

In the third year of Jehoiakim, King of Judah, the Lord God raised up a Lion from the east, one Nebuchadnezzar. In that same year, King Nebuchadnezzar led Babylon at a place called Carchemish, and there defeated the Egyptians. Though he did so in the name of his god, Marduk, the king of the Babylonian gods, the God of the Hebrews had in fact ordained his steps. Nebuchadnezzar's comings and goings were prophesied by the Voice of the Lord, Jeremiah of Anathoth. Here begins the account of how the God of the Universe caused the Children of Israel to go in exile to the land of the Chaldeans.

The Chronicles of Belteshazzar

CHAPTER 1

A steady flow of pilgrims made its way toward the Gate of Benjamin, the northern gateway to the Temple of Solomon. Unnoticed among the throng of people, Baruch said to his companion, "It is not too late, we can still turn back."

"I told you before, the Lord has called me to speak out. Now is the time. This is the place. You don't have to come with me if you don't want to." Jeremiah's gaze did not lift from the dusty ground in front of him as they proceeded.

"I won't abandon you. I just don't want to see you end up like Uriah," Baruch replied.

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

A tear escaped Jeremiah's eye and trickled down his wrinkled sun-scorched face before being captured in the tangle of his beard. With his head bowed to hide his sadness, thoughts of his old friend, Uriah, flashed through Jeremiah's mind. From the start of Jehoiakim's reign in Jerusalem, they had both spoken out against the atrocities committed by this king - a man long suspected of having conspired with the Egyptians to gain the throne of his late father, King Josiah. Since ascending to the throne three years ago, Jehoiakim had prostituted the faith, and sold Israel's soul in exchange for Egyptian riches. Uriah, older and more brash than Jeremiah, had gone into the Valley of Ben-Hinnom during the first year of Jehoiakim's reign to deliver a withering proclamation against the king as he sacrificed to Dagon. Uriah had spoken out for all to hear his words at the foot of the Topheth, their idol.

And for that, Uriah had paid with his life. Never had any prophet been killed by the political powers of Israel. But Uriah had. Indeed, Uriah had learned of Jehoiakim's plan to take his life and had fled to Egypt, but the king used his ties to Pharaoh to have Uriah taken prisoner and brought back to Jerusalem for execution. And Pashur, the First Keeper of the Door, had not said a word! So blinded by the profits from trade with the Egyptians were Jehoiakim and the Temple Priests that they would do everything to safeguard their position, including murder.

Now Jeremiah was about to follow in Uriah's footsteps. Would the Lord protect him as he went forward to proclaim the Word that the Voice of the Lord compelled him to utter? He said a silent prayer, ignoring the urge to turn and retrace his steps back across the viaduct over which he had just traversed. He looked at his friend and faithful servant, Baruch, who at forty-two, was two years his senior. Baruch had willingly followed him since their boyhood days growing up in Anathoth. It had been Baruch's plan that Jeremiah's young teenage disciples, Daniel and Ezekiel, accompany them on this day. "If you insist on going to the temple on this

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

suicide mission, at least allow us to provide a plan of escape for you, God willing,” he had said. As usual, Jeremiah left those concerns to Baruch. When the Lord prompted him to action, his only thoughts were the accomplishment of the task at hand.

They entered the Court of the Gentiles, a large outer area surrounding the temple proper and its inner courts. Here, Hebrews and non-Hebrews alike gathered in a space comprising a little more than twenty acres. Various kiosks were set up for pilgrims to purchase animals at the last minute for sacrifice by the temple priests. Arriving just a little before noon, Jeremiah and his friends found the day’s activity at its highest. The Hebrews were celebrating Succoth, the Feast of Tabernacles. Many were coming to Jerusalem, and hence to the temple. It had been a good year, and the Hebrew pilgrims enjoyed the fruits of their harvest as they gave thanks to the Lord. Because Succoth was in the second day of a weeklong celebration, many pilgrims and their families were already here. Small groups dotted the court, as rabbis and scribes taught from the Torah, the Book of the Law. For those not concerned with the fate of the nation of Judah, and the spiritual state of her people, it was a joyous time.

Jeremiah and Baruch came to the low stone wall that surrounded the inner courts of the temple. Called the Soreq, it stood five feet tall and surrounded the consecrated Temple area. Its purpose was to signify a barrier beyond which no Gentile might pass. As they entered the gate that would take them into the Court of the Women, Jeremiah glanced up at the inscription on the arch, which read:

“Any Gentile found within the enclosure of the Temple area will bear the responsibility of his own ensuing death.”

Jeremiah turned to Baruch. “For your own safety, leave me now.”

Baruch looked into his friend’s eyes, but knew that it was no use arguing. “I will not be far away,” he replied. Baruch looked around them. Only the temple guards were present in this

area. Thus, anything that happened would be under the jurisdiction of the priests, not the king. He caught the eyes of Daniel and Ezekiel. On silent cue, the two teenagers split up and merged into the milling crowd. He turned back to Jeremiah. “God be with you,” he said.

“And with you,” replied Jeremiah as he watched his friend blend into the crowd. He looked up at the early autumn sun and felt its warmth on his cheek. Slowly but intently, he began to work his way to the center of the Court of the Women. At the western end of the court was a semi-circular staircase leading up to the Nicanor Gate, which led into the next court called the Court of the Israelites. Within that area, no woman was allowed. Jeremiah and Baruch had discussed this subject, and decided it was unwise to go beyond that point. At the top of the staircase, he saw Pashur, the First Keeper of the Door. He mentally spat on the ground, for to do so physically would be to profane the holy ground on which he walked.

The Court of the Women was crowded with people watching the priests carrying water from the pool of Siloam to the inner altar of the Priest’s Court for the water purification ceremony. The pool trapped water which flowed from the Spring of Gihon through the tunnel King Hezekiah had dug over a century ago to insure a supply of water to the people of Jerusalem in times of attack. Carrying palm branches, the people cried out continuously:

The Lord save us! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! From the House of the Lord, we bless you! The Lord is God, and He has made His light shine upon us. With boughs in hand, join in the festival procession up to the horns of the altar!

The noise around Jeremiah was deafening. It took time to push his way through the mass of people waving palm branches as the priests proceeded to the Nicanor Gate and into the inner recesses of the temple. At last he came to his destination: One of the three raised daises, about six feet in diameter, in the center of the court. Jeremiah faced the gate leading to the inner courts of the temple. Until now, he had walked with a stoop, but now he pulled back the hood of his

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

cloak and stood to his full six-foot frame. He caught Pashur's eye and allowed a slight smile to flit briefly across his lips before lifting his face to heaven and stretching out his arms.

“For the last twenty-three years, from the thirteenth year of Josiah, the son of Amon, King of Judah to this day, the word of the Lord has come to me, and I have spoken to you over and over, but you have not listened!” Jeremiah paused and watched as Pashur stopped what he was doing and called an aide to his side. The people nearest him also ceased their chanting and turned their attention to him. Even some of the rabbis in their small groups had stopped and looked up to hear what Jeremiah would say next.

“You haven't listened to the Lord, who has commanded you, saying ‘Do not serve other gods, which are but the mere work of your hands. Therefore I am about to pour out my wrath upon you,’ declares the Lord.” Jeremiah paused again. Now people were coming to him to listen to his words. More than two hundred surrounded the dais on which he stood. He could see temple guards begin to move on the perimeter of the court. Out of the corner of his eye, he saw Daniel milling about with a group of about twenty youths of his age. While the sight of his young friend registered with his subconscious, it did not distract him from what he had to say.

“...Thus says the Lord of Hosts, ‘Because you have not obeyed My words, behold, I will exile the families of Judah. Even now, I am gathering all the armies of the north under Nebuchadnezzar, King of Babylon, whom I have appointed my servant. I will bring them against this land and its people. I will bring them against all the nations surrounding you, to destroy them.’” The crowd was beginning to grow restless. This was the point which Baruch had feared, had begged Jeremiah not to make. Not here. Not in public. Many believed that the Lord would never allow such a thing to befall His people and His temple.

They were wrong.

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

“This whole land shall be a desolation and a horror, and these nations shall serve the king of Babylon seventy years. With fire he shall consume this Temple, and all ...” A roar went up from the crowd. A hand grabbed him from behind, dragging him off the dais. Jeremiah struggled, but his assailants wrestled him backwards, wrenching his shoulder. Suddenly, the wind was knocked out of him as his back hit the ground below, his head slamming into the cobblestones. As he was dragged into the midst of the crowd, darkness surrounded him. Jeremiah struggled to retain consciousness, and failed.

* * *

“That man must die! We can’t allow him to say the things he is saying without suffering the wrath of Pharaoh Necho.” Jehoiakim, King of Judah, glared at the priests and rabbis gathered about him. Fools! They had no understanding of the intricacies of international politics. Without Egypt to protect them from the creeping threat from Babylon, the lucrative trade through the pass of Megiddo - not to mention the trade with the merchants of Tyre and Sidon - would be imperiled.

It had been three and one half years since he’d taken the throne from his weak brother, Jehoahaz, with the help of his Egyptian sponsors. From that time forward, he had used his position to prepare his people for a new, cosmopolitan Judah. Their infatuation with an uncompromising religion had blinded them to the need to be pragmatic. Only by compromising with Judah’s more powerful neighbors could his country hope to regain the greatness of King David’s time. To build his vision of a New Jerusalem, he had killed a prophet who had stood in his way once before - Uriah. Jehoiakim had no problem doing so again.

“Pashur acted wisely in stopping Jeremiah and putting him in the stockade,” said Ahikam. Jehoiakim turned to eye the old man, who had been an advisor to his father Josiah. It

had been Ahikam who had prevented him from having Jeremiah executed when he first took the throne three years ago. But that was then, and this was now, and Jehioakim's power was much greater. "The king should allow him to go his way as is the law for a man who has been flogged and publicly rebuked in the stockade," continued Ahikam. He met the king's stare and did not blink, while keeping his own countenance placid, revealing nothing of the emotional churning in his stomach.

"Jeremiah has already prophesied falsely concerning Babylon." All eyes turned to Shemaiah, who rose to speak out against Ahikam's counsel. The contempt which the two rival prophets held for each other was well known, as Shemaiah and Jeremiah had frequently locked horns, particularly over Judah's dealings with Egypt. Along with his younger associate, Hananiah, Shemaiah never missed an opportunity to disparage Jeremiah's words. "Though Babylon appears to be on the ascendancy, the Lord will clearly aid Egypt to prevail and elevate the House of David," he continued. "Thus, Jeremiah is a false prophet and must meet with the fate of a false prophet."

Jehoiakim smiled to himself. Without hesitation, he seized the opportunity afforded him by Shemaiah. "In the morning, we shall take him down from the stockade and imprison him. Then, when Necho defeats Babylon, we shall have him stoned to death just as the Law of Moses requires! Let us retire to our chambers and take this action at dawn." With that, the king rose and left the room, leaving the rest to realize that they had just been made party to a conspiracy to kill a prophet of God.

Ahikam left quickly, but discretely, and sought out his son, Gedaliah. As chief scribe, he was responsible for keeping the scrolls and overseeing their recopying. He was also the one who scheduled the reading of the sacred books in the Temple. His had been an honored position in

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

the time of King Josiah, Jehoiakim's father. But in recent years, his influence had waned. He must now do what he could to save Jeremiah's life, which unfortunately, was very little.

Making his way from the King's palace to the Temple of Solomon, Ahikam found his son in the temple library. "I need you to act quickly," he told Gedaliah. "Seek out Baruch and tell him that Jeremiah is to be thrown into prison at dawn. He must be freed before first light if he is to live to an old age. I will seek out some of our friends among the Rechabites and see what aide they might give us." He looked at his son, a man of gentle spirit. One who never grew angry at those around him, he was a good man, but too trusting.

"Fear not, father. I will find Baruch. This isn't the first time that Jeremiah has gotten himself in trouble with the powers that be, and I'm sure it won't be the last."

Hamath was a provincial capitol of the Assyrian Empire - at least, what was left of it. Just over sixty years had passed since Assyria had launched an invasion of Egypt. That invasion had resulted in the fall of Thebes and the subjugation of the Egyptians. But in the last thirty years, the Egyptians had driven the Assyrians back. Now, in an ironic twist of fate, the Egyptians were coming to the rescue of their former enemies. Babylon was on the march from the east. Ninevah, the capitol of Assyria, had fallen. So too had Haran, their northern provincial capitol. Weakened though Assyria was, Pharaoh Necho wanted to preserve her as a buffer zone between Egypt's vassal states and the advancing barbarians from Chaldea. If Assyria fell, Jerusalem was only slightly more than a fortnight's march away. Along with Judah, Tyre, Ashkelon and other kingdoms would come under the spreading evil. Then, nothing would stand in the way of an invasion southward toward the Third Kingdom. It was for this reason that Egypt had decided in the last several years to come to Assyria's aide.

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

Amhose could smell the salt scent of the breeze blowing off the Great Sea, less than-days march to the west away. As Necho's commanding general, he was pleased with the power he held in his hand. Arrayed behind him were 100,000 soldiers - mostly Egyptian, but numbering in their ranks were Greek mercenaries, Nubians and Libyans. Their mission was to march north to Carchemish, where a large Egyptian garrison had been harassed in recent months by the Babylonian scourge. Under his leadership, they had slowly wrested territory away from the Chaldeans (Osiris be praised!). In a display of typical overconfidence, their king Nabopolassar had returned to Babylon last year. Amhose had immediately overrun the garrison the Babylonians had left at Qurumati. All the Babylonian dogs had been put to the sword.

But now Nabopolassar's brash son, Nebuchadnezzar, was harassing the Egyptian garrison at Carchemish. Located on the Euphrates river, the garrison controlled a key choke point on one of the most important rivers in the world. Amhose's orders were to march his army north to Carchemish, relieve the garrison and wipe out the invaders. To move this army to its destination would take four more days. He had led his army out of Hamath two days before, and had encountered only scattered bands of Chaldeans since. Amhose had no doubt that they would quickly dispatch the raiders near Carchemish when he arrived. Once he had secured the garrison, he was to then march southeast along the Euphrates toward Babylon. Necho wanted him to strike the barbarians directly by laying siege to the enemy's capitol.

Amhose wiped away the sweat from his balding pate, cursing the onset of middle age which not only marred his youthful looks, but also was beginning to add inches to his waist. He had risen quickly through the ranks to become the general of Pharaoh's armies. At the age of thirty-two, he was ruthless, afraid of nothing. Yet this last plan was insane. It was a mad plan dreamed up by a middle aged king who liked to play soldier. In truth, Necho had no idea what

real soldiers did. But the invasion of Babylon was another issue - one with which he would deal when the time came. Amhose looked up at the sky. It would be dark in a few hours. He would give the order to halt once they had crested the next hill. Though expecting no trouble, he would make sure that every precaution to secure the camp was taken.

Amhose shifted his attention to several approaching riders. As they drew near, he could see they were an advance scouting party returning from their search for signs of the enemy. His personal guard had met them and were escorting them to his carriage. Amhose motioned the driver to stop, and bade his servants bring water to the scouts. They reined in their steeds and dismounted, immediately bending to one knee and saluting their general. "Rise and report," commanded Amhose.

"My lord, we came across 5,000 Babylonians a day and a half ride from here. They were camped at the foot of Mt. Tadmor, and were preparing to break camp when we came upon them."

"Were you seen?" Amhose asked the chief scout. While he was sure the man was a capable officer - Amhose could not recall his name - the general would be derelict in his duty if he did not ask this question.

"No, my Lord," the scout replied.

"You are certain?" Amhose saw the scout captain stiffen at the implied lack of faith in his abilities. A good sign - a display of hesitancy would have shown his next statement to be a lie.

"We were not seen, Lord Amhose," the scout said slowly and distinctly so there could be no misunderstanding of his answer - or his disgust that the question had been asked.

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

Amhose eyed the captain. His scouting party of twelve were strong, sure warriors. He was content that the information the man carried was accurate. He decided to ask the scout his assessment of the situation.

“What do you believe the enemy is up to?”

The scout paused to consider his words, then answered. “As you know, Mt. Tadmor is located near the Karasu river, a tributary to the Euphrates. There are several explanations for why they were there. The most likely explanation is that they were one of the raiding parties which had been harassing Carchemish - if not the only raiding party.”

“What makes you think they had been involved in a raid on Carchemish?”

“They were tending to their wounded and appeared to have been there for at least a week. However, if we don’t act quickly, their trail will grow cold by the time we return to where they were camped.”

Amhose looked away at his army. Like ants moving over the face of the earth, so his soldiers were moving north toward Carchemish. He looked in the direction of the Third Corps, twenty thousand of his most capable troops. “I am ordering the Third Corps to march toward Mt. Tadmor and pursue the Babylonians. We will follow with the main army.” He turned to the scout. “You will report to General Ptah and guide him to where you spied the Chaldeans.”

“Yes, my lord,” replied the scout. He went, along with Amhose’s chief of staff to convey the order.

* * *

General Ptah had a reputation for being a glory hunter. A quarry was loose and he wanted the honor of the kill. In his late forties and the most capable military leader in Amhose’s command, Ptah would become his replacement should anything happen to the young

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

commanding general. Ptah examined the site of the Babylonian encampment. He had led his men at a forced march to arrive here in less than a day since the order to proceed had been given. According to the report he'd received from his scouts, the Egyptians were now about six hours behind the retreating Babylonians. They have headed north, toward Carchemish, a little over a day's march from here. Assuming their destination was the garrison, they would be there by mid afternoon tomorrow.

Ptah calculated quickly. It was now about four o'clock. His company would arrive by nightfall tomorrow. The garrison at Carchemish housed 10,000 warriors. Therefore, the Babylonians would be caught between two superior forces, with the main Egyptian army two days behind. No doubt, there were other Babylonian units in the area. However, they would be focused on the Egyptian garrison and be unprepared for the approaching reinforcements. Ptah's main concern was to prevent the smaller, and therefore more mobile, Babylonian force from escaping his grasp.

Ptah pulled out his map of the region. Not far from the garrison stood a wooded glen, just the place where a force of 5,000 men would attempt to hide unseen from the walls of Carchemish a quarter league away. Ptah's main force should attack this wooded area just before dawn. If the Babylonians were encamped in this area, he would catch them sleeping. To the east lay the Euphrates, and a flat plain. To the west, mountains. Therefore, to prevent the Babylonians from escaping, Ptah decided to send his chariots to the east and his archers to the west. As he examined the map, Ptah marked where these two battalions, because of their greater mobility, would take up positions and await the arrival of the main force in the center near the glen.

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

Ptah looked at the map one more time, thinking through his plan. The main force of nearly 10,000 warriors would approach the glen just before daybreak a day and a half hence. That would give his foot soldiers and light cavalry about seven hours rest before engaging the enemy - which would have nowhere to run, as their backs would be to the garrison at Carchemish. By the time Amhose and the main contingent arrived about a day later, all should be secure. And, should there be any other Babylonian contingents in the area, the full army would be there to make sure they did not live out the week. Satisfied, Ptah stood up. "Prepare to move out," he barked to his lieutenants, who ran to him to receive his orders. The general informed them of his plans, and then ordered that riders be sent to inform Amhose of his plans.

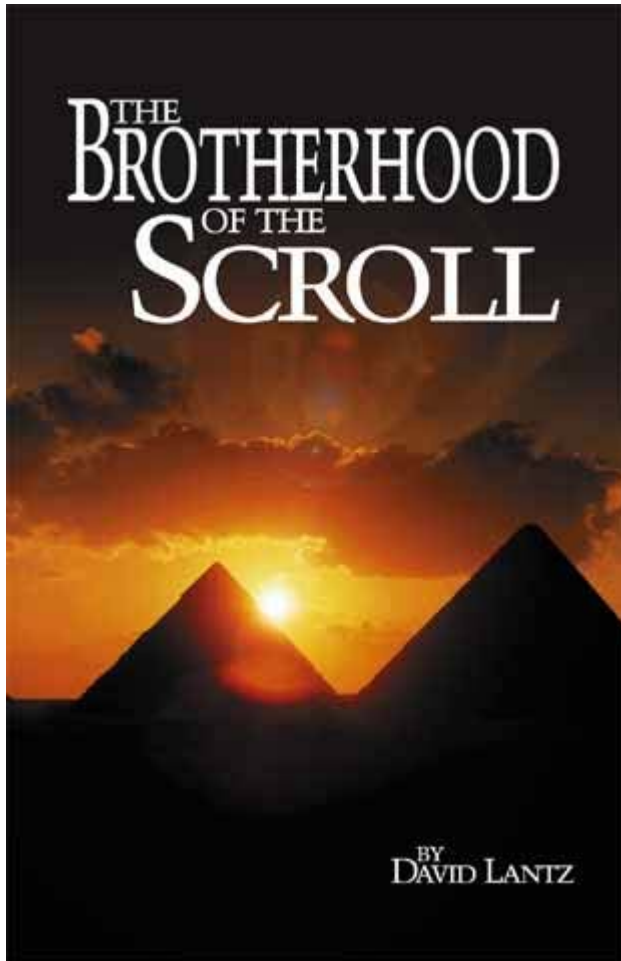
Ptah waved a scout to his side. "Take your finest men and scout the enemy position ahead. We will rendezvous at the glen," he commanded, and watched as he turned to obey. Already, the camp was alive with activity, as the Third Corps prepared to move out. With a grin Ptah contemplated the thrill of the hunt which was about to begin.

* * *

"Send the signal. Four battalions, a total of 20,000 men are on the move toward Carchemish," a crusty old Babylonian warrior whispered to the men around him. Near by, two scouts held a large mirror, while a third scout lifted a shield to first cover and then uncover the mirror to flash a signal to the patrol waiting about four leagues to the north. One, two, three, four. The commander continued talking to the other three Babylonian scouts under his command. "They will be sending scouting parties ahead of the main force. And, you can be certain that this is but the advance vanguard of a still larger army - perhaps headed by Pharaoh Necho himself."

ADAPTED FROM THE BOOK, THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, BY DAVID LANTZ

A thousand feet above the departing Egyptians, the four Babylonian scouts hid in a cleft in the rock. Protected from observation from below, theirs was the last piece in a plan to trap the Egyptians. When the expected signal confirming receipt of the message was received, the old warrior knew his job was ended until the main force was spotted. He watched the Egyptians below him march off to their doom.



For more information, including how to order *The Brotherhood of the Scroll*, please visit us on the web at www.brotherhoodscroll.net.

FOR MORE INFORMATION ON THE BROTHERHOOD OF THE SCROLL, VISIT WWW.BROTHERHOODSCROLL.NET E-MAIL DAVID LANTZ AT DLANTZ@BUYINGTECHNOLOGY.COM.