

Nebuchadnezzar (Jerusalem) Chronicle

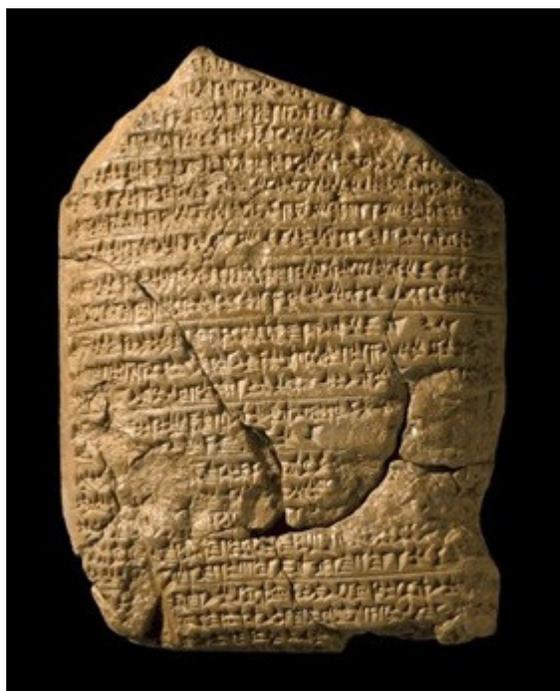
Excavated from an unknown location, the small ancient cuneiform tablet fragment that became known as the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle was purchased by the British Museum in 1896 from an antiquities dealer located in Southern Iraq.

Catalogued by the British Museum, “this historical chronicle describes Nebuchadnezzar’s first campaign against Jerusalem in 597 BC. The tablet covers the period of 12 years from the 21st year of Nabopolassar (605 BC, which was also Nebuchadnezzar’s accession year), through to the 11th year of Nebuchadnezzar’s reign.”

Because its subject is the historical account of a king of Babylon, the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle is part of the family of cuneiform texts called the Babylonian Chronicles.

Inscribed on both sides (Obv: obverse or front side, Rev: reverse side), the Chronicle records Nebuchadnezzar’s conquests of kingdoms west of Babylon and refer to two well-known battles: the defeat of Egypt at the Battle of Carchemish and Nebuchadnezzar’s Siege of Jerusalem.

On the front / obverse side of the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle (Obv), the line by line translations appears as follows with dates in brackets to aid the reader:



This small fragment, made in 590 B.C., is only 2.5 inches wide and 3.25 inches in height!
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- Obv.1) In the twenty-first year [605/604 B.C.] the king of Akkad [Nabopolassar] stayed in his own land, Nebuchadnezzar his eldest son, the crown-prince,
- Obv.2) mustered the Babylonian army and took command of his troops; he marched to Karchemiš which is on the bank of the Euphrates,
- Obv.3) and crossed the river to go against the Egyptian army which lay in Karchemiš.
- Obv.4) They fought with each other and the Egyptian army withdrew before him.
- Obv.5) He accomplished their defeat and beat them to non-existence. As for the rest of the Egyptian army
- Obv.6) which had escaped from the defeat so quickly that no weapon had reached them, in the district of Hamath
- Obv.7) the Babylonian troops overtook and defeated them so that not a single man escaped to his own country.
- Obv.8) At that time Nebuchadnezzar conquered the whole area of Hamath.
- Obv.9) For twenty-one years Nabopolassar had been king of Babylon,
- Obv.10) when on 8 Abu he went to his destiny; in the month of Ululu Nebuchadnezzar returned to Babylon
- Obv.11) and on 1 Ululu he sat on the royal throne in Babylon.
- Obv.12) In the accession year Nebuchadnezzar went back again to the Hatti-land and until the month of Šabatu
- Obv.13) marched unopposed through the Hatti-land; in the month of Šabatu he took the heavy tribute of the Hatti-territory to Babylon.
- Obv.14) In the month of Nisannu. ___ he took the hands of Bêl and the son of Bêl and celebrated the Akitu Festival.
- Obv.15) In the first year of Nebuchadnezzar [604/603 B.C.] in the month of Simanu he mustered his army
- Obv.16) and went to the Hatti-territory, he marched about unopposed in the Hatti-territory until the month of Kislîmu
- Obv.17) All the kings of the Hatti-land came before him and he received their heavy tribute.
- Obv.18) He marched to the city of Aškelon and captured it in the month of Kislîmu.
- Obv.19) He captured its king and plundered it and carried off spoil from it.
- Obv.20) He turned the city into a mound and heaps of ruins and then in the month of Šabatu he marched back to Babylon.

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Obv.21) In the second year **[603/602 B.C.]** in the month of Ajaru the king of Akkad gathered together a powerful army and marched to the land of Hatti.

Obv.22) [...] he threw down, great siege-towers he [...]

Obv.23) [...] from the month of Ajaru until the mon[th of ...] he marched about unopposed in the land of Hatti.

Obv.24-27) [Four lines missing]

The Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle confirms the historicity of events recorded in the Bible.

The Battle of Carchemish (Obv.1-4): Commissioned as a prophet to the nations (Jer 46:1), Jeremiah's prophecy of God's judgment of Egypt's Pharaoh Neco is written after Egypt's defeat at Carchemish (Jer 46:1-28) at the hands of Nebuchadnezzar the king of Babylon (Jer 46:13-26).

The alliance of Egypt and Assyria is soundly defeated by Nebuchadnezzar and marks the end of the Assyrian Empire and the expansion of Egypt.

The defeat of Hamath (Obv.5-8): Jeremiah prophesizes God's judgment of three important cities of Syria, Hamath, Zobah, and Damascus (Jer 49:23-27).

On the reverse side of the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle (Rev), the line by line translations appears as follows:

Rev. [Several lines missing]

Rev.1) In the third year **[602/601 B.C.]** the king of Akkad left and

Rev.2) in the month of [...] on the thirteenth day, Nabû-šuma-lišir [...]

Rev.3) The king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched to the Hatti-land.

Rev.4) and brought back much spoils from the Hatti-land into Akkad.

Rev.5) In the fourth year **[601/600 B.C.]** the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. In the Hatti-land they marched unopposed.

Rev.6) In the month of Kislîmu he took the lead of his army and marched to Egypt. The king of Egypt heard it and mustered his army.

Rev.7) 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.

Rev.8) In the fifth year **[600/599 B.C.]** the king of Akkad stayed in his own land and gathered together his chariots and horses in great numbers.

Rev.9) In the sixth year **[599/598 B.C.]** in the month of Kislîmu the king of Akkad mustered his army and marched to the Hatti-land. From the Hatti-land he sent out his companies,

Rev.10) and scouring the desert they took much plunder from the Arabs, their possessions, animals and gods. In the month of Addaru the king returned to his own land.

Rev.11) In the seventh year **[598/597 B.C.]**, the month of Kislîmu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops, marched to the Hatti-land,

Rev.12) and besieged the city of Judah and on the second day of the month of Addaru he seized the city and captured the king.

Rev.13) He appointed there a king of his own choice, received its heavy tribute and sent to Babylon.

Rev.14) In the eighth year **[597/596 B.C.]**, the month of Tebetu the king of Akkad marched to the Hatti-land as far as Karchemiš [...]

Rev.15) [...] in the month of Šabatu the king returned to his own land.

Rev.16) In the ninth year **[596/595 B.C.]**, the month of [...] the king of Akkad and his troops marched along the bank of the Tigris [...]

Rev.17) the king of Elam [...]

Rev.18) the king of Akkad [...]

Rev.19) which is on the bank of the Tigris he pitched his camp. While there was still a distance of one day's march between them,

Rev.20) the king of Elam was afraid and, panic falling on him, he returned to his own land.

Rev.21) In the tenth year [595/594 B.C.] the king of Akkad was in his own land; from the month of Kislîmu to the month of Tebetu there was rebellion in Akkad.

Rev.22) With arms he slew many of his own army. His own hand captured his enemy.

Rev.23) In the month of [...], he marched to the Hatti-land, where kings and [...]-officials

Rev.24) came before him and he received their heavy tribute and then returned to Babylon.

Rev.25) In the eleventh year [594/593 B.C.] in the month of Kislîmu, the king of Akkad mustered his troops and marched to the Hatti-land.

Because the Nebuchadnezzar Chronicle mentions the Siege of Jerusalem, it is also known as the Jerusalem Chronicle. The annotated translation of the pertinent lines (Rev.11-13) reads:

In the seventh year [of Nebuchadnezzar] in the month Chislew [Nov/Dec] the king of Babylon assembled his army, and after he had invaded the land of Hatti [Syria / Palestine] he laid siege to the city of Judah. On the second day of the month of Adar [16 March] he conquered the city and took the king [Jeconiah] prisoner. He installed in his place a king [Zedekiah] of his own choice, and after he had received rich tribute, he sent forth to Babylon. (Rev.11-13)

The Nebuchadnezzar (Jerusalem) Chronicle is significant for its confirmation of the biblical record of Judean king history. In response to the rebellion of king Jehoiakim of Judah, who was a Babylonian vassal, Nebuchadnezzar attacked Judah and took king Jehoiachin, son of Jehoiakim, who reigned for three months.

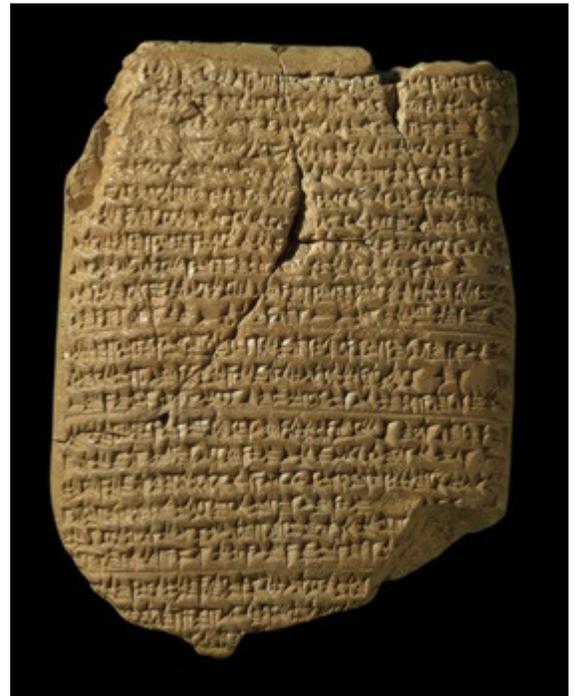
Jeremiah pronounces God's rejection and judgment of the teenaged king Jeconiah (throne name: Jehoiachin) (Jer 22:24-30).

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Nebuchadnezzar's conquest of Judah is detailed in 2 Kings 24.

Jehoiakim's vassalage and rebellion

In his days Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon came up, and Jehoiakim became his servant for three years; then he turned and rebelled against him. The Lord sent against him bands of Chaldeans, bands of Arameans, bands of Moabites, and bands of Ammonites. So He sent them against Judah to destroy it, according to the word of the Lord which He had spoken through His servants the prophets. Surely at the command of the Lord it came upon Judah, to remove them from His sight because of the sins of Manasseh, according to all that he had done, and also for the innocent blood which he shed, for he filled Jerusalem with innocent blood; and the Lord would not forgive. Now the rest of the acts of Jehoiakim and all that he did, are they not written in the Book of the Chronicles of the Kings of Judah? (2 Ki 24:1-5)



Reverse side of the tablet fragment
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Jehoiachin reigns

So Jehoiakim slept with his fathers, and Jehoiachin his son became king in his place. 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. Jehoiachin was eighteen years old when he became king, and he reigned three months in Jerusalem; and his mother's name was Nehushta the daughter of Elnathan of Jerusalem. He did evil in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done. (2 Ki 24:6-9).

Deportation to Babylon and appointment of Zedekiah

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. 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. 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. 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 Ki 24:10-17)

The deportation of Jeconiah / Jehoiachin was a significant event in the history of Israel, and it would be a reference point for subsequent historical accounting in the Bible (Est 2:6; Jer 24:1; 27:20; 29:2; Matt 1:11-12).

Jeconiah / Jehoiachin would ultimately be released from prison, receive preferential treatment in Babylon, and live out the rest of his life with rations (2 Ki 25:27-30; Jer 52:31-34, Babylon Ration Tablets).

References:

1. From the website: Livius.org, "ABC 5 (Jerusalem Chronicle)," <http://www.livius.org/sources/content/mesopotamian-chronicles-content/abc-5-jerusalem-chronicle/>.
2. Gaebelin FE ed., *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House (1992).
3. Walvoord JF, Zuck RB eds., *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, Wheaton: Victor Books, (1983).