

DID LEHI USE EGYPTIAN?

EXAMINING JEWISH-EGYPTIAN RELATIONS IN THE SEVENTH CENTURY B.C.

by Ben McGuire

In his on-line book *Mormon Claims Answered*, anti-Mormon author Marvin Cowan states the following:

I Nephi 1:1-4 says Lehi, a devout Jew living in Jerusalem, kept a sacred record in the Egyptian language. But Jews were enemies of the Egyptians in 600 BC. King Josiah was killed in a battle with Egypt about 608 BC, and Judah paid tribute to Egypt after that (II Chron. 35:20-36:4). Since Hebrew was the sacred language and the Lord was then “against Egypt” (Jer. 46:1-2), no devout Jew would write in Egyptian.¹

This paper explains how this perspective cannot be established in light of either the biblical text or the historical evidence, and posits that it is quite reasonable to suppose that a Jew living in Jerusalem at the time of Lehi could in fact know Egyptian and be required to use it consistently in his professional and private dealings. The first part of this paper is a fairly detailed (but not exhaustive) historic overview of the century preceding Lehi. The second part provides a direct response to Cowan’s criticism in light of this evidence. This paper largely follows the outlines of Israelite history as presented by Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes in their textbook *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*. Other references will be footnoted, and a list of additional information sources is presented.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY OF JUDAH FROM 700 TO 600 B.C.

The beginning of this period is marked by the reign of King Hezekiah. During this period we have biblical accounts in II Kings 18–20, Isaiah 36–39, II Chronicles 29–32, Jeremiah 26:17–19. In the secular realm we also have the inscriptions of Sargon and Sennacherib, rulers of the Assyrian empire.

In the prior century the historical tribes of Israel had been divided into two political kingdoms: the northern kingdom was known as Israel, and the southern kingdom was known as Judah. The kingdom of Israel ceased to exist in 722 B.C. when Samaria fell to Sargon II, king of Assyria. During the time period leading up to the defeat of the kingdom of Israel, the Israelites first tried to persuade Judah to join in an anti-Assyrian hegemony, and then later in the Syro-Ephraimitic Siege of Jerusalem tried to overthrow Ahaz, king of Judah (Jehoahaz I), and put on the throne of Judah a king who would be more sympathetic to their cause. They failed.

Hezekiah became King of Judah around 727 B.C. He would remain king until 698 B.C.² His first consideration of revolt against Assyria seems to have occurred in 713 B.C. A revolt in that year was spearheaded by the nation Ashdod, and while Judah appears to have contemplated participation, they apparently reconsidered. This revolt by Ashdod is the subject of Isaiah 20. Sargon’s inscription commemorating the invasion to put down this revolt makes mention of Judah as follows:

Then [to] the rulers of Philistia,³ Judah, Ed[om], Moab (and) those who live (on islands) and bring tribute [and] *tamartu*—gifts to my Lord Ashur—[he spread] countless evil lies to alienate (them) from me, and (also) sent bribes to Pir’u, king of Musru—a potentate incapable to save them—and asked him to be an ally.⁴

While not directly related to the time period in question, it is the clear beginning of a pattern. With Assyria on one side, and Egypt (Musru) on the other, these smaller kingdoms (Philistia, Judah, Edom, and Moab) were caught in the middle, and were dominated first by one side, and then the other. When they wanted to revolt against one master, they tried to get the other to come to their aid. And, as we see historically, Egypt



was the easier taskmaster. Hezekiah remained loyal to Sargon during the 713 B.C. revolt, and Ashdod was crushed. However, from that point onward, Assyria began to see an increasing number of internal difficulties, and Hezekiah began preparing for a revolt—one that would begin at the death of Sargon II and the ensuing chaos in 705 B.C.

The details of this revolt are fairly well known, and some of Hezekiah's preparations continue to exist to this day, as a monument to Judean innovation. II Chronicles 32 gives us the most complete picture of these developments (emphasis added):

2 And when Hezekiah saw that Sennacherib was come, and that he was purposed to fight against Jerusalem, 3 He took counsel with his princes and his mighty men **to stop the waters of the fountains which were without the city:** and they did help him. 4 So there was gathered much people together, who stopped all the fountains, and the brook that ran through the midst of the land, saying, Why should the kings of Assyria come, and find much water? 5 **Also he strengthened himself, and built up all the wall that was broken, and raised it up to the towers, and another wall without, and repaired Millo in the city of David, and made darts and shields in abundance.** 6 **And he set captains of war over the people,** and gathered them together to him in the street of the gate of the city, and spake comfortably to them, saying,

...

27 And Hezekiah had exceeding much riches and honour: and he made himself treasuries for silver, and for gold, and for precious stones, and for spices, **and for shields,** and for all manner of pleasant jewels; 28 **Storehouses also for the increase of corn, and wine, and oil; and stalls for all manner of beasts, and cotes for flocks.** 29 **Moreover he provided him cities, and possessions of flocks and herds in abundance:** for God had given him substance very much. 30 **This same Hezekiah also stopped the upper watercourse of Gihon, and brought it straight down to the west side of the city of David.** And Hezekiah prospered in all his works.

Most scholars believe that this fortification period began as early as 712 B.C. and continued until Hezekiah thought that the moment was right. His revolt lasted until 701 B.C. when Sargon II's successor, Sennacherib,

invaded Judah and conquered Jerusalem. It is of significance that the waterway created by Hezekiah to bring fresh water into Jerusalem during the siege is still functional, and an inscription was found in recent years providing details as to how they dug the tunnel referenced in verse 30 above. The records of Sennacherib in his victory inscriptions provide some of the details. There we read the following (transliterations removed from the cited text, highlights added):

In the continuation of my campaign I besieged Beth-Dagon, Joppa, Banai-Barqa, Azuru, cities belonging to Sidqia who did not bow to my feet quickly (enough); I conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. The officials, the patricians and the (common) people of Ekron⁷-who had thrown Padi, their king, into fetters (because he was) loyal to (his) solemn oath (sworn) by the god Ashur, and had handed him over to Hezekiah, the Jew (and) he (Hezekiah) held him in prison, unlawfully, as if he (Padi) be an enemy-**had become afraid and had called (for help) upon the kings of Egypt** (and) the bowmen, the chariot(-corps) and the cavalry of the king of Ethiopia, an army beyond counting-and they (actually) had come to their assistance. In the plain of Eltekeh, their battle lines were drawn up against me and they sharpened their weapons. Upon a trust(-inspiring) oracle (given) by Ashur, my lord, I fought with them and inflicted a defeat upon them. In the me'le'e of the battle, **I personally captured alive the Egyptian charioteers with the(ir) princes** and (also) the charioteers of the king of Ethiopia. I besieged Eltekeh (and) Timnah, conquered (them) and carried their spoils away. I assaulted Ekron and killed the officials and patricians who had committed the crime and hung their bodies on poles surrounding the city. The (common) citizens who were guilty of minor crimes, I considered prisoners of war. The rest of them, those who were not accused of crimes and misbehavior, I released. I made Padi, their king, come from and set him as their lord on the throne, imposing upon him the tribute (due) to me (as) overlord.

As to Hezekiah, the Jew, he did not submit to my yoke, I laid siege to 46 of his strong cities, walled forts and to the countless small villages in their vicinity, and conquered (them) by means of well-stamped (earth-)ramps, and battering-rams brought (thus) near (to the walls) (combined with) the attack by foot soldiers, (using) mines, breeches as well as sapper work. I drove out (of them) 200,150 people, young and old,

male and female, horses, mules, donkeys, camels, big and small cattle beyond counting, and considered (them) booty. Himself I made a prisoner in Jerusalem, his royal residence, like a bird in a cage. I surrounded him with carthwork in order to molest those who were leaving his city's gate.⁵

Here, the same pattern is repeated. When going to battle against the invading Assyrians, Hezekiah requested help from Egypt, and Egypt graciously responded. It did no good, and Judah returned to Assyrian domination. It may even be that Egypt helped to instigate the revolt, as the new Twenty-fifth Dynasty had established control of most of Egypt, and was spreading out its power base. However, it is also clear that the prophet Isaiah opposed the involvement of the Egyptians, and it was their involvement that was given the blame (at least in religious Judah) for the defeat of Hezekiah. Isaiah wrote:

1 Woe to them that go down to Egypt for help; and stay on horses, and trust in chariots, because they are many; and in horsemen, because they are very strong; but they look not unto the Holy One of Israel, neither seek the LORD! 2 Yet he also is wise, and will bring evil, and will not call back his words: but will arise against the house of the evildoers, and against the help of them that work iniquity. 3 Now the Egyptians are men, and not God; and their horses flesh, and not spirit. When the LORD shall stretch out his hand, both he that helpeth shall fall, and he that is holpen shall fall down, and they all shall fail together.⁶

II Kings 19:9 reveals the name of the commander of one of the Egyptian forces (sent most likely by the Ethiopian Pharaoh Shebitku—702–690 B.C.) as Tirhakah. Evidence points to the fact that Sennacherib's victory was not as overwhelming as the Assyrian account recalls. The details of the spoils are vague, and Hezekiah was allowed to retain his kingship after the surrender—a rare event for that time period. Additionally, Judah was made a vassal state, but was not absorbed—perhaps because the Assyrians thought that Judah as an independent vassal state made a better buffer against its neighbors.

In 697 B.C. Manasseh assumed the throne of Judah, and would rule until 642 B.C.—the longest rule of any king in the history of Judah/Israel. Even if we assume that there is some exaggeration in the accounts left by the Assyrians, Judah was still in poor condition after the invasion by Assyria in 701 B.C. Despite Manasseh's

long reign, there are almost no historical references to it biblically or secularly, and what little is said is entirely negative. He is generally blamed for the end of Judah and the destruction of Jerusalem. In this point, the account in II Kings differs somewhat from that of the Chronicler, who has Manasseh repenting (and thus not responsible for the fall of Jerusalem later). During this period of rather uneventful history, Judah remained a vassal state to Assyria. The Assyrian empire reached the apex of its power during this time period, which suggests that few of its major neighbors were willing to risk starting a war over Judah. There are also Assyrian records that maintain that Judah was required to send tribute and corvee labor to Assyria.

During this time Assyria was actively invading Egypt, and in the process moving their armies through Syro-Palestine. Esarhaddon, the successor to Sennacherib, invaded Egypt first in 673 B.C. and then again in 671 B.C. In the second attack he was successful in sacking Memphis. He then established new rulers for Egypt in an attempt to create a ruling group that was pro-Assyrian. One of these appointees was Neco I. Two years later, Esarhaddon again went to Egypt to try to defeat Tirhakah, and died in the process. His successor in 668 B.C. was Ashurbanipal who would rule from 668 to 627 B.C. Tirhakah immediately took advantage of the situation and tried to clear the pro-Assyrian leaders from power. Ashurbanipal sent the military to deal with it, and they did so. Most of the pro-Assyrian leaders however, had temporarily sided with Tirhakah, and were dealt with by the Assyrians, but Neco was again placed in a position of power as king. This began an alliance between the Egyptian and Assyrian kingdoms that would last until the downfall of the Assyrian empire around 627 B.C.

In Judah, Manasseh was succeeded in 642 by his son Amun. Amun reigned for two years before court officials killed him.⁷ Nothing is known about the conspiracy other than the fact that the people later dealt with the conspirators. In 639 B.C., Josiah would come to the throne of Judah. He would remain king until 609 B.C., covering most of the rest of the period before Lehi begins his prophetic calling. It is almost certain that Lehi was born near the beginning of the reign of Josiah, and that his four oldest sons were born during Josiah's reign, (along with an unknown number of daughters). It is because of this that this period is the most interesting to us. By this time, the Assyrian empire was declining and was faced with a new problem—the rising Babylonian empire. The Babylonian threat would ultimately destroy the Assyrian power structure, conquer Palestine and threaten Egypt. The Babylonian chronicles—their history—are not complete, but they

do survive for much of 626–623 and 616–594. This, in addition to the biblical text, provides a great deal of insight into events current with Lehi.

In 630 B.C. Ashurbanipal abdicated the Assyrian throne to his son Ashur-etil-ilani. Ashurbanipal died in 627 B.C., and upon his death, one of the military commanders, Sin-shum-lishir, made himself king. This set off a series of minor succession wars that resulted in a four-year period of civil strife. During this time, the Egyptians had consolidated power along the Mediterranean seaboard. They still existed in peaceful cooperation with the Assyrians, and assumed control of Palestine, by mutual agreement, sometime around 620–630 B.C. Following the rule of Ashurbanipal, this must have seemed a tremendous relief to Judah (see sidebar, below). Jeremiah 2 seems to indicate that during this time period, Judah was subservient to both Assyria and Egypt, although as Assyria waned, Egypt became the dominant power and influence in the area. Shortly after this,

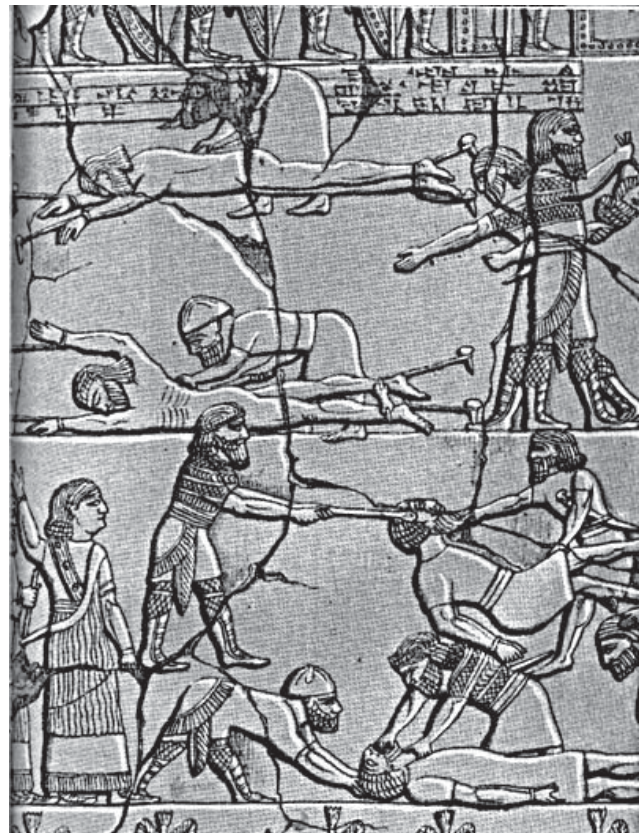
Assyria fell to the Babylonian empire. The following is a list of references indicating Egyptian control of Palestine at this time:

1. Jeremiah 2 speaks of Judah's submission to both Egypt and Assyria (especially verses 16-18 and 36-37), dated to about 627 B.C.
2. The Babylonian chronicles indicate that Judah participated in Egyptian military actions against Babylon by protecting supply lines and not attacking an exposed flank when given the opportunity (this would be about 613 B.C.).
3. The Egyptians maintained control of *via maris* (the way of the sea) during this entire period—it was a road that ran down along side the Mediterranean right through Palestine.
4. Jewish troops were employed by the Egyptians as noted a) by their presence in military colonies in Elephantine; b) Josephus indicates Jewish military

RULING BY TORTURE

The image at the right comes from a relief dating to the time of Ashurbanipal, king of Assyria (668-627 B.C.) and his dealings with his Elamite enemies (neighbors of Judah). The upper register of the relief has two supine naked men, tied to the ground by staked ropes, with two Assyrians flaying them with knives. To the right is an Assyrian carrying away a head on a string. At the bottom are two Assyrians removing the tongue of an Elamite prisoner, and just above them the next victim is being thrown down with his arms tied behind his back to wait his turn. In related scenes, Elamite heads are shown being collected as trophies.

Ashurbanipal is also recorded as saying: “Their dismembered bodies I fed to the dogs, swine, wolves, and eagles, to the birds of heaven and the fish in the deep...What was left of the feast of the dogs and swine, of their members which blocked the streets and filled the squares, I ordered them to remove from Babylon, Kutha and Sippar, and to cast them upon heaps.” Those who were spared he “pierced the lips (and) took them to Assyria as a spectacle for the people of my land.” In Elam, he went so far as to destroy the sepulchers of former kings, desecrate their burial sites, and then carted their bones off to Assyria. History shows that Ashurbanipal was simply following the examples of his father Essarhadon and the kings of Assyria who preceded him. It is no wonder that there was a collective appreciation for



the lax government imposed by the Egyptians following Ashurbanipal's reign. (Quotes taken from Daniel David Luckebill, *Ancient Records of Assyria and Babylon*, Volume 2 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1927), 795–796, 800.)

personnel were at Nebuchadnezzar's defeat of the Egyptians at Carchemish in 605 B.C.;⁸ c) the presence of Greek mercenaries hired by the Egyptians in Palestine, and the fact that Judah supplied these mercenaries serves as another indication that they were allies if not subservient to the Egyptians; and d) excavations at Mesad Hashavyahu showed evidence of a Greek settlement, a contingent of Psammaetichus I's forces (king of Egypt), and the presence of a Semitic force.

5. II Kings 24:7 tells us that "And the king of Egypt came not again any more out of his land: for the king of Babylon had taken from the river of Egypt unto the river Euphrates all that pertained to the king of Egypt." This clearly covers the area of Palestine.

Now, assuming at least some Egyptian control over Palestine during this period, in Miller-Hayes we find the following comments:

Egyptian policy in Syria-Palestine was far more politically laissez-faire in nature than had been the Assyrian policy and was primarily commercial in operation. Egypt did not seem to have any more plans or desires to annex or subjugate completely Syro-Palestinian affairs, such as religious practices and developments. Accordingly, while Judah under Josiah did not experience a period of complete freedom unhampered by foreign domination, internal affairs were certainly more under Judean control under Egyptian than Assyrian overlordship. As direct Assyrian control in Judah began to loosen, and was replaced with an Egyptian program far more benevolent in character and less oppressive in nature, Josiah was able to reform the Jerusalem and Judean cult.⁹

This continued until 609 B.C., when a bizarre turn of events is recorded in II Kings 23:29. Josiah went to meet Neco II near Megiddo (Neco was on his way to help the Assyrians fight off the Babylonians in the conflict that Assyria would lose), and the text reads:

In his days Pharaoh nechoh king of Egypt went up against the king of Assyria to the river Euphrates: and king Josiah went against him; and he slew him at Megiddo, when he had seen him.

The Chronicler wrote of this event:

After all this, when Josiah had prepared the temple, Necho king of Egypt came up to fight against Carchemish by Euphrates: and Josiah

went out against him. But he sent ambassadors to him, saying, What have I to do with thee, thou king of Judah? I come not against thee this day, but against the house wherewith I have war: for God commanded me to make haste: forbear thee from meddling with God, who is with me, that he destroy thee not. Nevertheless Josiah would not turn his face from him, but disguised himself, that he might fight with him, and heardkened not unto the words of Necho from the mouth of God, and came to fight in the valley of Megiddo. And the archers shot at king Josiah; and the king said to his servants, Have me away; for I am sore wounded.¹⁰

We probably will never know the cause of these events. In any respect, with Josiah dead, his son Jehoahaz was placed on the throne.¹¹ Because the Judean people had chosen a successor and not Neco, on Neco's return, probably nursing a bad attitude due to his failure to defeat the Babylonians, he immediately threw Jehoahaz in prison, and named his older brother Jehoiakim to the throne. It is a safe assessment to say that at least at this point, Egypt was still in full control of Palestine. A couple of additional references to this event are found in Jeremiah 22:10 and Ezekiel 19:1-4. Jehoiakim would reign from 608 to 598 B.C., covering the time frame for Lehi's departure into the wilderness.

Not long afterward, Babylon continued increasing its control over the area. In 605 B.C., Babylon defeated the Egyptians at Carchemish. After that defeat, Nebuchadnezzar marched essentially unopposed into Syro-Palestine and made Judah a vassal state. Jehoiakim paid tribute to Nebuchadnezzar for three years in 603, 602 and 601 B.C. In 600 B.C. he decided to withhold tribute from the Babylonians and revolted. The Babylonian chronicle states that in 600 B.C., when Nebuchadnezzar sent his army to Palestine, that Neco arrived and defeated him. The chronicle reads:

Year 4 [601-600 B.C.E.]: The king of Akkad [Nebuchadnezzar] sent out his army and marched in Hatti land [Syria-Palestine]. They marched unopposed through Hatti land. In the month of Kislev he took the lead of his army and marched toward Egypt. The king of Egypt [Neco] heard of it and sent out his army; they clashed in an open battle and inflicted heavy losses on each other. The king of Akkad and his army turned back and returned to Babylon.¹²

After a year off, Nebuchadnezzar returned to Palestine in 599 B.C. But, due to a variety of uprisings among various groups, he was unable to mount an assault on Jerusalem. The Old Testament records this remark:

And the LORD sent against him bands of the Chaldees, and bands of the Syrians, and bands of the Moabites, and bands of the children of Ammon, and sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the LORD, which he spake by his servants the prophets.¹³

The following year however, he marched on Jerusalem, captured it, replaced the king with “a king of his liking”¹⁴ and then departed with a great deal of wealth. The king that Nebuchadnezzar replaced was Jehoichin. He was the eighteen-year-old successor of Jehoiakim, and had been king for three months. It is not really known what happened to Jehoiakim, other than the fact that text implies that he died a natural death. If this is the case, then he died waiting on an Egyptian army that never arrived.¹⁵ The king that Nebuchadnezzar liked was Mattaniah, an uncle of Jehoichin, who was renamed Zedekiah.

For a period of time, Judah submitted to Babylonian rule. Then in the early 580s (possibly late 590s), Zedekiah again withheld tribute in an act of revolution.¹⁶ Among contributing factors to the decision to revolt was that Nebuchadnezzar had not made an appearance in Palestine since 594 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar returned and laid siege to Jerusalem. The siege would last more than two years. Judah again asked for assistance from Egypt. In Ezekiel 17:15 we have clear reference to Egyptian assistance:

But he rebelled against him in sending his ambassadors into Egypt, that they might give him horses and much people. Shall he prosper? shall he escape that doeth such things or shall he break the covenant, and be delivered?

In the Lachish Ostrakon, which date to this period, we have an account of at least one high-ranking military commander (possibly the most senior military commander) traveling to Egypt to negotiate with the Egyptians. In any event, Zedekiah clearly was counting on aid from the Egyptians in dealing with their common Babylonian enemy. As Jeremiah 37:1-10 records, the Egyptians (Pharaoh Apries) did in fact send an army during the siege, forcing the Babylonians to lift it temporarily. During this respite, Zedekiah sent to Jeremiah asking him to pray for the people. Jeremiah responded with this message:

Thus saith the LORD, the God of Israel; Thus shall ye say to the king of Judah, that sent you unto me to enquire of me; Behold, Pharaoh's

army, which is come forth to help you, shall return to Egypt into their own land. And the Chaldeans shall come again, and fight against this city, and take it, and burn it with fire.¹⁷

At this point Jeremiah was imprisoned. Eventually the city ran out of food, the city was taken, and destroyed, and Zedekiah's sons were slaughtered before his eyes, he was blinded and taken to Babylon in chains.¹⁸

Part of the reason for this destruction is that unlike Assyria, Babylon did not have the infrastructure to maintain order and control in the region, while at the same time focusing on their much greater enemy—Egypt. As one scholar writes:

Nebuchadnezzar probably lacked the capability of imposing an effective imperial bureaucracy on these small Mediterranean states as Assyria had done. His overriding concern was with Egypt. And his instrument of foreign policy toward real or potential allies of Egypt was a blunt one—annihilation, and for those who survived, deportation. Throughout Philistia, and later throughout Judah, his scorched-earth policy created a veritable wasteland west of the Jordan River.¹⁹

It is in light of a remark like this that we see the wisdom given to Jeremiah. The destruction of Ashkelon by the Babylonian forces was so violent and so thorough that it would remain desolate for eighty years, and Nebuchadnezzar would claim (incorrectly) that none of the inhabitants had survived. Judah, after experiencing years of brutal Assyrian rule followed by a brief period of relative peace and prosperity under Egyptian control, saw Egypt—the enemy of Babylon—as a source of security. It was their alliance with Egypt, however, that proved their complete undoing. Babylon, rather than trying to bring them back into the fold of obedient vassal states, simply destroyed them. Had they remained visibly independent from the Egyptians (even while struggling to remain independent from the Babylonians), they probably would have met a far different fate. Instead, their Egyptian allies brought an army up to Jerusalem during its final siege, and then left. But, it was the show of force that perhaps convinced Nebuchadnezzar of the necessity to remove this threat once and for all.

Unlike Ashkelon, the Babylonians left some of the population in Palestine, and chose a native ruler to act as governor of the territory. Unfortunately, a nationalistic

Jew assassinated the governor, and in the ensuing crisis the people asked Jeremiah what they should do.²⁰ Jeremiah's response is that the people should wait in Judah because the Babylonian king would be merciful.²¹ He further warns the people in their plans to flee to Egypt, saying that if they head to Egypt they would be destroyed.²² The people still choose Egypt, drag Jeremiah with them, and his prophecy comes to pass.

LEHI AND HIS EGYPTIAN BACKGROUND

With the proper understanding of the history of Judah, we can now return to the issue of the reasonableness of Lehi's Egyptian background. The first question presented by Cowan's criticism is whether or not the Jews were enemies of the Egyptians in 600 B.C. While Cowan correctly points out that King Josiah was killed in battle with Egypt in 608 B.C., that appears as an anomaly in the Judah-Egyptian relations. Both before and after that event Judah was a vassal state to the Egyptian empire. Likewise, in 600 B.C. (at the time of Lehi) the king of Judah had just determined to act in revolt to Babylonian rule in a complicit alliance with Egypt. In other words, Judah had a formal arrangement with Egypt for Judah to receive support from Egypt in their attempt to become free from Babylonian rule. This would help the Israelites, and it would provide a buffer to the Babylonian Empire for Egypt. It is clear that while relations between Egypt and Judah may have been strained from time to time, for all of Lehi's life prior to his departure from Jerusalem in 600 B.C., Egypt had been considered an ally by the people.

Next we have Cowan's criticism that the Lord was "against Egypt." This, as has already been shown, is true. The fact that the Lord was against Egypt did not prevent a majority of the people from repeatedly turning to Egypt for support and security. The fact that starting with the rise of Assyria Judah had never been able to maintain any kind of independence from one of the "superpowers" of the time, and the fact that their experience with Egypt had been the easiest of the three powers (Egypt, Assyria and Babylon), leads one to conclude that they actually appreciated the time spent under Egyptian dominance. (It represented the lesser of three evils.) When the prophet spoke out against this relationship (as Jeremiah repeatedly did), he was simply ignored by sectarian and religious Jews alike.

As a third point, noted by historians, is that the relationship between Israel and Egypt in the decades leading up to the fall of Jerusalem was largely an economic

relationship. There was a great deal of trade between the two nations, and since all trade from Egypt that did not occur by boat went through Palestine, Judah served as an important part of the trade routes. This importance only increased when Assyria and Egypt began peaceful coexistence near the assumed time of Lehi's birth. It is precisely because of his knowledge of Egyptian (and partly because of his recorded wealth) that many LDS scholars see Lehi as a successful merchant for most of his life in Palestine.²³

Additionally, it is reasonable to assume that while Judah was under Egyptian domination, legal documents and edicts may well have been written in Egyptian. It is a reasonable assumption that the military personnel Judah provided to Egypt probably brought back with them knowledge of Egyptian language and customs.

Ultimately, it is only reasonable to assume that Lehi might be expected to know Egyptian. To what extent he was involved through his profession or his daily experience with the Egyptian allies of Judah is something that we don't know with any certainty, however, it is clear that the picture he paints of a doomed city when he leaves for the wilderness is echoed by other contemporary prophets, and was fulfilled.

CONCLUSION

In the course of this paper, I have tried to demonstrate that Cowan presents several incorrect statements. The first, that Jews were the enemies of the Egyptians in 600 B.C. To the contrary, the actual evidence shows they were allies, in spite of the fact that Israelite prophets condemned the relationship. Second, that as a vassal state and trading partner of Egypt, there were going to be Israelites who spoke Egyptian. It is also highly likely, as I suggest, that those who were sent to work for the Egyptians under the corvee system (in which Israel found itself) also would have learned Egyptian as well. Finally, I pointed out that while the Lord may well have been "against Egypt," the Israelites themselves were not—and because of this, the Lord allowed Jerusalem to be captured and eventually destroyed. Placed in this environment, it is not just plausible, but quite likely that a Jew might keep a record in "language...which consists of the learning of the Jews and the language of the Egyptians."²⁴

FURTHER READING

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NOTES

1. Marvin W. Cowan, *Mormon Claims Answered*, 1997 Version (Salt Lake City: Utah Lighthouse Ministry, 1997). The text cited is from Chapter 4, which can be found online at the UTLM Web site: www.utlm.org/onlinebooks/mclaims4.htm

2. There is a great deal of difficulty in accurately dating Hezekiah's reign. There are a number of conflicting details in the scriptural accounts. II Kings 18:1 correlates the first year of Hezekiah's reign with the third year of Hoshea's reign. II Kings 18:9–10 places Hezekiah's fourth year as king as occurring at the same time as the beginning of the siege of Samaria by Shalmaneser V, and his sixth year with the fall of that city. II Kings 18:13 claims that in his fourteenth year as king, Sennacherib invaded Jerusalem. We know from external data that Samaria fell in 722 BC, and that Jerusalem was invaded in 701 BC. So, we are presented with the following contradiction: His sixth year = 722 BC and his fourteenth year = 701 BC. Because of this, I am following the timeline proposed by Miller and Hayes. [J. Maxwell Miller and John H. Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1986), 350.] They calculated the date by using the notation on regnal years (II Kings 18:2) and moving backward from the certain date of the Babylonian

capture of Jerusalem on the sixteenth of March in 597 BC. There are, of course, other plausible dating schemes like that put forth by Siegfried H. Horn in his essay *The Divided Monarchy: The Kingdoms of Judah and Israel* [*Ancient Israel: A Short History from Abraham to the Roman Destruction of the Temple*, edited by Hershel Shanks (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995), 117] where he places Hezekiah's reign from 729–686, referring at the beginning and end to coregencies with Ahaz and Manasseh. For the purposes of this paper, being more exact is unnecessary, as we only need to place Egyptian relations with Judah in an approximate setting.

3. Here, in the original reference text, it reads Palestine. However, it has since been accepted as reading Philistia, and the change was made to avoid any confusion in this paper.

4. ANET 287, as found in James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), 198.

5. Ibid. ANET 287–288 p. 199–200.

6. Isaiah 31:1–3.

7. II Kings 21:19–26; II Chronicles 33:21–25.

8. Contra Apion I.136–137.

9. Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 391.

10. II Chronicles 35:20–23.

11. II Kings 23:30–31.

12. ANET 564 (Translation in Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 407).

13. II Kings 24:2.

14. Ibid.

15. II Kings 24:12.

16. II Kings 24:20.

17. Jeremiah 37:7–8.

18. II Kings 25:37; Jeremiah 52:5–11.

19. Lawrence E. Stager, "The Fury of Babylon," *Biblical Archaeological Review*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (January/February 1996), 69.

20. Jeremiah 42:1–2.

21. Jeremiah 43:11–12.

22. Jeremiah 43:15–22.

23. See, for example, Hugh Nibley, *Lehi In the Desert, The World of the Jaredites, There Were Jaredites* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 34–42, and Hugh Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Company, 1988), 58–92.

24. 1 Nephi 1:2.

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