Rembrandt Harmensz, *Jeremiah Lamenting the Destruction of Jerusalem*. (wikicommons).

The narrative of the imprisonment of Jeremiah gives us helpful insights into the world of the Book of Mormon and the world of Lehi and his sons.

The Imprisonment of Jeremiah in Its Historical Context

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The book of Jeremiah describes the turbulent times in Jerusalem prior to the Babylonian conquest of the city. Warring political factions bickered within the city while a looming enemy rapidly approached. Amid this complex political arena, Jeremiah arose as a divine spokesman. His preaching became extremely polarizing. These political factions could be categorized along a spectrum of support and hatred toward the prophet. Jeremiah's imprisonment (Jeremiah 38) illustrates some of the various attitudes toward God's emissary. This scene also demonstrates the political climate and spiritual atmosphere of Jerusalem at the verge of its collapse into the Babylonian exile and also gives insights into the beginning narrative of the Book of Mormon.

Setting the Stage: Political Background for Jeremiah's Imprisonment

In the decades before the Babylonian exile in 587/586 BC, Jerusalem was the center of political and spiritual turmoil. True freedom and independence had not been enjoyed there for centuries.[1] Subtle political factions maneuvered within the capital city and manipulated the king. Because these political

groups had a dramatic influence on the throne, they were instrumental in setting the political and spiritual stage of Jerusalem. The Assyrian Empire had ruled much of the ancient Near East for hundreds of years. Both Manasseh and Amon ruled Judah vassals under the Assyrians.[2] Both kings were wicked according to the author of Kings (2 Kings 21:11, 16, 19–22).[3] Amon's reign ended abruptly after only two years, at which point his servants assassinated him (2 Kings 21:23). At the time of his death, Amon was only twenty-four years old (2 Kings 21:19; 2 Chronicles 33:21), leaving his eight-year-old son Josiah to rule (2 Kings 22:1; 2 Chronicles 34:1). This means that Amon was sixteen years old when his son was born. Securing a natural heir as early as possible was critical.[4]

In 640 BC, King Josiah was placed on the throne by a profoundly influential group called "the people of the land" (2 Kings 21:24).[5] Little is known about this group, but it is clear that its members wielded a tremendous amount of influence upon the young king and were able to manipulate the future of the kingdom in very significant ways. Josiah's rule would prove to be a turning point in the religious history of Judah, and few kings would garner as much respect and admiration (2 Kings 22:2).

Josiah's marriages would play a significant role in the future of Jerusalem and were probably arranged.[6] In order to obtain an heir to secure the royal Davidic line, the woman who would become the mother of a future king would wield an enormous amount of power and so must be chosen carefully.[7] These crucial decisions could not be left to a youth.[8] Josiah's first wife was Zebudah, the daughter of Pedaiah of Rumah (2 Kings 23:36).[9] Their first-born son was named Jehoiakim and was probably born when Josiah was fourteen.[10] By age sixteen, Josiah married a second wife, Hamutal of Libnah (2 Kings 23:31; 24:18).[11] Hamutal's firstborn son was named Jehoahaz. In the same year that Jehoahaz was born, sixteen-year-old Josiah began to "seek after the God of David" (2 Chronicles 34:3). Four years later, he began to purge the land of all alternative forms of worship, eliminating "high places," "groves," and "images" (2 Chronicles 34:3).

During the eighteenth year of his reign, he ordered the high priest Hilkiah to use state taxes to renovate the temple (2 Kings 22:3–4; 2 Chronicles 34:9). During this renovation "the book of the law" was discovered (2 Kings 22:3–10). These scriptures had a dramatic impact on Josiah (2 Kings 22:11; 2 Chronicles 34:19).[12] As a result of this discovery and of hearing the text read aloud, a reform began in the city. Josiah purged the land of all pagan practices

and closed all local shrines, centralizing the worship of Jehovah to the temple in Jerusalem.[13] Because Josiah's spiritual awakening was so closely associated with Jehoahaz's birth, both Jehoahaz and his mother were identified as the catalyst for this reform movement.[14]

Jeremiah entered the scene during Josiah's reform. Jeremiah came Anathoth, the home of an exiled priestly family and had moved to Jerusalem to assist in Josiah's temple renovations (Jeremiah 1:1).[15] As a young man, Lehi too was a firsthand witness of Josiah's reform.[16] Later in his life, Lehi may have "stood as a second witness" to Jeremiah as they preached to the citizens of Jerusalem.[17]

By 612 BC the Assyrian Empire was clearly declining. The Babylonians and the Medes destroyed Nineveh, the Assyrian capital, and the end of Assyrian domination was imminent. Josiah took the opportunity to declare independence from the oppressive Assyrian regime, trying to take advantage of the declining Assyrian influence.[18] He attempted to follow in the footsteps of his ancestor King David[19] by making efforts to unify the remaining Israelites and to gather them under one unified monarchy to amass the strength of Israel.

In the spring of 609 BC, the Egyptian pharaoh Necho II[20] led a sizable military force north to aid the Assyrian ruler Asshuruballit II in Carchemish in a frantic effort to retake Haran from the Babylonians. Josiah attempted to block the advance of Necho's forces at the valley of Megiddo, some sixty miles north of Jerusalem. He hoped to eliminate Assyria's support and to ensure the Assyrian defeat.[21] Amid the conflict with the Egyptian army in June 609 BC, Josiah was killed (2 Kings 23:29–30; 2 Chronicles 35:23–24),[22] and Necho pressed on toward Haran.

Necho ultimately failed at the battle at Haran and retreated to Egypt. On his return march, Necho found that Josiah's second oldest son, Jehoahaz, sat on the throne in Jerusalem (2 Kings 23:31)—the second-born son was chosen over the firstborn.[23] Curiously, it was the "people of the land" (2 Kings 23:30) who placed Jehoahaz on the throne, probably to help support the reforms Josiah had begun. Necho immediately removed Jehoahaz, who had ruled for only three months, and imprisoned him in Egypt, replacing him on the throne with his more compliant older brother, Jehoiakim (2 Kings 23:34; 2 Chronicles 36:3–4).[24] It could be viewed that Necho restored the natural order of things by placing the firstborn on the throne. Jehoiakim ruled as a vassal of the pharaoh and would prove to be a supporter of Egypt.

Necho levied a high tax on Jerusalem. This tax was not paid with the royal coffers,[25] but rather the penalty was passed along to the people of the land at the explicit command of Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:35). The people who put Jehoahaz on the throne were ultimately punished.

Once Jehoiakim was placed on the throne, he became a ruthless tyrant who disregarded his subjects' needs and reversed the recent religious reforms of his father, Josiah.[26] Jehoiakim put down all opposition, and the moral status of the kingdom rapidly declined (2 Kings 24:3–4). Because of this, Jeremiah was quick to criticize the new king (Jeremiah 7, 22).[27]

As Jehoiakim began to rule Judah, Babylon was beginning to expand its borders toward Egypt. The Babylonian forces came down on Jerusalem following the battle at Carchemish in 605 BC (Jeremiah 46:2, 13, 22; 2 Kings 24:7). Jehoiakim quickly buckled before Babylon and pledged allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar and became *his* vassal. Nebuchadnezzar's forces returned to Babylon to regroup,[28] and Jehoiakim saw this retreat as an opportunity to rebel against Babylon (2 Kings 24:1–2).

Jehoiakim's revolt against Babylon in 598 BC indicates that Jehoiakim still acted as a loyal ally or vassal of the Egyptians who put him on the throne,[29] and it resulted in a Babylonian siege of Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:10–11). It was toward the beginning of this three-month siege that Jehoiakim passed away.[30] He was replaced by his eighteen-year-old son, Jehoiachin (2 Kings 24:6–9), who reigned in Jerusalem for just over three months before the siege ended. Jehoiachin's speedy submission to Nebuchadnezzar saved his life but unfortunately lost him his crown and his freedom. Nebuchadnezzar took Jehoiachin captive along with his entire household, his royal court, and thousands of his citizens (2 Kings 24:11–16; 2 Chronicles 36:9–10).[31] In the end, Zedekiah was placed on the throne at age twenty-one by Nebuchadnezzar after swearing an oath of allegiance to Babylon (2 Kings 24:17–18).

Zedekiah's Pressures

Zedekiah came to the throne at a time of great spiritual, economic, and political turmoil. The previous kings had made "disastrous choices."[32] The city was caught between two external political powers since both Egypt and Babylon vied for power. Over the past decades, loyalties had shifted and allegiances had waned as Jerusalem was continually controlled by one side or another. Egypt had heavily taxed the people (2 Kings 23:33), and Babylon had pillaged the temple and national coffers and had exiled a portion of the inhabitants, leaving the state in financial ruin (2 Kings 24:13). Zedekiah had witnessed the murder of his father, Josiah, and the exile of his brother Jehoahaz. He had seen his brother Jehoiakim mismanage Jerusalem, which had caused the might of Babylon to come down on the city for a three-month siege, resulting in the death of Jehoiakim and the exile of his son Jehoiachin. Thousands of people were deported, and both the city's economy and defenses were in shambles. Civil unrest prevailed, and various political groups competed for power.

Zedekiah inherited a city in which the spiritual climate was deplorable. Adultery was rampant (Jeremiah 5:7–8; 9:2), corruption and dishonesty permeated almost every group (Jeremiah 5:1; 6:13; 9:2–4), and false and perverse religious practices began to reappear (Jeremiah 7:31; 11:13; 19:5; 32:35). Many divinely commissioned ministers began preaching in the holy city at this time (2 Chronicles 36:15–16; 1 Nephi 1:4). Prophets active during this era included Jeremiah (ca. 626–587 BC), Zephaniah (ca. 640–609 BC), Obadiah (ca. 587 BC), Nahum (ca. 612 BC), and Habakkuk (ca. 609–605 BC).[33] The Book of Mormon reports that Lehi was called to the ministry at this time (1 Nephi 1:5–20). Lesser-known prophetic figures were also preaching repentance, including Urijah,[34] Huldah the prophetess,[35] Ben-Yohanan ben Igdaliah (LXX Jeremiah 35:4),[36] and possibly many others. This increased number of prophets in the city was accompanied by an increasing wave of imitators (Jeremiah 23:13–32). While true prophets warned of the impending war and desolation, false prophets lulled the people with their messages of reassurance and idleness. As a result, the people rejected the true prophets and were often personally aggressive toward them (Jeremiah 5:31; 6:13–14; 8:9–11; 14:14–15; 20:2; 23:11–17, 21, 25–38; 27:1–18; 1 Nephi 1:20).

For the next few years, Zedekiah maintained a quiet reign. The Babylonians had successfully cowed him. Few would have dared to question the might of Babylon after their armies had just sacked the city. Over his eleven-year reign, Zedekiah realized he needed to rebuild without provoking the ire of either Babylon or Egypt. Zedekiah was a well-intentioned leader (Jeremiah 38:14–16), but he was weak, vacillating, and fearful of public opinion (Jeremiah 38:5, 19).

Throughout Zedekiah's reign, various political groups pressured Zedekiah to break his oath of allegiance to Nebuchadnezzar. Rumors began to arise that Egypt would assist in a rebellion against Babylon.[37] News of civil unrest

in Babylon reached Jerusalem; Zedekiah gave in to the pressures and joined an alliance with Egypt to rebel against Babylon (2 Kings 24:20).[38] And so the countdown to Jerusalem's destruction began.

In January 588 BC Nebuchadnezzar caught wind of the rebellion and moved quickly against Jerusalem, laying siege to the city. The blockade ultimately lasted over eighteen months. In the spring or summer of 588 BC, Judah became hopeful when the Egyptians began to march toward Jerusalem (Jeremiah 37:5–7). Nebuchadnezzar briefly left the siege of Jerusalem to smash this Egyptian resistance, and then he quickly returned Jerusalem.[39] Zedekiah was in a desperate situation.

The Imprisonment of Jeremiah

During the siege of the city, Jeremiah once again prophesied, "He that remaineth in this city shall die by the sword, by the famine, and by the pestilence: but he that goeth forth to the Chaldeans shall live;[40] for he shall have his life for a prey and shall live" (Jeremiah 38:2).[41] Jeremiah had frequently and repeatedly forewarned of the impending Babylonian victory (Jeremiah 37:6–10, 16–17; 38:1–3, 18, 22–23). He clearly outlined the three options left to the people: they could (1) leave the city by escaping the siege, (2) remain in the city and face the consequences of the terrible end of the siege, or (3) surrender and hope that becoming the "prey" of war would somehow result in survival.[42] The implied message was that "the Babylonian invader is the Lords' instrument. To resist him is to resist the Lord."[43] Jeremiah connected politics and faith, which led to a remarkable and predictably unpopular pronouncement: "obedience to God *equaled* surrender to Babylon."[44]

The message was too much for the leading councils of the city to accept. A group referred to as "the princes" (Jeremiah 38:4), officials or officers of the king, had the prophet arrested.[45] *Princes* could refer to military officers, commanders of military units, or the whole army,[46] or it could refer to civic officials or royal advisers (1 Kings 4:2–6; 20:14; see also the Hebrew text of 1 Kings 22:26; 2 Kings 23:8).[47] The princes "and not the king appear to be the shapers of policy. They embody the bureaucracy which is impervious outside its own ideology."[48] They appear to have been able to influence the king so effectively that one wonders who was really running the state's affairs.[49]

The charges that the princes brought against Jeremiah appear to have been either of treason, claiming that he "weakeneth the hands of the men of war" (Jeremiah 37:4) by undermining the military,[50] or of false prophecy

(Deuteronomy 13:1–5) by predicting a false outcome of the conflict.[51] The princes' primary concern seems to be the morale of the soldiers, supporting the conclusion that the princes were indeed military commanders. Regardless of the charges, they wanted Jeremiah silenced! Their repeated efforts to silence him in the past had failed (compare Jeremiah 26; 36),[52] but this time these pro-Egyptian/anti-Babylonian courtiers planned to kill Jeremiah, silencing him permanently.

Zedekiah had already promised Jeremiah that he would spare his life, but because the king lacked "the power to resist [the princes'] designs,"[53] Zedekiah was caught in a dilemma. According to Jeremiah 38, the king knew the difference between right and wrong but was too weak[54] to make his private support of Jeremiah public.[55] William McKane labels Zedekiah as guilty of "moral cowardice"; he is a "helpless tool" in the power of the princes, whom he calls "brutal terrorists."[56]

Although weak, Zedekiah still controlled Jeremiah's fate. Charges—including a verdict against Jeremiah—were brought before the king for ratification. Zedekiah is framed as the final judge in the case. The exact role of the king's judicial function is unknown but in the early monarchal period, the king functioned as a primary and final judge in all kinds of cases.[57] During the seventh-century Deuteronomic reform, many of the day-to-day civil or criminal matters were delegated to other officials (Deuteronomy 16:18; 17:8–13).[58] Ultimately, it was the king's responsibility "to guarantee the true administration of justice throughout the land."[59] The king relinquished all responsibility in the case against Jeremiah, claiming that "he is in your hand; for the king is not he that can do any thing against you" (Jeremiah 38:5).[60] The princes took Jeremiah and "cast him into the dungeon of Malchiah" (Jeremiah 38:6),[61] believing that he "would not be supported by God and would die."[62] Empty cisterns were sometimes used as prisons, or holding cells (Jeremiah 38:6; Lamentations 3:53; Psalms 40:2; 69:15). Most "domestic cisterns were shaped like a bottle, with a small opening in the top, often covered by a stone."[63] Because it was in the month of July, presumably either the now-empty water cistern had only mud at the bottom (Jeremiah 38:6)[64] or the cistern was cracked and could not hold significant amounts of water. Once again, Jeremiah was imprisoned; but this time instead of being under house arrest, as he had been before (Jeremiah 37:17), he sat in the "mud of hopelessness, a place of abandonment and death."[65] Leaving Jeremiah in those

conditions would ultimately kill him, while sparing the princes the task of actually charging him with a crime or personally killing him.[66]

Word of Jeremiah's imprisonment was not kept secret and spread quickly. Ebed-Melech[67] the Ethiopian, one of the king's officials,[68] heard the news (Jeremiah 38:7). He found the king "sitting in the gate of Benjamin" (Jeremiah 38:7)[69] and pleaded with him, saying, "These men have done evil in all that they have done to Jeremiah the prophet, whom they have cast into the pit; and he is like to die in the place where he is because of the famine; for there is no more bread in the city" (Jeremiah 38:9).[70] Ebed-Melech could have acted independently and rescued Jeremiah on his own, but he sought the king's permission and tried to spur Zedekiah on to action. He had his master's true interests at heart, "helping him to reach relative levels of justice and spiritual perception he would otherwise not have attained."[71] However, the king remained passive, bending to the request of both the princes to condemn and Ebed-melech to rescue. He granted Ebed-Melech an escort, declaring, "Take from hence thirty men with thee, and take up Jeremiah the prophet out of the dungeon, before he die" (Jeremiah 38:10). It would seem an excessive amount to get one man out of a pit, and "no reason is given for so many, perhaps the idea is some protection from those who resist the rescue."[72] Jeremiah was rescued but remained in a type of house arrest or in "the court of the prison" (Jeremiah 38:13). This house arrest might have been to ensure Jeremiah's safety or to curb his message from being spread.

Zedekiah later met with the prophet in private. Jeremiah declared that the king's feet too would sink in the mire (Jeremiah 38:22), and he compared his own imprisonment to the siege of Jerusalem. As Leslie Allen and Jennifer K. Cox wrote, these "two crises are linked as cause and effect. The rejection of the prophetic message that resulted in Jeremiah's dire predicament, despite the partial amelioration granted by the king, was to land Zedekiah himself in a comparable predicament."[73] The imagery seems to mirror Jeremiah's incarceration in a muddy cistern: "Zedekiah rescued Jeremiah from mud, but the king's friends had abandoned him to it."[74]

Zedekiah was caught between different groups as he tried to appease everyone. The princes pushed him to oppose God's messenger under the guise of national independence; Jeremiah commanded him to surrender and face the consequences of leading his people into peril; Ebed-Melech tried to inspire, with his own example, the need to make correct moral choices.

Book of Mormon Connections

The context of the situation in Jerusalem gives insight into the early events of the Book of Mormon. These connections shed greater light on the context of 1 Nephi, which can help the reader gain greater insight.

Josiah's reform must have had an impact on Lehi and his family[75] since it had *some* aspects that resonate with the teachings found in the Book of Mormon. Both emphasize a belief in central temple worship[76] and devotion to religious law (see Deuteronomy 28:15, 45, 61; 30:10, 16; 2 Nephi 5:10; Mosiah 2:31) as well as a belief in opposing priestcrafts (see Deuteronomy 13; 16:16; 2 Nephi 10:5; 2 Nephi 26:29; Alma 1:16) and reunifying Israel (see 2 Chronicles 30:6–8, 18–19; 2 Nephi 3:13; Jacob 5). The scarcity of scripture in Josiah's early years can partially explain the lack of readily available scriptural texts to Lehi as he departed Jerusalem (see 1 Nephi 2).

At the outset of the Book of Mormon, Nephi specified that his father's call came in "the first year of Zedekiah" (1 Nephi 1:4), a time in which an apparent explosion of prophetic activity took place. Although Lehi's call came early in Zedekiah's reign, there is some debate as to when Lehi and his family left the city. Zedekiah ruled for approximately ten years. Did the small group of refugees depart early in the reign of King Zedekiah, perhaps within the first year of his reign (597–596 BC), or did they leave Jerusalem sometime later, possibly just before the final Babylonian siege and the fall of Jerusalem some ten years later? S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely argue that Lehi and his family left Jerusalem soon after he received his call as a prophet in the first year of Zedekiah's reign.[77] On the contrary, Randall Spackman argues that Lehi preached for almost a decade before the climate in Jerusalem became so violent that he was prompted to leave.[78] Part of the argument hinges on Jeremiah's imprisonment. Nephi acknowledged that he is aware of Jeremiah being "*cast* into prison" (1 Nephi 7:14). Brown and Seely show that Jeremiah was imprisoned or restrained several times (in one way or another) throughout his ministry (Jeremiah 20:2–3; 32:2; 36:5; 37:21).[79] Of these instances in which Jeremiah was bound or incarcerated, only one describes Jeremiah as being "*cast*" (Heb: שָׁלַךְ šalak) into prison (compare Jeremiah 38:6; 1 Nephi 7:14). The Hebrew verb is not used to describe the stocks Jeremiah wore (Jeremiah 20:2) or the house arrest that he was forced to endure (Jeremiah 37:15, 18). Nephi must have had Jeremiah's being "cast into the dungeon" (Jeremiah 38:6) in mind when he wrote that Jeremiah was "cast into prison" (1 Nephi 7:14).

Nephi also compared Jeremiah's imprisonment to the fact that people sought his own father's life. The imprisonment described in Jeremiah 38:6 was explicitly designed to kill Jeremiah (Jeremiah 38:9, 16). Nephi's concern that people "sought to take away the life of [his] father" (1 Nephi 7:14) is parallel to Jeremiah's imprisonment that was intended to result in Jeremiah's death.[80]

Laban could have been one of the princes mentioned in Jeremiah 38:7 who were directly involved with Jeremiah's imprisonment[81] since Nephi mentioned that Laban had been meeting with "the elders of the Jews" (1 Nephi 4:22), and some Bible passages connect the elders with the princes (Judges 8:14; Lamentations 5:12; Ezra 10:8). As mentioned above, the term *princes* also refers to military captains and officials. The fact that Laban was meeting with this group "by night" suggests that this was some sort of conspiratorial meeting.[82] Because the princes plotted to silence Jeremiah from repeatedly "weakening" the military with his prophetic message (Jeremiah 38:4),[83] they could have been part of the group that Laban was meeting with late into the evening (1 Nephi 4:22). If Laban was working closely with "the elders" (1 Nephi 4:22), he must have been among the military leaders of Jerusalem. The fact that Laban was regaled in armor when Nephi found him supports this theory (1 Nephi 4:19). In further evidence, Laman and Lemuel described him as an influential leader in Jerusalem, "a mighty man" (1 Nephi 3:31; 4:1), a title that has military connotations.[84] Laban was also shown commanding large groups of soldiers when Laman described him as being able to command at least fifty men, possibly even of tens of thousands of men (1 Nephi 3:31; 4:1). Referring back to the Jeremiah text, Zedekiah's order for Ebed-Melech to take thirty men with him to rescue Jeremiah appears to be a reasonable rescue force (Jeremiah 38:10), especially if any of the *princes* mentioned in Jeremiah had the ability to command a military force of "fifty" like Laban (1 Nephi 3:31).

Summary and Conclusions

Understanding the social and political context of the biblical text helps illuminate the plight of the people described and the pressures they faced. Understanding the historical context of the political climate of Jerusalem and the social pressures the king of Judah was under adds greater insight into Jeremiah's plight. The prophet was in a desperate situation as he preached to the inhabitants of a city who were set on the edge of exile. King Zedekiah is framed in a near hopeless position with a dominant military force at his gates and military advisers who strongly opposed the message of Jeremiah. The king tried to play both sides, and he gave in to requests to both execute and rescue the prophet. The narrative of the imprisonment of Jeremiah also gives us insights into the world of the Book of Mormon and of Lehi and his sons. The writings of Jeremiah illuminate the conflict from which Lehi was trying to escape, the climate in which he was commanded to send his four sons, and the dangers of having to face Laban to retrieve the brass plates. The political climate of Jerusalem over the previous decades prior to its fall sets the stage for a dramatic episode where Jeremiah was cast into a miry pit for foretelling the victory of the Babylonian siege. ▣

Notes

1. The nations of the Levant had become vassals to the Assyrians as early as during the reign of Ashurnasirpal II (883–859 BC).

2. Records left behind by the Assyrian rulers Esarhaddon and Ashurbanipal both indicate that Manasseh was a vassal of Assyria; see James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 291, 294. See also Siegfried H. Horn and P. Kyle McCarter Jr., "The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel," in *Ancient Israel*, ed. Hershel Shanks (Boston: Prentice Hall, Biblical Archaeology Society, 2011), 184.

3. In contrast to the book of Kings, Chronicles describes King Manasseh as repenting before his death (2 Chronicles 33:11–13).

4. Jay Wilcoxen, "The Political Background of Jeremiah's Temple Sermon," in *Scripture in History and Theology: Essays in Honor of J. Coert Rylaarsdam*, ed. Arthur L. Merrill and Thomas W. Overholt (Pittsburgh, PA: Pickwick, 1977), 153.

5. Marvin A. Sweeney writes that "the *ʿam hāʾāreṣ* (עַם-הָאָרֶץ) 'people of the land' bring Josiah to the throne following a failed attempt at a coup d'état against the Davidic house that saw the assassination of his father Amon (2 Kings 21:23–24)." He continues, the "popular legitimization of the monarch appears to be foundational to the concept of legitimate kingship in the [Deuteronomistic History]." Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah: The Lost Messiah of Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 105–6. The people of the land also acted to install Joash following the assassination of Ahaziah (2 Kings 11:17–21), Azariah/Uzziah following the assassination of Amaziah (2 Kings 14:21), and Jehoahaz following the death of Josiah (2 Kings 23:30). See Tomoo Ishida, "'The People of the Land' and the Political Crises in Judah," *Annual of the Japanese Biblical Institute* 1 (1975) 23–38; Tryggve N. D. Mettinger, *King and Messiah: The Civil and Sacral Legitimation of the Israelite Kings* (Lund, Sweden: Gleerup, 1976), 124–29; Christopher R. Seitz, *Theology in Conflict: Reactions to the Exile in the Book of Jeremiah* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989) 42–65; Horn and McCarter, "Divided Monarchy," 188; Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 93n16, 105n16, 150, 166–68; Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel: Its Life and Institution*, trans. John McHugh (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1961), 71.

6. Wilcoxen, "Political Background," 154.

7.   Bathsheba is the first to achieve this elevated status (1 Kings 2:19; see 2:12–20), but others also sat in this position, namely Maachah (1 Kings 15:9–13) and Athaliah the daughter (or granddaughter) of Ahab (2 Kings 11).

8.   Wilcoxen, "Political Background," 154.

9.   Rumah was located in the north, east of the Sea of Galilee. See Harry Thomas Frank, *Reader's Digest Atlas of the Bible: An Illustrated Guide to the Holy Land*, ed. Joseph Lawrence Gardner and Harry Thomas Frank (Pleasantville, NY: Reader's Digest Association, 1981), 136. It was a town later referred to by Josephus as being located in Galilee. See Flavius Josephus and William Whiston, *The Works of Josephus: Complete and Unabridged* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988), 650 (*Jewish War* 3.7.21).

10. Josiah was ordained king at age eight and ruled for thirty-one years (2 Kings 22:1). Jehoiakim began to rule at age twenty-five (2 Kings 23:36), putting Jehoiakim's birth when Josiah was fourteen.

11. Libnah was a small military outpost south of Jerusalem near Lachish (2 Kings 19:8).

12. The discovery of this text not only had an impact on Josiah personally but also on the way scriptural texts were viewed, redacted, and produced in the future. This event became a "fundamental linchpin" in the production of future scriptural text. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 3–20.

13. Josiah's reforms included the centralization of worship to the temple in Jerusalem. Second Kings 23:9–10 illustrates Josiah inviting the priests of the various high places in the countryside to come in from the countryside to serve in the temple in Jerusalem, but these priests declined the offer.

14. Wilcoxen, "Political Background," 157.

15. Anathoth was the place where the priestly line was exiled that supported Adonijah instead of Solomon after the death of David (1 Kings 2:26–27).

16. John Welch places Lehi as being close to Jeremiah's age, placing his birth at 650 BC. See John W. Welch, "They Came from Jerusalem," *Ensign*, September 1976, 28. However, we cannot be sure of that because Lehi might have been born a little later than 650 BC. Depending on a number of variables, he could have been born as late as 625 BC. Regardless, Lehi was a witness of Josiah's reform.

17. S. Kent Brown and Peter A. Johnson, *Journey of Faith: From Jerusalem to the Promised Land* (Provo, UT: Neal A. Maxwell Institute for Religious Scholarship, 2006), 44.

18. The nation of Israel and the subsequent nation of Judah had been overshadowed by stronger foreign entities for centuries. With the death of Ashurbanipal, the last powerful king of the Assyrian Empire, it appeared that the oppressive rule over Judah was over. Nadav Na'aman has argued that there was no political vacuum that gave Josiah opportunity to try to found a new Davidic empire. Rather, the declining Assyrian power in the west was matched by the growing power of Egypt; indeed, there may have been an orderly transfer of territorial control by mutual agreement. The nation of Judah was an Egyptian vassal during Josiah's entire reign. See Na'aman, "The Kingdom of Judah under Josiah," in *Good Kings and Bad Kings*, ed. Lester L. Grabbe and Marvin A. Sweeney (London: T & T Clark International, 2005), 210–17; James Maxwell Miller and John Haralson Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 383–90; Lester L. Grabbe, *Ancient Israel: What Do We Know and How Do We Know It?* (London: T & T Clark, 2007), 204–5.

19. Josiah is the only king described as one who "walked in all the way of David his father, and turned not aside to the right hand or to the left" (2 Kings 22:2). The Deuteronomic Historian singles Josiah out as one who best emulates King David.

20. Circa 667 BC the Assyrian ruler Assurbanipal had conquered Egypt and had taken a group of Egyptian princes to Assyria as prisoners. They were all executed except one, who returned to Egypt as a vassal of Assyria. This vassal was the grandfather of Necho. See Donald B. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel in Ancient Times* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 364, 430; Ian Shaw, *Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 353.

21. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 448; Abraham Malamat, "Josiah's Bid for Armageddon: The Background of the Judean-Egyptian Encounter in 609 B.C.," *Journal of the Ancient Near Eastern Society of Columbia University* 5 (1973): 274–75; John Bright, *A History of Israel* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2000), 324. Marvin A. Sweeney wrote that the opposition to the Egyptian movements might have been theologically and not just politically motivated. He writes, "According to 2 Kings 22–23, Josiah's policies are based on a 'book of Torah' found during the renovation of the Temple; his major actions include the centralization of Temple worship; the prohibition of pagan worship; emphasis on the celebration of Passover with its anti-Egyptian viewpoint." Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 168.

22. In contrast to the book of Kings, the chronicler attempts to blame Josiah for his own death by depicting him in opposition to God. When Josiah meets Necho in battle in 2 Chronicles 35:20–25, Necho tells him, "Forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not."

23. Jehoahaz was twenty-three when he ascended to the throne in June 609 BC (2 Kings 23:31); Jehoiakim was twenty-five when he became king three months later (2 Kings 23:36).

24. Marvin A. Sweeney wrote that Jehoahaz was exiled and replaced by Jehoiakim, "who apparently was more compliant with Egyptian hegemony." Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 309. Remember that Jehoahaz's mother was from the town of Libnah, a small military outpost south of Jerusalem near Lachish (2 Kings 19:8). The outpost was designed to thwart attacks from the south, specifically from Egypt. Considering that Jehoahaz's father was killed by the Egyptians and his mother was from the decidedly anti-Egyptian town of Libnah, one would assume that Jehoahaz would have bitter feelings toward the Egyptians and would not make the best vassal for Egypt. In contrast, Jehoiakim's mother was from the city of Rumah (2 Kings 23:36), a military outpost to the north that held specifically anti-Babylonian sentiment. See Tomoo Ishida, *The Royal Dynasties in Ancient Israel: A Study on the Formation and Development of Royal-Dynastic Ideology* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1977), 168–69.

25. Jeremiah condemns Jehoiakim for expanding the royal palace just after he was put on the throne (Jeremiah 22:13–15). This project was done through forced labor, "which could have been another penalty imposed by Jehoiakim on his political opponents." Wilcoxen, "Political Background," 159.

26. Jehoiakim supported the Egyptians over the Babylonians, which leaning was opposite of what his father Josiah had done. At the first opportunity, Jehoiakim rebelled against the Babylonians (2 Kings 24:1–2). Jehoiakim is described as evil by the Deuteronomic Historian (2 Kings 24:19), and the prophets strongly opposed him, framing him as an evil ruler who abused his own people (Jeremiah 22:13–14) and persecuted and murdered God's servants (Jeremiah 26:20–23).

27. This might have been the setting for the execution of the prophet Uriah (see Jeremiah 26:20–24).

28. Redford, *Egypt, Canaan, and Israel*, 456.

29. Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 309.

30. The details of Jehoiakim's death are uncertain. Michael David Coogan, *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 350. Second Chronicles 36:6 states that Jehoiakim was an exile of Nebuchadnezzar. Jeremiah prophesied of the humiliating nature of Jehoiakim's death procession (Jeremiah 22:18–19; 36:30).

31. It was probably during this time that Ezekiel and Daniel were brought into exile.

32. Barbara Green, *Jeremiah and God's Plans of Well-Being* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2013), 126.

33. Some have dated Habakkuk to the years 609–605 BC, contesting that Habakkuk views the Babylonians as an impending threat against the Egyptian-supported rule of Jehoiakim. Alternatively, others date Habakkuk to 605–597 BC, contending that the Babylonians are not a potential threat but an actual threat against the Judean kingdom. See Sweeney, *King Josiah of Judah*, 307–8.

34. Urijah "prophesied against this city and against this land," and as a result, Jehoiakim tried to kill him. This places Urijah's ministry during the reign of King Jehoiakim, ca. 608–598 BC. Urijah fled to Egypt for safety, but the king had him extradited and then "slew him with the sword" (Jeremiah 26:20–23). Not long after the death of Urijah, Lehi was called to this prophetic office (1 Nephi 1:5–20).

35. Elder Wilford Woodruff recorded in his journal his feelings that Huldah was an authentic prophetess: "May they influence the daughters of Zion to deeds of virtue, Holiness, Righteousness and truth. May thy Blessings of Sarah, Huldah, Hannah, Anna, & Mary the Ancient Prophetess and Holy women rest upon them." See *Wilford Woodruff's Journal*, ed. Scott G. Kenney (Midvale, UT: Signature Books, 1985), 7:309.

36. This prophetic figure is mentioned in the Greek Septuagint but is absent from the Hebrew Masoretic text. Ben-Yohanan ben Igdaliah was a prophet who preached during the reign of Jehoiakim (ca. 608–598 BC).

37. Jeremiah warned against an alliance with Egypt (Jeremiah 2:13–18, 36; 37:5–10; 42:7–19; 43:2; 44:12–14, 30; see Ezekiel 17:12–21), knowing that Egypt was either too feeble to help or would have ulterior motives in assisting Judah.

38. Walter Brueggemann claims that "the princes advocate a policy of go-it-alone and resistance which sounds like a militant kind of patriotism." Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant: A Commentary on Jeremiah 26–52* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 146.

39. William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 1: A Commentary on the Books of the Prophet Jeremiah* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1986), 9.

40. "Goeth out" (verse 2) connotes surrender (Compare Jeremiah 21:9). See William L. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah, Chapters 26–52* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress, 1989), 289.

41. This section is almost a direct quote from Jeremiah's previous declaration found in Jeremiah 21:9. Linguistic parallels connect this to Deuteronomy 30:16, which states that whoever is faithful in "walking in the ways" of the Lord will obtain life. Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor suggests that living in Jeremiah 38:3 appears "to imply more than mere survival." Geoffrey H. Parke-Taylor, *The Formation of the Book of Jeremiah: Doublets and Recurring Phrases* (Atlanta, GA: Society of Biblical Literature, 2000), 201.

42. Gerald Lynwood Keown, Pamela J. Scalise, and Thomas G. Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1995), 223.

43. Douglas R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1992), 460. This is a different situation and different message than the one given over a century earlier when Assyrians, led by Sennacherib, encroached on Jerusalem.

44. Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant*, 146.

45. Jeremiah 37–38 describes two scenes in which Jeremiah is imprisoned. The accounts are so similar that some scholars suggest the two chapters describe the same event from differing perspectives; see Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 222–23.

46. Jack Lundbom describes them as "upper-level civil and military officers." See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 67. For additional references, see 1 Samuel 8:12; 12:9; 14:50; 17:18, 55; 18:13; 22:7; 26:5; 2 Samuel 2:8; 4:2; 10:16, 18; 18:1; 19:13; 24:2, 4; 1 Kings 1:19; 2:5, 32; 11:15, 21, 24; 15:20; 16:9, 16; 22:31–33; 2 Kings 1:9–11, 13–14; 4:13; 5:1; 8:21; 9:5; 11:4, 9, 15, 19; 25:18, 20; 1 Chronicles 15:25.

47. William McKane translates the phrase as "statesmen" instead of as "princes." See McKane, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Jeremiah* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1986), 946; de Vaux, Ancient Israel, 69. See Holladay, *Jeremiah 1*, 45.

48. Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant*, 147

49. Jeremiah 38:19 describes Zedekiah expressing fear of others who he felt had betrayed him. He continues in Jeremiah 38:24 by warning Jeremiah not to let anyone know about their private conversation, and that if he did, Jeremiah's life would be in danger.

50. A similar phrase has been found on an ostracon found at Lachish. Yohanan Aharoni, "Three Hebrew Ostraca from Arad," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*, no. 197 (1970): 22.

51. As Welch has outlined, "since such a judicial penalty for treason is unprecedented, it appears that the main reason Jeremiah was confined was not because it was the result of a legal proceeding, but because he was being silenced from making disturbing prophecies." See John W. Welch, *The Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2008), 370. The issue of treason is not directly addressed in the Hebrew Bible. First Kings 2:25 might be the sole exception when Benaiah ben Jehoiada is executed for treason. A few centuries later, the issue of treason is addressed in the Temple Scroll among the Dead Sea Scrolls. See Moshe Weinfeld, "High Treason in the Temple Scroll and in the Ancient Near Eastern Sources," in *Emanuel: Studies in Hebrew Bible, Septuagint, and Dead Sea Scrolls in Honor of Emanuel Tov*, ed. Shalom M. Paul et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 827–31. It appears that death was a common penalty for treason in the ancient Near East.

52. Brueggemann, *To Build, to Plant*, 147.

53. McKane, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 949.

54. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 289. William McKane viewed Zedekiah more as a calculating as opposed to an indecisive or vacillating king. McKane writes that Zedekiah "appears to give those who intend to silence Jeremiah a free hand and yet withholds permission to exact the penalty of death." McKane, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 954.

55. Douglas R. Jones, *Jeremiah* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1991), 458.

56. McKane, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 964.

57. First Samuel 8:5; 2 Samuel 8:15; 12:1; 14:4; 1 Kings 3:9, 16; Psalm 72:1–4; Jeremiah 22: 15–16; Ze'ev W. Falk, *Hebrew Law in Biblical Times: An Introduction* (Provo, UT: Brigham Young University Press, 2001).

58. The judicial function of the king in ancient Israel was always limited and was perhaps eliminated during the Deuteronomic reforms. See Hans Jochen Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and Ancient East* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1980), 40–49.

59. Keith W. Whitelam, *The Just King: Monarchical Judicial Authority in Ancient Israel* (Sheffield: Department of Biblical Studies, University of Sheffield, 1979), 37.

60. The Hebrew version of this verse emphasizes the king's weakness, while the Greek version emphasizes the strength of the princes. Robert P. Carroll, *Jeremiah, Volume 1* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 678.

61. Malchiah is identified as "the son of Hammelech" in Jeremiah 38:6. But Hammelech might reflect a translator's error since ben-hammelek means "son of the king" and is not a proper name—a fact confirmed by the Septuagint (LXX Jeremiah 45:6). William L. Holladay suggests, "If Malchiah was Zedekiah's son, he could be approximately fifteen years old, own a cistern and function as a guard; but, on the other hand, 'king's son' may simply mean 'of the royal family.'" Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 289.

62. Welch, *Legal Cases in the Book of Mormon*, 370.

63. Holladay, *Jeremiah 2*, 289.

64. Jack Lundbom, *Jeremiah among the Prophets* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2013), 128.

65. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *Jeremiah: Pain and Promise* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2011), 77.

66. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 68.

67. The term Ebed-Melech simply means "servant of the King." This phrase could refer to a personal name or a title.

68. The Hebrew term translated as *eunuch* (סָרִיס) does not necessarily refer to a physical eunuch, but to a court official (compare Jeremiah 39:15–18). See Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 221.

69. It is unknown what the king was doing there. It is possible that he "may well have been fulfilling his judicial function by sitting 'in the gate,' rendering decisions in cases of legal dispute." Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 224. See Lundbom, *Jeremiah among the Prophets*, 128. He might have been "inspecting the defenses." See also McKane, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 964.

70. "If there is no bread left in the city, Jeremiah would find that situation no better out of the cistern than in it." Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 224. The danger must have been more dire than simply the lack of food. Lamentations 4 describes the famine. Robert P. Carroll suggests that "a curious explanation when Jeremiah's plight is more one of suffocation or exposure than lack of food. If the bread supplies in the city had been exhausted, hauling him from the cistern would not have had made him any less hungry." Carroll, *Jeremiah, Volume 1*, 682.

71. Leslie Allen and Jennifer K. Cox, *Jeremiah* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2008), 413.

72. Keown, Scalise, and Smothers, *Jeremiah 26–52*, 224. Jack Lundbom writes, "some commentators and Bible translations (e.g., RSV) change the number 30 to the number 3, the argument being that it would only take three men to pull Jeremiah up from the pit. Maybe so, but the change has virtually no textual support (only one Hebrew manuscript reads "three") and betrays a painfully unimaginative reconstruction of what was going on. Sending 30 men to rescue Jeremiah makes for a dramatic public event." Lundbom, *Jeremiah among the Prophets*, 129.

73. Allen and Cox, *Jeremiah*, 415.

74. McKane, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary*, 960.

75. It is debatable whether this impact had a positive or negative effect on Lehi's theology. Many scholars suggest that the Deuteronomic reform does not align with the theology of the Book of Mormon. Margaret Barker, "What Did King Josiah Reform?," in *Glimpses of Lehi's Jerusalem*, ed. John W. Welch, David Rolph Seely, and Jo Ann H. Seely (Provo, UT:

FARMS, 2004), 521–42; Kevin Christiansen, "Prophets and Kings in Lehi's Jerusalem and Margaret Barker's Temple Theology," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 4 (2013): 177–93; Neal Rappleye, "The Deuteronomist Reforms and Lehi's Family Dynamics: A Social Context for the Rebellions of Laman and Lamuel," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 16 (2015): 87–99. As a counterpoint, see Benjamin L. McGuire, "Josiah's Reform: An Introduction," *Interpreter: A Journal of Latter-day Saint Faith and Scholarship* 4 (2013): 161–63.

76. Josiah eliminated other forms of worship that were performed outside the temple in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 34:3). This allowed him to maintain the orthodoxy and orthopraxy of the liturgy and maintained the centrality of the temple in religious rites. Although Lehi sacrificed a three-day journey from Jerusalem (1 Nephi 2:6–7), it appears that the temple remained the central focus of religious life among the Nephites (2 Nephi 5:16; Jacob 1:17; Mosiah 1:18; 3 Nephi 11:1).

77. S. Kent Brown and David Rolph Seely, "Jeremiah's Imprisonment and the Date of Lehi's Departure," *Religious Educator* 2, no. 1 (2001): 15–32.

78. Randall P. Spackman, "Introduction to Book of Mormon Chronology: The Principal Prophecies, Calendars, and Dates" (Provo, UT: FARMS paper, 1993), 6–14.

79. See David Rolph Seely and Jo Ann H. Seely, "Lehi and Jeremiah: Prophets, Priests, and Patriarchs," *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies* 8, no. 2 (1999): 28.

80. Admittedly, this was not the first attempt to kill Jeremiah (see Jeremiah 18:18, 23).

81. Hugh Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 97–98; Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book; Provo, UT: FARMS, 1988), 97, John A. Tvedtnes, *The Most Correct Book: Insights from a Book of Mormon Scholar* (Salt Lake City: Cornerstone, 1999), 64–71.

82. Nibley, *Lehi in the Desert*, 98.

83. Jeremiah 38:1 states that Jeremiah "continued to speak" to all the people (*Contemporary English Version* Jeremiah 38:1). The verbal form used for "to speak" in this verse is a *piel* participle. A *piel* form *can* denote iterative (repeated) action. See Wilhelm Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, ed. E Kautzsch (Oxford: Clarendon, 1910), 141. Some translations chose to emphasize this repetitive aspect of Jeremiah's speech. Jeremiah was determined to get his message out! See Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 66.

84. The Hebrew term "גִּבּוֹר" is sometimes translated as "mighty man" (Judges 6:12; 11:1; 1 Samuel 9:1; 2 Samuel 10; 1 Kings 11:28; 2 Kings 5:2; Jeremiah 9:23; 14:9; etc.). This term has military connotations and can be translated as "warriors fit for war," "elite troop," or "bodyguard." See Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (New York: Brill, 1994–2000), 172.