

The Bible and the Babylonian Chronicles

Intro: In our Bible reading we have followed the history of Israel as reported by God's prophets. The 7th century BC was a time of great importance to the story. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel were publicly announcing that God would raise up the Babylonians into a great empire and that the city of Jerusalem was to be destroyed and its inhabitants taken into captivity.

It is interesting to know that the Babylonians preserved their own record of the events of their nation on clay tablets. These tablets are called "The Babylonian Chronicles" and are inscribed with a square type script called cuneiform script. Some of these historical records have been discovered and translated by archaeologists. Tonight I'd like to show you a couple of those records and compare it with the Bible's record of ancient history.

The Babylonian Chronicles and the Bible

The Chronicle of the Late Years of Nabopolassar

This chronicle covers the 18th to 21st years of the Babylonian king, Nabopolassar. He was the father of Nebuchadnezzar. In the Chronicle we can read the report of the famous conflict between the Babylonians, led by Nebuchadnezzar and the Egyptians, led by Pharaoh Neco.

The twentieth year (606/605): ...The army of Egypt, which was in Karchemiš, crossed the Euphrates and against the army of Akkad, which was camped in Quramatu, it marched. They pushed the army of Akkad back so that they withdrew. The twenty-first year (605/604): The king of Akkad stayed home while Nebuchadnezzar, his eldest son and crown prince, mustered the army of Akkad.

The Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar

In the twenty-first year the king of Akkad [Nabopolassar] stayed in his own land, Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown-prince, mustered the Babylonian army and took command of his troops; he marched to Karchemiš which is on the bank of the Euphrates, and crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemiš. They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him. He accomplished their defeat and beat them to non-existence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country. At that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hamath.

The Prophet's Report of King Josiah

The conflict between the Babylonians and the Egyptians is mentioned first in Scripture in the reign of Josiah. There we read about the Egyptians attempting to come to the aid of the weakened Assyrians by making war at Carchemish.

After all this, when Josiah had set the temple in order, Neco king of Egypt came up to make war at Carchemish on the Euphrates, and Josiah went out to engage him. (2 Chron. 35:20)

Of course, Josiah was to lose his life in this battle in which he engaged the Egyptians on their way to Carchemish; but clearly we can see that the Biblical record shows Egypt's intentions to fight the Babylonians for supremacy on the Euphrates, just as the Babylonian Chronicle reported.

Jeremiah's Prophecy of Egypt's defeat

It is interesting that one of the first prophecies in Jeremiah's collection against the nations was given on the occasion of Egypt's campaign against the Babylonians.

That which came as the word of the Lord to Jeremiah the prophet concerning the nations. To Egypt, concerning the army of Pharaoh Neco king of Egypt, which was by the Euphrates River at Carchemish, which Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon defeated in the fourth year of Jehoiakim the son of Josiah, king of Judah: (Jeremiah 46:1-2)

Jeremiah in vivid terms predicts the defeat of the Egyptians:

For that day belongs to the Lord God of hosts, a day of vengeance, so as to avenge Himself on His foes; and the sword will devour and be satiated and drink its fill of their blood; for there will be a slaughter for the Lord God of hosts, in the land of the north by the river Euphrates. (Jeremiah 46:10)

The Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar

At that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hamath and becomes the king of Babylon upon his father's death.

For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been king of Babylon, when on 8 Abu [15 August 605] he went to his destiny; in the month of Ululu Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon and on 1 Ululu [7 September] he sat on the royal throne in Babylon.

In his ascension year as king (605) Nebuchadnezzar led his armies westward to Syria-Palestine.

In the accession year Nebuchadnezzar went back again to the Hatti-land and until the month of Šabatu marched unopposed through the Hatti-land; in the month of Šabatu he took the heavy tribute of the Hatti-territory to Babylon.

Daniel reports the first deportation of Jewish youths by Nebuchadnezzar

In the third year of the reign of Jehoiakim king of Judah, Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came to Jerusalem and besieged it. And the Lord gave Jehoiakim king of Judah into his hand, along with some of the vessels of the house of God; and he brought them to the land of Shinar, to the house of his god, and he brought the vessels into the treasury of his god. (Daniel 1:1-2)

The Chronicle of Nebuchadnezzar

The chronicle report that in 601 Nebuchadnezzar would continue on to Egypt where he would significantly erode Egypt's power with great expense to himself.

In the fourth year [601/600] the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. In the Hatti-land they marched unopposed. In the month of Kislimu he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard it and mustered his army. In open battle they smote the breast of each other and inflicted great havoc on each other. The king of Akkad turned back with his troops and returned to Babylon.

The prophets speak of the Babylon's successful suppression of Egypt

And the king of Egypt did not come out of his land again, for the king of Babylon had taken all that belonged to the king of Egypt from the brook of Egypt to the river Euphrates. (2 Kings 24:7)

The Chronicle of Jerusalem's Destruction

It would be several years later before Nebuchadnezzar would wage war with Jerusalem again; but the Babylonian Chronicle reports a very significant event in 598-597 BC.

In the seventh year, the month of Kislimu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land, and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king. He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon.

The Prophets on the siege of Jerusalem!

At that time the servants of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon went up to Jerusalem, and the city came under siege. And Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon came to the city, while his servants were besieging it. And Jehoiachin the king of Judah went out to the king of Babylon, he and his mother and his servants and his captains and his officials. So the king of Babylon took him captive in the eighth year of his reign. And he carried out from there all the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king's house, and cut in pieces all the vessels of gold which Solomon king of Israel had made in the temple of the Lord, just as the Lord had said. Then he led away into exile all Jerusalem and all the captains and all the mighty men of valor, ten thousand captives, and all the craftsmen and the smiths. None remained except the poorest people of the land. So he led Jehoiachin away into exile to Babylon; also the king's mother and the king's wives and his officials and the leading men of the land, he led away into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. And all the men of valor, seven thousand, and the craftsmen and the smiths, one thousand, all strong and fit for war, and these the king of Babylon brought into exile to Babylon. Then the king of Babylon made his uncle Mattaniah, king in his place, and changed his name to Zedekiah. (2 Kings 24:10-17)

Note: There is a slight discrepancy on the date. 2 Kg. 24 indicates the 8th year of Nebuchadnezzar; but note that Jeremiah as well identifies it as the 7th year (Jer. 52:28-30). Perhaps the event crossed over a year.

Jeremiah had prophesied that Jehoiachin would have no son on his throne:

“Thus says the Lord, ‘Write this man down childless, a man who will not prosper in his days; for no man of his descendants will prosper sitting on the throne of David or ruling again in Judah.’” (Jeremiah 22:30)

Lessons for us

The Bible is a trustworthy book

Any book that claims to be written with the guidance of God would have to be accurate in its reporting of historical events. Though it is not correct to say that archaeology “proves” the Bible true, we can see that there is a correspondence between secular and spiritual history that suggests that the writers of the Scripture were reporting real events and about real people. These are not fairy tales!

The prophets accurately foretold the history of mankind and the Jewish people.

Since we know the history of the nations, we can see the accuracy of the predictions of the prophets of God who announced the end from the beginning.

for no prophecy was ever made by an act of human will, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (2 Peter 1:21)

God’s revelation is the “true” interpretation of the history of mankind

When the Babylonians tell the story of their kingdom, they attribute their successes to their gods. However the Scriptures reveal the true historical interpretation of events. Both accounts agree about the facts; but the Scriptures reveal the truth about why history unfolded as it did. All that Babylon accomplished was simply the result of God’s sovereign rule over His people Israel and the nations.

and He made from one, every nation of mankind to live on all the face of the earth, having determined their appointed times, and the boundaries of their habitation, (Acts 17:26)

The “facts” of history may be acknowledged and written by any people; but the meaning of history is determined by the sovereign purposes of God Himself. And in his purposes, what is important is the working out of His plan for man’s redemption in Jesus Christ. God has and will always work in history to make things work for His purposes and for the salvation of His people!

Conclusion: If you can see that the Bible is trustworthy, why not put your faith in the God it describes and submit to His purposes for your life!