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence, as the Lord hath spoken against the nation that will not serve the king of Babylon? Therefore hearken not unto the words of the prophets that speak unto you saying, Ye shall not serve the king of Babylon: for they prophesy a lie unto you. For I have not sent them, saith the Lord, yet they prophesy a lie in my name; that I might drive you out, and that ye might perish, ye, and the prophets that prophesy unto you. (Jeremiah 27:13–15)⁴⁰

However, Jeremiah’s preaching was to no avail. “Like Isaiah in his day, or Ezekiel his younger contemporary, Jeremiah strove to smash the popular image of Egypt, which had led to a false sense of security among the Judean leadership and spread a spurious hope of military support (cf., e.g., Egypt as ‘a staff of reed to the house of Israel . . . and when they leaned upon thee thou didst break,’ in Ezek. xxix 7–8).”⁴¹ “Instead of turning to powerful Babylon, the Judeans toyed with false hopes created by the misleading image of Egypt that led to Judah’s hazardous gamble on her.”⁴² It was in this climate of overconfidence and

misconstrued righteousness, with the expectation to qualify for the deliverance of the Lord, that prophets such as Jeremiah and Lehi ministered. It appears that even Lehi—and possibly Jeremiah (Jeremiah 11:21)—encountered such attitudes within their own families. The attitude of Laman and Lemuel (two of Lehi’s sons) is portrayed:

Now this he spake because of the stiffneckedness of Laman and Lemuel; for behold they did murmur in many things against their father, because he was a visionary man, and had led them out of the land of Jerusalem, to leave the land of their inheritance, and their gold, and their silver, and their precious things, to perish in the wilderness. And this they said he had done because of the foolish imaginations of his heart. And thus Laman and Lemuel, being the eldest, did murmur against their father. And they did murmur because they knew not the dealings of that God who had created them. Neither did they believe that Jerusalem, that great city, could be destroyed according to the words of the prophets. And they were like unto the Jews who were at Jerusalem, who sought to take away the life of my father. (1 Nephi 2:11–13; see also 1 Nephi 17:43–45)

Such was the mentality and attitude of the people in Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction.

Opposition to These Prophets

As alluded to earlier, the prophets’ messages tended to create factions among the people. The messages of the prophets were generally not cordially received. Many prophets do not win popularity contests, nor is the word of God that they preach dependent on it. Thus these prophets encountered stiff opposition in all its forms in the course of their declarations. The following describes the specific difficulties that Lehi’s prophetic pronouncements brought upon him, as recorded by his son Nephi:

Therefore, I would that ye should know, that after the Lord had shown so many marvelous things unto my father, Lehi, yea, concerning the destruction of Jerusalem, behold he went forth among the people, and began to prophesy and to declare unto them concerning the things which he had both seen and heard. And it came to pass that the Jews did mock him because of the things which he testified of them; for he truly testified of their wickedness and their abominations; and he testified that the things which he saw and heard, and also the things which he read in the book, manifested plainly of the coming of a Messiah, and also the redemption of the world. And when the Jews heard these things they were angry with him; yea, even as with the prophets of old, whom they had cast out, and stoned, and slain; and they also sought his life, that they might take it away. (1 Nephi 1:18–20)⁴³

Lehi's life was not the only one in jeopardy. Probably early in the reign of Jehoiakim (609–598),⁴⁴ an important event occurred involving one Urijah (Jeremiah 26:20–23). Urijah (ca. 609) had prophesied against Jerusalem (just as Jeremiah had done and Lehi would do), thus infuriating the king and his officials. Fearing for his life, Urijah fled to Egypt. He was pursued by a posse of the king headed by Elnatan⁴⁵ and was captured and returned to Jerusalem, where he was executed and disrespectfully cast into a grave. A similar pursuit is related in Lachish ostrakon 3.13–18.⁴⁶ A commander named Konyahu, son of Elnatan, had gone down into Egypt; this letter seems to be describing the need for more men for an organized posse or a deputized search team.⁴⁷ As discussed by Dana Pike, chronological considerations make it impossible to render the events in Lachish and the ones in Jeremiah 26 as one and the same.⁴⁸ However, it is highly plausible that these two texts are referring to episodes of a similar nature. The individuals mentioned in Lachish ostrakon 3 could very well have been pursuing

a prophet who was prophesying against the city and had fled to Egypt. The conclusion of Lachish ostrakon 3 lends more credence to the possibility of contextual similarities with the conclusion of Jeremiah 26. Lachish ostrakon 3.19–21 describes a letter received from the prophet, which began “Beware.” This letter was to be sent to Jerusalem reporting that Konyahu and others (whom he commissioned at Lachish) had gone to Egypt, possibly seeking the capture or extradition of the prophet (or another of “similar persuasion”),⁴⁹ who was weakening the hands of the people through his proclamations and warnings to “Beware” of destruction.⁵⁰ The historical alignment of the events comprising the end of Jeremiah 26 (Urijah) and the Lachish record is also complementary. Judah under Jehoiakim had been an Egyptian vassal. This explains why his posse was free to enter Egyptian borders in pursuit of Urijah.⁵¹ The later Lachish event also finds historical confirmation in that Zedekiah gained the support of Apries (589–570 B.C.) in his break with Nebuchadnezzar.⁵² Judah again had Egyptian support and would have had clearance to pursue a wanted individual or fugitive into Egypt. These two disparate episodes suggest a zero-tolerance attitude by the royal officials toward the perceived pro-Babylonian messages of the prophets.⁵³

As just alluded to, Jeremiah faced intense opposition within Jerusalem. His words elicited such a response from the people: “Now it came to pass, when Jeremiah had made an end of speaking all that the Lord had commanded him to speak unto all the people, that the priests and the prophets and all the people took him, saying, Thou shalt surely die” (Jeremiah 26:8). Jeremiah was also imprisoned on multiple occasions. One of these incarcerations, as well as the recalcitrant nature of the people, is described by Nephi: “For behold, the Spirit of the Lord ceaseth soon to strive with them; for behold, they have rejected the prophets, and Jeremiah have they cast into prison. And they have sought to take

away the life of my father, insomuch that they have driven him out of the land” (1 Nephi 7:14).

On the eve of the Babylonian destruction, Jerusalem was an intense hotbed of prophetic persecution. Concerning the disregard for prophetic utterances in relation to submitting to Babylon and not trusting Egypt we read:

The Judean leadership failed to grasp the shift in balance of power, and continued to cling to the dubious image of a strong Egypt which would rush to the aid of its allies in time of need. . . .

In this light, we can appreciate all the more the deep foresight and realistic historical perspective of the prophetic circles in Judah, who had a genuine understanding of the international scene at that time. The great prophets of the day, Jeremiah and Ezekiel (or Uriah, the son of Shemaiah from Kiriath-jearim, who prophesied “in words like those of Jeremiah,” Jer. 26.20) were entirely free of the “establishment” line of thought, unlike the false prophets, and were thus able to grasp the situation in more realistic terms. Therefore, theirs was a sober and unbiased appreciation of the situation, for the long-range benefit of the nation, as opposed to the immediate, feasible interests so typical of the establishment and its supporters, the false prophets, such as Hananiah. . . .

In modern terms, these prophets served—*with due recognition of their far more profound motives*—as analysts and commentators, quite independent of official policy and general consensus. In doing so, they played an active role in the acute issue of foreign political orientation, which had gradually intensified the polarity between the pro-Egyptian and pro-Babylonian factions. This polarity crossed lines—from the royal court onward, through state officials and priestly circles down to the masses. Likewise,

political orientation and ideology proved the main bone of contention between the true and false prophets.⁵⁴

The factions created between pro-Babylonian and pro-Egyptian attitudes (which were exacerbated between the teachings of true and false prophets) proved fatal to the kingdom. Such divisions are discerned in Jeremiah 26 when, after no small debate among the people and leaders, it was decided to spare Jeremiah's life. Later in the same chapter Urijah was killed for preaching in the same fashion. These factions stemmed from a desire to combat Assyria at the side of Egypt rather than to submit to the Babylonians, as counseled by the true prophets of the Lord (false prophets such as Hananiah preached an anti-Babylonian message—the people were not to submit, and victory would follow). Egypt was a logical choice for an ally because Jewish colonies had been established there for years.⁵⁵ These ties made it easier to side with a power that was weaker and less threatening than the Babylonians who were at the doorstep. Such conflicting attitudes between the people and the local leadership throughout the final days of Judah's existence would bring Judah into a compromising situation from which she would not be able to escape. It was in this political and social climate that prophets such as Jeremiah and Lehi were attempting to persuade people to hearken to the Lord and be spared.

In the midst of such a volatile situation and impending destruction, the Lord commanded Lehi to take his family and leave Jerusalem. This probably came as no surprise to Lehi (especially when the Lord explained the purpose for the departure). It is possible that Lehi had witnessed the events that had transpired in the life of Urijah.⁵⁶ He was well aware of the danger and threats on his life, but so was the Lord. God had a specific agenda for Lehi and his family, one that required preserving his life.

For behold, it came to pass that the Lord spake unto my father, yea, even in a dream, and said unto him: Blessed art thou Lehi, because of the things which thou hast done; and because thou hast been faithful and declared unto this people the things which I commanded thee, behold, they seek to take away thy life. And it came to pass that the Lord commanded my father, even in a dream, that he should take his family and depart into the wilderness. And it came to pass that he was obedient unto the word of the Lord, wherefore he did as the Lord commanded him. (1 Nephi 2:1–3; see 1 Nephi 3:17–18)

Lehi was obedient to the Lord in taking his family out of Jerusalem, thus preserving their lives. He took them out of the hotbed of prophetic persecutions and into the Judean wilderness. Significantly, the Lord inspired Lehi and his family to flee southward, in a path that would have led them through modern-day Saudi Arabia and into Oman.⁵⁷ The first place that a posse in search of them would have looked was in Egypt, where Semites had been fleeing in times of famine and danger for over thirteen hundred years and where Jewish settlements were well established in this period of time.

The Kingdom of Judah's Connections with Egyptian Scribal Traditions

Judeo-Egyptian interconnections required a formal means of communication. This would have included scribal activity between the two states. While the role of the Egyptian scribal tradition in late preexilic Judah remains unclear, the Egyptian scribal community in Canaan is rather well established until the late Nineteenth or early Twentieth Dynasty (ca. early twelfth century B.C.). Hieratic ostraca from this early time “provide clear evidence” of Egyptian scribal activities in city-states such as Tell el-Far‘ah, Tel Sera‘, and Lachish.⁵⁸ After

that time there is a lacuna in the Egyptian scribal traditions in Canaan. However, indications of a continuation of such a tradition into the late preexilic period in Judah is indicated by the existence of hieratic numerals and signs in the Hebrew epigraphic material, and their presence raises many questions as to the scribal traditions and practices of the times. With no definitive answer as to why this seemingly unusual practice occurs in this period and region (in which a large void lies in the understanding of the Egyptian scribal tradition in Judah), Orly Goldwasser states a possible hypothesis:

It might be suggested, as a working hypothesis, that this peculiar and isolated variation of hieratic developed locally from the Egyptian scribal tradition in Canaan itself. . . . We would like to suggest that these Egyptian or Egyptian-trained scribes, cut off from their homeland, well acquainted with Egyptian decorum as well as the Canaanite language, educated local scribes, who in their turn passed on their knowledge to their successors. After three or four centuries of such evolution, most of the Egyptian terms were assimilated into the local language, and the numerals remained the only definitive testimony for the Egyptian archetype.⁵⁹

The Book of Mormon confirms that the Egyptian scribal tradition in Judah extended into the late seventh century. Archaeological evidence suggests that an extensive Egyptian community resided in Lachish up until the conquest of Sennacherib (ca. 701 B.C.). Human skulls (695 to be exact) from a mass grave in Lachish were examined, and “curiously, the crania indicate a close racial resemblance to the population of Egypt at that time.” Also, “They show, further, that the population of Lachish was probably derived principally from Upper Egypt. . . . If so, this indeed is a conclusion of far-reaching implications.”⁶⁰ This evidence not only establishes an Egyptian

presence, but would also suggest an Egyptian scribal tradition within Judah's borders almost into the sixth century. Other evidence also suggests an Egyptian presence in Judah's borders at this time. Na'aman suggests that the site of Mešad Ḥashavyahu was built by Egyptians (based among other things on the merits of its architecture and layout, which are at variance with others in the region) and opines that the context of the famous ostraccon found on that site (generally dated to the reign of Josiah) should be viewed in light of an Egyptian backdrop.⁶¹ Na'aman further suggests that the hieratic writing of numerals found at Arad suggests an Egyptian domination over that site. He also believes that the building of the site of Kadesh-barnea (where hieratic numerals have also turned up) was originally initiated by the Assyrians and controlled by the Egyptians in its last phase (prior to its destruction in ca. 604):

In my opinion, Egyptian control of the site during the last phase of the fortress' existence is hinted at by the presence of ostraca in hieratic writing, bearing various figures (from 1 to 10,000) and dimension units commonly in use in the area at the time. These may have been used by pupils of Semitic origin, for practice in the Egyptian method of record-keeping then in force; this would explain the few Semitic words appearing on the ostraca.⁶²

Though Na'aman may have overstated Egypt's formal presence in the region, their interest and affairs are clearly felt in the archaeological and epigraphic evidence at hand within Judah's borders almost into the sixth century (the approximate time of Lehi's ministry). The employment of Egyptian in the Book of Mormon in this time period is consistent with other findings of modern scholarship, and the Book of Mormon begins to confirm such evidence.⁶³

Though conclusive evidence cannot be offered that such an Egyptian scribal tradition in the late preexilic period in Judah existed, the presence of the Egyptian language within Judah's borders at this time is in harmony with what is suggested by other evidence. This makes sense, as there would have been bilingual individuals trained in both Hebrew and Egyptian, just as individuals had been bilingual in the major empires of the ancient Near East. That is not to say bilingualism functioned on a large scale (though it could have), but that it did operate among trained scribes is witnessed in the Egyptian remnants and vestiges extant in the Hebrew epigraphic material, as well as in the Book of Mormon.⁶⁴

Concerning the language (which is discussed elsewhere in this volume) and writing techniques of the Book of Mormon, Daniel Peterson has concluded that "most who have studied the subject conclude that this signifies writing the Hebrew language in modified Egyptian characters."⁶⁵ It would seem that space limitations would have caused the writers of the plates to move away from an alphabetically based system (and hence from one script to another) to a system logographic in nature. This would have created more writing space and would have necessitated bilingual abilities on the part of these authors (both of Hebrew and Egyptian).⁶⁶ That the Nephite authors were capable of dealing with language acquisition and linguistic shifts is witnessed in Mormon 9:32–33, and there are numerous ancient Near Eastern examples of alterations in linguistic dialects and families.⁶⁷ In the case of script-switching between two alphabetic languages or dialects, this is witnessed between Phoenician and Aramaic (Arslan Tash).⁶⁸

In relation to the orthography of this reformed Egyptian, John Gee has discussed an "abnormal hieratic" in use in southern Egypt in the Twenty-fifth and Twenty-sixth Dynasties (727–

548 B.C.)⁶⁹ that might be more plausible than the suggestion of Demotic.⁷⁰ Paleography is a difficult issue since the Nephites had altered the language and since the relevant scripts originated from a single source (Middle Egyptian), wherein at some point in time overlapping similarities occurred in the appearance of random characters. This results in the script resembling both Egyptian logograms and Hebrew characters. This is indeed an issue to be dealt with when examining the few copies of the original characters in our possession today. Other questions come into play: Did the Nephites revert back to a paleo-Hebrew script in writing good Hebrew names (as is witnessed elsewhere in the ancient Near East), or did they use a makeshift system based on Egyptian (or some combination of both)?⁷¹ Was *mā-tres lectiones* abandoned or preserved? Do the characters represent earlier or later developments in the language (or some combination of both)?⁷² Whatever the case may be, the Book of Mormon claims that Lehi and his family were familiar with a dialect of the Egyptian language.

Other Scribal Activity: Laban's Records and Writing on Metal Plates

Laban possessed the records that Nephi obtained. It is difficult to ascertain exactly who Laban was, as the sources say little about him. What we do know, however, answers some vital questions as to why he possessed the records. Laban “was a descendant of Joseph, wherefore he and his fathers had kept the records” (1 Nephi 5:16). The “wherefore” in this statement appears to be an explanation of an almost implicit, matter-of-fact concept. Biblical and extrabiblical findings also help clarify such a scribal axiom:

It is of interest to note that the above biblical passages [Joshua 18:6, 9; Judges 5:14; 8:14] mention members of the

tribes of Joseph (Joshua the Ephraimite, the leaders of Machir and Gideon of Menasseh). Our abecedary found in the foothills of Ephraim, some 40 kms. due west of Shiloh—in addition to the palaeographically similar Raddana handle, found at the southern border of Ephraim—indicates a wide distribution and use of writing during the period of the Judges, at least among the tribes of Joseph.⁷³

In an early period of Israel's history, a tradition of writing began within the tribe of Joseph. It is thus not surprising (even centuries later) to find Laban, a descendant of Joseph, in possession of written records—especially if the skill of writing with all its conventions was diligently preserved within the lineage, as was the case with Nephi (1 Nephi 1:1–2) and King Benjamin (Mosiah 1:2–4) centuries later. Thus Laban's plates found their continuance in the lineage of Joseph through Lehi and his family, and eventually Joseph Smith—another descendant of Joseph (2 Nephi 3:11–12)—translated the Nephite writings.

Scribal activity had increased in the late preexilic period in Judah. The time of Hezekiah has been defined as a critical period for literary activity in ancient Israel:

At this time, there was a surge in the population of Jerusalem, partially due to disenfranchised people coming into Jerusalem from the northern kingdom. In addition, Hezekiah apparently encouraged the collection and editing of various literary materials (cf. Prov 25:1); this literary activity was undoubtedly prompted by the destruction of the northern kingdom, and perhaps also the crisis surrounding Sennacherib's invasion.⁷⁴

Laban's possession of a scriptural record is thus not surprising. The content of the brass plates became a significant contribution to the spiritual growth of the descendants of Lehi and his family (as well as of the many lives the Nephite record has influenced in our day).⁷⁵ For the Lehtes, having that record

made the difference between spiritual survival and spiritual death (1 Nephi 4:15–16).

The imperative nature of conveying and preserving God’s word in Lehi’s world is vividly demonstrated in an incident reported in the book of Jeremiah:

In the fourth year of Jehoiakim son of Josiah, king of Judah, this word came to Jeremiah from the Lord: Take a scroll and write on it all the words I have spoken to you about Jerusalem, Judah, and all the nations, from the day that I first spoke to you during the reign of Josiah down to the present day. Perhaps the house of Judah will be warned of all the disaster I am planning to inflict on them, and everyone will abandon his evil conduct; then I shall forgive their wrongdoing and their sin. Jeremiah summoned Baruch son of Neriah, and Baruch wrote on the scroll at Jeremiah’s dictation everything the Lord had said to him. (Jeremiah 36:1–4 REB)

When the unpleasant content of these writings was brought to the attention of the king and all his officials, they were promptly destroyed. Jeremiah then redictated the content of the scroll “and much else was added to the same effect” (Jeremiah 36:32 REB). Perhaps because of the ease with which materials such as parchment or ostraca were destroyed, records began to be kept on metallic plates or scrolls whenever this was a viable option. Such metal documents would have been more difficult to destroy and more likely to endure the elements of nature and time. They also reflected the value and preciousness of the content of the text.⁷⁶ Several of the metallic ancient Near Eastern writings in existence today appear in religious or covenantal contexts or contain the mandates of the king.

Indeed, by the time of Lehi’s ministry in Jerusalem, the inscribing of metal objects was already an established practice in the ancient Near East. The employment of metallic mediums for

inscriptions had been in use for centuries. From ca. 1900 B.C. four separate pseudohieroglyphic syllabic texts (Proto-Byblian) were inscribed on bronze copper spatulate tablets.⁷⁷ This antedates a purely consonantal alphabet in the ancient Near East. In the past century and a half, inscriptions in various languages have been discovered on metallic objects throughout the region. In the period of the early Hittite “Great Kings” there is the “Treaty of Tudhaliya” from Hattusha, which was written on a bronze tablet. A cuneiform inscription on a bronze blade dating to the fourteenth-thirteenth century was excavated in the Tabor valley.⁷⁸ There are over fifty bronze inscribed Phoenician arrowheads that date from as early as the early eleventh to the tenth century B.C., as well as eleventh-tenth-century cuneiform bronze arrowheads from Luristan and western Iran—very similar to the Phoenician arrowheads.⁷⁹ Furthermore, numerous inscriptions on bronze tablets have been found in South Arabia and Yemen,⁸⁰ and a document from ca. A.D. 426 purports that metal plates were used in the time of Noah.⁸¹ Needless to say, other inscriptions in various Near Eastern languages and dialects are inscribed on mediums such as gold, silver, and bronze, as well as on objects such as pendants, bowls, bottles, and plaques. At the very least, they demonstrate the relatively early adoption of the practice of inscribing metals. In describing an eleventh-century B.C. Phoenician inscription on a bronze spatula and an eighth- or ninth-century cuneiform tablet issued by a Median king that was inscribed on a flat copper object, W. F. Albright maintained, “while this object is not identical with the Byblian ones in shape, there can be little doubt that they go back to some common source and that the custom of inscribing certain formulaic inscriptions on flat copper objects of cultic provenience was older and more widespread than has hitherto been guessed.”⁸² This statement was made some sixty years ago, and even today “more than 100 examples of ancient writing

on metal plates have been discovered, including [a] gold plate of Darius, buried in a stone box in 516–515 B.C.”⁸³ It seems that inscribing on metal plates may be more consistent and uniform with ancient Near Eastern traditions than has been previously believed.⁸⁴

In summary, the scribal activity described in the Book of Mormon reflects an Egyptian scribal tradition in preexilic Judah that archaeological, palaeographic, and anthropological evidence currently suggests. Writing in an Egyptian dialect, a tradition of writing within the lineage of Joseph, and the inscribing of metallic plates is consistent with the findings and interpretations of the evidence in current scholarship in relation to scribal activity in the kingdom at this time. These elements of scribal activity also reflect aspects of Egyptian interconnections with the kingdom of Judah.

Conclusion

The items discussed in this chapter portray some of the circumstances, challenges, attitudes, and difficulties that prophets such as Lehi and Jeremiah faced. Other issues relevant to Book of Mormon contributions to the study of this time period include confirming the persecution of the prophets in Jerusalem on the eve of its destruction (which is rather telling) and attitudes of the indestructibility of Jerusalem among its people. An important contribution the Book of Mormon makes—in light of current scholarship discussed in this chapter—relates to establishing an Egyptian scribal tradition in the sixth century in Judah. This is significant as scholars are searching for ways to explain the appearance of such a tradition.

In conclusion, it is miraculous in itself that Nephi was able to obtain the plates (that his people’s faith might be preserved) in this turbulent time, and he recognized the Lord’s hand in this endeavor. These scriptures were instrumental in perpetuating the

faith of many throughout the course of the Book of Mormon's history, and the testimonies of the Book of Mormon prophets have resulted in the blossoming of the faith of millions today. The chain of events that transpired from Lehi's ministry in Jerusalem—including his dreams, obtaining the plates, transporting them to the American continent, the rise and fall of civilizations, and the eventual transmission and translation by the Prophet Joseph Smith—leaves no doubt that the Book of Mormon truly is part of a “marvelous work and a wonder” (2 Nephi 25:17; 27:26).

NOTES

1. For a discussion on this date as opposed to 587, see Gershon Galil, *The Chronology of the Kings of Israel and Judah* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 108–18; and Abraham Malamat, “The Kingdom of Judah between Egypt and Babylon: A Small State within a Great Power Confrontation,” in *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham*, ed. W. Claassen (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1988), 117–29.

2. Some believe that Josiah's coronation occurred in 639 B.C. See for example Nadav Na'aman, “The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah,” *Tel Aviv* 18 (1991): 3.

3. The siege of Lachish (a city in the kingdom of Judah) is famously displayed on Assyrian bas reliefs from Nineveh. The depiction shows Assyrian battering rams and archers coming against the city. Second Kings 18:3–19:37; 2 Chronicles 32:1–22; and Isaiah 36–37 describe the Assyrian invasion of Judah and Jerusalem. Second Kings 19:35 claims a victory over the Assyrian army, but Sennacherib reports to the contrary that he seized thousands of people as booty (an obvious exaggeration). The Bible is silent on this deportation, and with the Assyrians' propensity to exaggerate it is difficult to assess the true figure.

4. “Some scholars have claimed that the Assyrian domination of Palestine collapsed several years before the death of Ashurbanipal in 631

B.C.E. [and thus before Josiah's reign], and that, at the time of Josiah's rise to power, the Assyrian presence had become so weak as to be scarcely noticeable, enabling Josiah to operate for many years in the vacuum thus created." Na'aman, "Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," 34.

5. The accounts of Josiah's reform as contained in 2 Kings 22–23 and 2 Chronicles 34–35 seem to have different agendas, and the chronology and sequence of the reform are at variance with one another. For a brief discussion on this, see George E. Mendenhall, *Ancient Israel's Faith and History: An Introduction to the Bible in Context*, ed. Gary A. Herion (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 166–72.

6. This is the time we first encounter Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:1–2).

7. Second Kings 23:2 also refers to this as "the book of the covenant."

8. This scroll contained elements of the law as found in the book of Deuteronomy and offered direction and instruction in Josiah's implementation of the reform. As a result of the similarities, there is much debate as to when the book of Deuteronomy was written.

9. Baruch Halpern, "Jerusalem and the Lineages in the Seventh Century BCE: Kinship and the Rise of Individual Moral Liability," in *Law and Ideology in Monarchic Israel*, ed. Baruch Halpern and Deborah W. Hobson (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 68.

10. For a study of the distribution of religious icons (Judean pillar figurines) in the kingdom of Judah in this period, see Raz Kletter, "Pots and Politics: Material Remains of Late Iron Age Judah in Relation to Its Political Borders," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 314 (1999): 19–54.

11. This language is reminiscent of the language found in Jacob 5 in the Book of Mormon.

12. The extent to which this expansion occurred is still under debate, and a definitive conclusion has yet to be reached.

13. See Abraham Malamat, "The Twilight of Judah: In the Egyptian-Babylonian Maelstrom," *Supplements to Vetus Testamentum*, vol. 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 125. As previously stated, Assyria was battling a Babylonian revolt at this time, which contributed to Josiah's successful

efforts of expansion. The other superpower in the region (Egypt) was busy aiding Assyria, and they were also attempting to secure the maritime transportation routes on the coastal region (thus being far enough away from the mountains in Judah to enable Josiah some room to operate). “This state of affairs gave Josiah considerable freedom of action in the internal regions of the country, and there can be no doubt that he exploited this freedom to gather strength, to unify and crystallise his kingdom (the cultic reform played a major role in these trends), and, to a certain extent, even to expand his borders.” Na’aman, “Kingdom of Judah under Josiah,” 40–41.

14. Halpern, “Jerusalem and the Lineages,” 63. Finkelstein has commented: “Manasseh’s realpolitik in his relations with Assyria enabled him to profit from the geopolitical conditions of the early seventh century BCE. It is reasonable to assume that, despite the tribute that had to be paid to Assyria, Judah under Manasseh started an economic revival, mainly because of its activity in the south, in the Beer-sheba sector of the Arabian trade routes. It is conceivable that the Assyrians encouraged this revival, in order to maintain the economic strength of the Judahite buffer state. It is worth noting in this connection that a text reporting tribute given by south Levantine states to Esarhaddon or Ashurbanipal indicates that Judah’s tribute was smaller than that paid by Ammon and Moab.” Israel Finkelstein, “The Archaeology of the Days of Manasseh,” in *Scripture and Other Artifacts: Essays on the Bible and Archaeology in Honor of Philip F. King*, ed. Michael D. Coogan, J. Cheryl Exum, and Lawrence E. Stager (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1994), 180–81.

15. Halpern, “Jerusalem and the Lineages,” 76–77. Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 172, states that Josiah’s religious reforms “were actually little more than a typical exploitation of religious tradition to consolidate political control.”

16. The circumstances surrounding Josiah’s death are highly problematic and speculative. Put simply, it is not known why he was there at Megiddo or exactly what course of events led to his death. Theories range from Josiah’s attempts at blocking Egypt’s advance

to confront Babylon (thus aiding Assyria) to Josiah being summoned there by Egypt, after which, for some reason they decided to execute him. See Abraham Malamat, *History of Biblical Israel: Major Problems and Minor Issues* (Leiden: Brill, 2001), 293–97, for a discussion of a few of these theories.

17. Gershon Galil, “The Babylonian Calendar and the Chronology of the Last Kings of Judah,” *Biblica* 72 (1991): 376.

18. Jehoahaz is also known as Shallum (see 2 Kings 23:30; 1 Chronicles 3:15; 2 Chronicles 36:1; Jeremiah 22:11).

19. Jehoiakim was originally called Eliakim (see 2 Kings 23:34; 2 Chronicles 36:4).

20. Second Kings 23:35 states that Jehoiakim imposed a tax on his people to collect the tribute he paid to Egypt.

21. Jeremiah 36:9 describes a fast that was proclaimed in Jerusalem and a council that deliberated during this time. Galil, “Babylonian Calendar,” 376, opines that Jehoiakim may have gathered this council to discuss surrendering to the Babylonians.

22. Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 118, 119.

23. *Ibid.*, 124.

24. Galil, “Babylonian Calendar,” 377, attempts to lower the chronology of Zedekiah’s coronation by a year (thus affecting this date); however, it appears that Jehoiakim’s death occurred toward the end of 598.

25. The exact number has been debated. See Malamat, “Twilight of Judah,” 132–34.

26. This may also have been the time Ezekiel was taken into Babylonian captivity. See Mendenhall, *Faith and History*, 186.

27. “Nebuchadnezzar’s policy of deportation and ‘heavy tribute’ ultimately proved shortsighted. The very foundations of the kingdom were undermined; social and economic chaos, as well as psychic and spiritual distress prevailed, as can be discerned in the prophets’ words.” Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 125.

28. This translation is taken from Tsvi Schneider, “Six Biblical Signatures: Seals and Seal Impressions of Six Biblical Personages

Recovered,” *Biblical Archaeology Review* 17/4 (1991): 32. Schneider also refers to the seal of a biblical figure about whom little is known and opines that this Azariah (the high priest) went into exile in 597 with Jehoiachin (*ibid.*). Again, it is probably no coincidence that Lehi received his vision (which presumably opened his ministry) about this time when high profile characters in the kingdom had been deported and questions concerning the state of the nation and what action to take were at an all-time high.

29. For a discussion on the chronology of these kings in relation to the Babylonian calendar, see Galil, “Babylonian Calendar,” 367–78.

30. Subsequently, the archaeological excavations throughout Judah reveal utter destruction from Timnah in the west to Ein Gedi in the east, and from Jerusalem in the north to Lachish in the south. See Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 117–18.

31. *Ibid.*, 126.

32. Jehoiachin’s fate seems to have been somewhat different. Babylonian ration lists dating to ca. 592 cite Jehoiachin and his sons as recipients of monthly allocations of oil. Second Kings 25:27–30 states that Jehoiachin was later released from prison by Nebuchadnezzar’s successor and was treated with kindness (receiving rations for sustenance). See Antony Kamm, *The Israelites: An Introduction* (London: Routledge, 1999), 104.

33. Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 119–20.

34. For a recent treatment of prophetic activity in Judah and its environs (including the Neo-Babylonian empire) as contained in extra-biblical sources, see Martti Nissinen, *Prophets and Prophecy in the Ancient Near East* (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

35. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah Chapters 26–52*, ed. Paul D. Hanson (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 31; Nicolas Grimal, *A History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 361; and Erik Hornung, *A History of Ancient Egypt: An Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 140. It is no wonder some of Nephi’s earliest words included, “having seen many afflictions in the course of my days” (1 Nephi 1:1).

36. Isaiah also began his ministry with a vision (Isaiah 6:1–8) and John was instructed (similarly to Lehi) within his vision to eat a book (Revelation 10:9–10). See also Ezekiel chapters 1–3. Other prophets, including Joseph Smith, also began their ministries with visions.

37. See John W. Welch, “The Calling of Lehi as a Prophet in the World of Jerusalem,” in this volume, pages 421–48.

38. Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 123.

39. Hananiah was not the only false prophet Jeremiah encountered. There was also Zedekiah son of Maaseiah, and others (Ahab son of Kolaiah and Shemaiah) who were falsely prophesying in Babylon (Jeremiah 29:21–32).

40. A problem that Jeremiah’s preaching created was that he was viewed as being politically pro-Babylonian. He was actually pro-Judah and was attempting to save his people by following the direction of the Lord (though the people were unable to discern this).

41. Malamat, “Twilight of Judah,” 129.

42. Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 128.

43. See also Jeremiah 26:1–15 for an incident in Jeremiah’s life.

44. Because Jeremiah 26 begins with the beginning of Jehoiakim’s reign, Holladay argues that Urijah was executed in the early part of Jehoiakim’s reign. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 103.

45. The Septuagint (LXX) does not contain Elnatan’s name. If his name was a later editorial addition, it is possible that this was done to preserve his lineage. If this is the case, it may form a familial, military, or authoritative lineage in light of Lachish ostrakon 3. If this was the intention of later editors, it seems to imply a prior knowledge of the relationship between Elnatan and Konyahu. The coincidence of the Masoretes or a later redactor choosing a name that fits so conveniently with extrabiblical sources seems miniscule.

46. For a translation of this text and a discussion of these events, see Dana M. Pike, “Israelite Inscriptions from the Time of Jeremiah and Lehi,” in this volume, pages 193–244.

47. It is not implausible that the Elnatan of Jeremiah 26 and the Konyahu son of Elnatan in Lachish ostrakon 3.15 would equate to

a father/son relationship. Various administrative, secular, and religious posts were inherited by family members throughout the ancient Near East. Examples of this can be seen in the Tobiah family, where Seraiah's (2 Kings 25:18) grandson Jeshua was high priest at the time of the return from captivity, as well as in Egyptian wisdom literature and stelae. See Benjamin Mazar, "The Tobiads," *Israel Exploration Journal* 7 (1957): 234–35. See "The Teaching for Merikare," in Raymond O. Faulkner, trans., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt: An Anthology of Stories, Instructions, and Poetry*, ed. William Kelly Simpson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 183. In the stele of Senwosret-Senbu, BM 557, a son bearing his father's name also holds the same title of "overseer of the treasury." Inherited offices also occurred in Assyrian administrative positions.

48. See especially Pike, "Israelite Inscriptions," 237 n. 22 above.

49. In describing the unnamed prophet mentioned in Lachish ostracon 3, Parker assigns "Jeremiah or another of similar persuasion" as potential candidates. See Simon B. Parker, "The Lachish Letters and Official Reactions to Prophecies," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. Lewis M. Hopfe (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 76.

50. I use the words "weakening the hands" of the people deliberately here in light of Lachish ostracon 6 and Jeremiah 38:4. I do this to again connect the possibility of contextual similarities between Lachish ostracon 3 and Jeremiah 26 (which states that Urijah "prophesied against the city and against this land according to all the words of Jeremiah," Jeremiah 26:20). In this volume, Pike, "Israelite Inscriptions," 238 n. 28 above, cautions against identifying Jeremiah as the referent in Lachish ostracon 6. Concerning the similar phraseology between the two, he states that this is not a direct quotation and that these terms are used elsewhere in the Bible. He is right: this is not a direct quotation; however, it is a recollection of the event. Both Lachish ostracon 3/Jeremiah 26 and Lachish ostracon 6/Jeremiah 38 appear to be describing confrontations between religious and political orientations. The prophets prophesy contrary to the propaganda of the government officials, and

they in turn seek to incarcerate and punish them. In light of the context of Jeremiah 38:1–4 (which describes Jerusalem’s destruction and the abduction of Jeremiah as a result of these proclamations), the similar phraseology in Lachish ostrakon 6 argues in favor of connecting the two episodes. Furthermore, two seals were found at Lachish bearing the names of Shephatyahu and one “Gedalyah, royal steward.” See Sandra L. Gogel, *A Grammar of Epigraphic Hebrew* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1998), 487, seals 5 and 6. This places individuals by these names (both possessing seals) in both the biblical and extrabiblical texts. As officials, it would not have been unusual for their seals to be located in fortresses outside of Jerusalem for the sake of private and secured communications. In regard to Lachish, they would have carried on written correspondence with them. They may also have been required to visit Lachish on occasion (see Lachish ostrakon 4.7–13 and the difference between sending the Kittim and Elyashib being ordered to go in person in Arad ostraca 2 and 3). Thus in both cases the messages of destruction were proclaimed, officials of the kings were sent after them, and the prophets were either detained or executed for the disheartening words they were proclaiming against the kingdom. Though there is no definitive proof that this actually was the prophet Jeremiah mentioned in the Lachish ostrakon 6, the gap of uncertainty may not be as wide as Pike implies.

51. Holladay, *Jeremiah* 2, 109.

52. Hornung, *History of Ancient Egypt*, 141.

53. The context of Jeremiah 38:4–5 is unclear as to whether Zedekiah actually supported the abduction of Jeremiah. He states that he could not stop them even if he wanted to, or at least punish them if they did. This passive allowance on the part of Zedekiah may have been inspired by the fear of offending his cabinet and whatever consequences that might have brought. An interesting comment has been made insinuating Zedekiah’s lack of power among his people, “The new king and last monarch of Judah, Zedekiah, summoned, or was forced to summon, an anti-Babylonian conference of delegates of petty kingdoms in Jerusalem in the year 594/593 BC, thus rebelling

against the power which had enthroned him, a step in conflict with his own personal interest.” See Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 125. This conference was held amidst “false prophets” predicting victory over the Babylonians. Nebuchadnezzar was suppressing a revolt in his country, and Psammetichus II had recently taken the throne in Egypt and was possibly encouraging such a revolt. It is thus possible that Zedekiah agreed to detain Jeremiah upon observing the determination of his officers and recalling the precedent established by Jehoiakim. These items seem to suggest that Zedekiah did not have much influence among his people.

54. Malamat, “Kingdom of Judah,” 122–24.

55. Jewish residences in Egypt are listed in Jeremiah 44:1—Migdol, Tahpanhes, Noph, and Pathros. The exact location of Migdol is uncertain. Exodus 14:2 gives an approximate location in the eastern Delta region of Lower Egypt. Ezekiel 29:10 places it on the extreme borders of Egypt. Some suggested sites include Tell el-Her and Tell el-Maskhuta. See *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), s.v. “Migdol.” Noph was the Egyptian city of Memphis. The New Kingdom Memphis had housed a community of Canaanite merchants and mercenaries and also received a wave of exiles who were fleeing the Babylonians (*ibid.*, s.v. “Memphis”). Pathros was a subsection comprising Upper Egypt, probably somewhere between Memphis/Cairo and Aswan. It was on its southern border that a military installation from Judah was established (*ibid.*, s.v. “Pathros”). Tahpanhes was an outpost in the Eastern Delta bordering Sinai. It is presumed to be the location of Tell ed-Defenna/Dafna, 8 km west of el-Qantara and 24 km southwest of Pelusium/Tell el-Farama (*ibid.*, s.v. “Tahpanhes”). It was to Tahpanhes that Jeremiah was taken toward the end of his life (Jeremiah 43:5–7). For an interesting and positive outlook on Egypt in the eyes of the Israelites, see Mordechai Cogan, “The Other Egypt: A Welcome Asylum,” in *Texts, Temples, and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. Michael V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 65–70.

56. See John W. Welch, “The Trial of Jeremiah: A Legal Legacy from Lehi’s Jerusalem,” in this volume, pages 337–56.

57. See S. Kent Brown, “Jerusalem Connections to Arabia in 600 B.C.,” in this volume, pages 625–46.

58. Orly Goldwasser, “Hieratic Inscriptions from Tel Sera’ in Southern Canaan,” *Tel Aviv* 11 (1984): 86–87.

59. *Ibid.*, 251–52.

60. David Ussishkin, *The Conquest of Lachish by Sennacherib* (Tel Aviv: Institute of Archaeology, 1982), 56–57.

61. Na’aman, “Kingdom of Judah under Josiah,” 46–49. See also Nili S. Fox, *In the Service of the King: Officialdom in Ancient Israel and Judah* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union College Press, 2000), 245 n. 195, for a summary of other prominent scholars who believed that the site was under Egyptian control in one form or another at this time. I have conducted a literary analysis on the inscription and have found particular affinities and similarities of style to that found in Egyptian writings from a similar genre. Though there is some degree of biblical law reflected in the text, it is in more general terms than is usually ascribed.

62. Na’aman, “Kingdom of Judah under Josiah,” 48.

63. This being said, I am not necessarily in agreement with all of Na’aman’s conclusions, but Egyptian occupation at this time seems viable.

64. For further discussion on Lehi’s use of Egyptian, see John S. Thompson, “Lehi and Egypt,” in this volume, pages 259–76.

65. Daniel Peterson, “Mounting Evidence for the Book of Mormon,” *Ensign*, January 2000, 19.

66. Bilingual inscriptions are not uncommon in the region. As early as the first half of the second millennium and beyond, one can find examples of Middle Egyptian-Hittite, Hittite-Akkadian, Phoenician-Luwian (Hittite hieroglyphic), and Aramaic-Assyrian, to name a few. There are also bilingual and polyglot dictionaries. Joseph in Egypt also appears to have been bilingual (Genesis 42:21–23) and in a

hieroglyphic Luwian inscription set up by Yariris, he claimed to read twelve languages.

67. This is witnessed in Semitic glosses in Egyptian Second Intermediate texts, the Canaanite glosses in Amarna Akkadian, and the Deir ‘Alla text, which is still under debate as to exactly how to classify it, as it possesses characteristics of both Hebrew and Aramaic. A recently discovered incense altar in Moab may also be added to the list, as it is at variance with what is expected in the Moabite language.

68. There are also instances of Aramaic texts written in Demotic.

69. John Gee, “Two Notes on Egyptian Script,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 5/1 (1996): 162–76. Gee also cites in his note 20 an example of an Egyptian (Demotic) inscription on metal; he refers to Adel Farid, “Sieben Metallgefäße mit demotischen Inschriften aus Kairo und Paris,” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 45 (1994): 117–32 and plates XIII–XVII.

70. See John Gee, “Egyptian Society during the Twenty-sixth Dynasty, in this volume, pages 277–98.

71. There is at least one example where a name is purported to have been discovered that employs two biliteral Egyptian signs; however, certainty of this interpretation is lacking.

72. A recent study on the hieratic characters in the extant Hebrew corpus comments on the paleographic divergences with the hieratic found in Egypt and speaks of an “Israelitization” of the hieratic system. Fox, *In the Service of the King*, 279. This is interesting in light of the shifting nature of the language in the Nephite record and leads one to wonder if such changes were beginning to be witnessed in Jerusalem before Lehi and his family left.

73. Aaron Demsky, “A Proto-Canaanite Abecedary Dating from the Period of the Judges and Its Implications for the History of the Alphabet,” *Tel Aviv* 4 (1977): 24.

74. William Schniedewind and Daniel Sivan, “The Elijah-Elisha Narratives: A Test Case for the Northern Dialect of Hebrew,” *Jewish Quarterly Review* 87/3–4 (1997): 337.

75. The plates contained the five books of Moses, a record of the Jews from the beginning to the reign of Zedekiah (including the prophecies of Jeremiah), and a genealogy of the fathers (1 Nephi 5:11–16).

76. This is witnessed in the name of the Mandaean book of scripture (*ginza rabba*), “the great treasure,” as well as in the Latter-day Saint scripture the Pearl of Great Price.

77. George E. Mendenhall, *The Syllabic Inscriptions from Byblos* (Beirut: American University of Beirut, 1985), ix. Mendenhall actually dated them from as early as the twenty-fourth century, though this seems too early in light of other epigraphic evidence.

78. M. Dietrich and O. Loretz Münster, “The Cuneiform Alphabets of Ugarit,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 21 (1989): 109.

79. Benjamin Sass, “Inscribed Babylonian Arrowheads of the Turn of the Second Millennium and Their Phoenician Counterparts,” *Ugarit-Forschungen* 21 (1989): 349. It may be argued that these inscriptions are relatively short; however, it is interesting that so many occur during times in which so little has actually been discovered at the respective times and regions. The Proto-Byblian compositions are lengthy texts, and the Phoenician arrowheads constitute the only surviving remnants of the final stages of the development from a pictographic to a linear alphabetic script (i.e., Proto-Canaanite > Northwest Semitic dialects). These arrowheads represent the earliest Phoenician material, and not until the tenth century do the earliest and lengthier Phoenician, Aramaic, Hebrew, and Moabite inscriptions occur on any medium.

80. Mohammed Maraqtan and Yusuf Abdallah, “A Recently Discovered Inscribed Sabea Bronze Plaque from Maḥram Bilqīs near Mārib Yemen,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 61/1 (2002): 49–53.

81. For later findings, see John A. Tvedtnes, “Hiding the Secret Plans,” *Insights* 22/8 (2002): 2. See generally H. Curtis Wright, “Ancient Burials of Metal Documents in Stone Boxes,” in *By Study and Also by Faith: Essays in Honor of Hugh W. Nibley*, ed. John M.

Lundquist and Stephen D. Ricks (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book and FARMS, 1990), 2:273–334.

82. William F. Albright, “The Copper Spatula of Byblus and Proverbs 18:18,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 90 (1943): 37.

83. Peterson, “Mounting Evidence,” 18.

84. For a discussion on silver rolls containing apparent biblical passages from ca. 600, see Pike, “Israelite Inscriptions,” in this volume, pages 213–15; and William J. Adams Jr., “Lehi’s Jerusalem and Writing on Metal Plates,” *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 3/1 (1994): 204–6.