

# The Book of Jeremiah

*Composition, Reception, and Interpretation*

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## Jeremiah at Mizpah of Benjamin (Tell en-Naşbeh): The Archaeological Setting\*

*Jeffrey R. Zorn*

When analyzing any biblical text, with all its attendant layers of editing and complex transmission history, it is easy to slip into the habit of thinking of biblical characters as just that, characters in a piece of literature, not flesh and blood individuals who once lived in particular real world contexts, who experienced real events in specific geographic, historical, social, and architectural settings. In this essay, using primarily archaeological data, I attempt to set the prophet Jeremiah in just such a context in the period following the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians in 586 BC, primarily during his time at Mizpah of Benjamin, most likely the site of Tell en-Naşbeh (hereafter TEN), 12 km north of Jerusalem and just south of modern Ramallah.<sup>1</sup>

The Babylonians besieged Jerusalem from the tenth month of King Zedekiah's ninth year until the fourth month of his eleventh year. Save for a brief respite, when the Babylonian had to withdraw to deal with an Egyptian

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1 For the various possible site identifications for Mizpah, see James Muilenburg, "The Literary Sources Bearing on the Question of Identification," in *Tell en-Naşbeh: Excavated Under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè*, vol. 1, *Archaeological and Historical Results*, ed. Chester C. McCown (Berkeley: Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion, 1947), 23–44; also James Muilenburg, "Mizpah of Benjamin," *ST* 8 (1954–1955): 25–42. Recent suggestions to locate Mizpah at Nebi Samwil, as advocated by Yitzhak Magen and Benny Har-Even ("Persian Period Stamp Impressions from Nebi Samwil," *TA* 34 [2007]: 38–58) and Yitzhak Magen and Michael Dadon ("Nebi Samwil [Montjoie]," in *One Land — Many Cultures: Archaeological Studies in Honour of Stanislao Loffreda OFM*, ed. Giovanni C. Bottini, Leah Di Segni and Leslaw D. Chrupcala [Jerusalem: Franciscan Printing Press, 2003], 123–38) are problematic because no remains from either the Iron I or Babylonian periods were found there, which should be the case for any site identified with Mizpah.

relief force, the siege lasted at least eighteen months,<sup>2</sup> and the city suffered the triple calamity of “sword, famine and pestilence.”<sup>3</sup> A month after they broke into the city, the Babylonians, under the commander Nebuzaradan, began the systematic destruction of the city’s infrastructure. The city’s walls were destroyed, as were the temple, royal palace, and many houses (Jer 52:12–14). Subsequently, according to one text, 832 people were sent into exile (Jer 52:29), the riches of the temple, mostly bronze at this point, were plundered and carried away (Jer 52:17–23), and many priests, royal officials, and even Zedekiah’s sons were executed (Jer 52:24–27). Wherever excavations have uncovered strata of this period in Jerusalem they have yielded deposits consumed in the Babylonian conflagration.<sup>4</sup> During the period of the siege Jeremiah was most often under arrest in the palace, including some time in a cistern/prison cell (Jer 37–38) and certainly felt the effects of the famine himself (Jer 37:21; 38:9).

Jeremiah was a known Babylonian sympathizer. The Babylonians certainly understood that they would need some local leadership to administer what was left of Judah after the war. They had already picked Gedaliah son of Ahikam, a member of a distinguished though non-royal line, as the new secular administrator (Jer 39:14; 40:4–6). It would no doubt have been advantageous to Gedaliah to have the support of a religious figure of Jeremiah’s authority behind him, one whose oracles had so recently proved true. Also, Jeremiah had a long standing friendship with Gedaliah’s family.<sup>5</sup> There are two somewhat different accounts of Jeremiah’s status following the destruction of Jerusalem. In one passage (Jer 39:11–14) Nebuchadnezzar himself gives orders that Jeremiah is to be treated well. A trio of high officials sees to his release from the court of the guard in Zedekiah’s palace, where he had been imprisoned at the king’s orders (Jer 37:21), and entrusts him to Gedaliah. A few verses later (Jer 40:1–6), however, Jeremiah is at Ramah (8 km north of Jerusalem and

2 Though perhaps as long as thirty months; see Jack R. Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52: A New Translation and Commentary*, AB 21C (New York: Doubleday, 2004), 82–84.

3 Jer 21:7; 24:8; 27:12–13; 32:24; 38:2; 52:6; Lam 1:11, 19; 2:11–12, 19–21; 4:4–5, 8–11; 5:4, 9–11; Ezek 5:12, 15–17; 6:11–12; 7:15; 14:21. All biblical citations are from the NRSV.

4 Examples include: Yigal Shiloh, *Excavations at the City of David I: 1978–1982, Interim Report of the First Five Seasons*, Qedem 19 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1984), 29. Hillel Geva, *Jewish Quarter Excavations in the Old City of Jerusalem Conducted by Nahman Avigad, 1960–1982*. vol. 1, *Architecture and Stratigraphy: Areas A, W and X-2, Final Report* (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society and Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 2000), 158. Eilat Mazar and Benjamin Mazar, *Excavations in the South of the Temple Mount: The Ophel of Biblical Jerusalem*, Qedem 29 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1989), 21, 43.

5 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 92.

just 4 km south of TEN) where he is manacled and apparently awaiting deportation to Babylon along with other Judeans. There he is given the choice to go with Nebuzaradan to Babylon, where he will be well-treated, or to remain in Judah, either with Gedaliah at Mizpah or wherever he prefers. It is unclear if these are two separate or overlapping accounts of Jeremiah's fate. For example, the prophet might have been released initially, then subsequently rounded up for deportation, only to be released again. The accounts do agree on the core points that Jeremiah was initially in Babylonian custody, released by them, and eventually joined Gedaliah at Mizpah. Because he advocated surrender to the Babylonians it may be that Jeremiah's safety would have been an issue in the lawless conditions following the destruction of the Judean state, hence Nebuzaradan's advice to either journey with him to Babylon, or to stay with the Babylonian appointed officer in charge of what was left of Judah, where local security would be tighter since Gedaliah had at least a small force of Judean and Babylonian soldiers at his disposal (2 Kgs 25:3; Jer 40:7–8, 13; Jer 41:11, 16; Jer 41:3).

Once Jeremiah left the devastated city of Jerusalem he would have witnessed a countryside that had suffered greatly from the Babylonian attack. No doubt, he was also aware of the damage inflicted by the Babylonians on many other parts of the country (Jer 34:7). Many Iron Age IIC sites in Judah bear evidence of destruction or abandonment at the end of this period. One problem in interpreting the remains at these sites, however, is the chronology surrounding when they came to an end.<sup>6</sup> It is not known when the late Judean ceramics, as attested in Babylonian destruction strata like Lachish II and City of David 10, began to morph into the forms found in the Persian period of the fifth century.<sup>7</sup> Were the ceramic repertoires of, for example, 550 BC or 539 similar to those of 586, or had significant changes begun to emerge? Without a site with a destruction deposit that can confidently be dated to the mid-to-late-sixth century this is impossible to say. It is tempting to assume that all sites that came to an end with ceramics resembling those of the early sixth century, be it with clear

6 Avraham Faust, *Judah in the Neo-Babylonian Period: The Archaeology of Desolation*, ABS 18 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), 10–17. Oded Lipschits, *The Fall and Rise of Jerusalem: Judah Under Babylonian Rule* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2005), 192–97.

7 Oded Lipschits, "Shedding New Light on the Dark Years of the 'Exilic Period': New Studies, Further Elucidation, and Some Questions Regarding the Archaeology of Judah as an 'Empty Land,'" in *Interpreting Exile: Displacement and Deportation in Biblical and Modern Contexts*, ed. Brad Kelle, Frank R. Ames, Jacob L. Wright, AIL 10 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011), 64–65; Ephraim Stern, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible*, vol. 2, *The Assyrian, Babylonian and Persian Periods (732–332 B.C.E.)* (New York: Doubleday, 2001), 342–44.

evidence of destruction or not, were destroyed in the Babylonian campaign of 587–586. However, it is also possible that some of these sites were destroyed or abandoned sometime after the end of that campaign.<sup>8</sup> Some settlements facing imminent attack by the Babylonians may have been abandoned by their inhabitants, who fled as refugees to Ammon, Moab and Edom (Jer 40:11–12) or to other settlements in Judah or other neighboring regions. As the security once provided by the central administration in Jerusalem lapsed, sites in marginal areas may also have been abandoned as their inhabitants sought refuge in surviving, better defended Judean settlements or in neighboring lands. Some settlements, perhaps stripped of whatever garrisons they had to help shore up the defense of Jerusalem, may have fallen prey to non-Babylonian raiders at any time after their invasion had begun. Some sites may have gradually dwindled away once the royal support that helped maintain them was gone (e.g. sites in the Judean wilderness). Jeremiah would certainly have been well aware of the existence of such internally and externally displaced segments of society.

Despite the widespread ruin brought by the Babylonian invasion, there seem to have been some parts of the Judean kingdom that escaped destruction and which carried on much as before. For example, a pocket around Rogem Ganim in the Rephaim Valley southwest of Jerusalem seems to have survived from the Iron Age into the Persian period.<sup>9</sup> It likely supplied wine to the impressive palace-garden complex at Ramat Rahel, south of Jerusalem, which also seems to have survived the Babylonian invasion.<sup>10</sup>

The town of Mozah, west of Jerusalem, was a site used for the collection of agricultural resources, probably grain, in the late Iron Age, as attested by the storage pit facility found there.<sup>11</sup> No evidence for destruction was found at the site, and the existence of *M(W)SH* stamped jar handles, most likely marking goods produced at the royal estate at Mozah, found in their highest concentration at TEN, suggests that Mozah continued to provide such a function to the

8 Lipschits, "Shedding New Light," 57.

9 Raphael Greenberg and Gilad Cinamon, "Stamped and Incised Jar Handles from Rogem Ganim and Their Implications for the Political Economy of Jerusalem, Late 8th–Early 4th Centuries BCE," *TA* 33 (2006): 235, 239.

10 Lipschits, "Shedding New Light," 58–62.

11 Zvi Greenhut and Alon De-Groot, *Savage Excavations at Tel Moza: The Bronze and Iron Age Settlements and Later Occupations*, Israel Antiquities Authority Reports 39 (Jerusalem: Israel Antiquities Authority Reports, 2009), 219–27. There is some debate whether biblical Mozah should be located at Khirbet Mizzah/Tel Moza or nearby Khirbet Beit Mizza; see Israel Finkelstein and Yuval Gadot, "Mozah, Nepthtoah and Royal Estates in the Jerusalem Highlands," *Semitica et Classica* 8 (2015): 227–34.



new administrative center, at least in the period of the immediate aftermath of the Babylonian attack.

Besides these two areas west of Jerusalem, it has long been thought, based on a variety of texts that mention the continued existence of certain towns (Anathoth, Mizpah, Ramah) during and after the Babylonian assault, that the tribal area of Benjamin was largely spared the devastation visited upon Judah.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately, except for TEN, the archaeological data from the end of the Iron Age from the Benjaminite area is problematic for a variety of reasons. First is the general problem of the uncertainty surrounding the end/transition dates for late Iron Age ceramic forms already mentioned, which makes dating the final period of occupation at the Benjaminite sites impossible. The published survey data, however, does indicate a pronounced drop in settlements from the end of the Iron Age until the middle of the Persian period. Second, many of the sites in Benjamin were excavated many years ago (e.g. TEN), or were poorly excavated or published (e.g. Beitin, el-Jib) and so the available data is not always useful. Third, at some sites (e.g. el-Ful) the remains of the late Iron Age were paltry. Fourth, the identifications of some biblical toponyms remain uncertain (e.g. Anathoth).<sup>13</sup> Fifth, some important sites (e.g. er-Ram) have never been excavated. Finally, because most of the Benjaminite region is inside the West Bank today, little new archaeological data, other than from salvage excavations, is likely to become available. On the other hand, the *M(W)SH* impressions, most likely connected to the Babylonian administration, come only from the Benjaminite region and Jerusalem, suggesting continued occupation.<sup>14</sup> On the whole, and with the available evidence, it seems best to assume that occupation of some sort continued in Benjamin beyond the Babylonian invasion, though at some uncertain point many sites did come to an end.<sup>15</sup> The Babylonians would not have set up an administration at Mizpah if there was little to administer. In fact, if the area was spared by the Babylonians it may have even witnessed a temporary increase in population from refugees from other parts of the kingdom seeking shelter there. The area around Ramah,

12 Abraham Malamat, "The Last Wars of the Kingdom of Judah," *JNES* 9 (1950): 226–27.

13 Charles E. Carter, *The Emergence of Yehud in the Persian Period: A Social and Demographic Study*, JSOTSup 294 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1999), 163–64, notes the problems with the various sites suggested to be ancient Anathoth.

14 Jeffrey R. Zorn, Joseph Yellin, and John Hayes, "The *m(w)sh* Stamp Impressions and the Neo-Babylonian Period," *IEJ* 44 (1994): 161–83.

15 Contra Faust, *Desolation*, 209–31. See also Oded Lipschits, "The History of the Benjaminite Region under Babylonian Rule," *TA* 26 (1999): 155–90, and Lipschits, *Fall and Rise*, 237–49.

where those to be deported to Babylonia were rounded up, may have had the appearance of a temporary shanty town at this time.

There are multiple reasons why the Babylonians could have spared the Benjaminite area. Because of the long antipathy felt by the Benjaminites towards the Davidic dynasty it may be that they were more favorable to the Babylonian cause. It should not be forgotten that Jeremiah himself was from Anathoth of Benjamin (Jer 1:1). It may also be that the Babylonians, understanding that the siege of Jerusalem might be long, decided to spare this area in order to use it as a source of supplies during the siege. Finally, any administration set in place by the Babylonians would need some resources to function at all, and so the Benjaminite area might have been spared with that intention in mind.

Thus, in the time between the fall of Jerusalem and Jeremiah's arrival at Mizpah he would have witnessed, or been aware of, a socially disjointed and architecturally devastated landscape. Some settlements were destroyed and in complete ruins; some continued much as before; some were at the beginning of a downward spiral to abandonment. In addition, squatters and refugees likely huddled in some of the ruins or lived in caves and temporary clusters of tents and attempted to rebuild or carry on with their lives. These are the poor of the land mentioned in the biblical texts (Jer 39:10; 52:16; 2 Kgs 25:12).

The prophet was likely well-acquainted with Mizpah.<sup>16</sup> It was close to Jerusalem, not even a day's walk away, and was most likely visible to him at Ramah.<sup>17</sup> It had been Judah's bulwark against invasion from the north since the time of Asa in the early ninth century (according to 1 Kgs 15:22)<sup>18</sup> and was

16 For an in-depth survey of the Babylonian to Persian Period remains at TEN, see Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Tell en-Naşbeh and the Problem of the Material Culture of the 6th Century," in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 413–47. A briefer, popular version is Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Mizpah: Newly Discovered Stratum Reveals Judah's Other Capital," *BAR* 23.5 (1997): 28–38, 66.

17 Based on *Google Earth Pro* Viewshed and Elevation Profile analyses. See also Chester C. McCown, "The Archaeological Problem," in *Tell en-Naşbeh: Excavated Under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè*. vol. 1 *Archaeological and Historical Results*, ed. Chester C. McCown (Berkeley: Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion, 1947), 53.

18 Some scholars have dated the wall later than the time of Asa. Finkelstein would put the construction of the wall around the time of Hazael's invasion toward the end of the ninth century. See Israel Finkelstein, "The Great Wall of Tell en-Naşbeh (Mizpah), The First Fortifications in Judah, and 1 Kings 15:16–22," *VT* 62 (2012): 25–27. Katz dated the wall to the eighth century. See Haya Katz, "A Note on the Date of the 'Great Wall' of Tell en-Naşbeh," *TA* 25 (1998): 131–33. Na'aman even attempted to date the wall to the

associated with traditions concerning Samuel (1 Sam 7, 10). As Jeremiah approached Mizpah from the south he would have used the road which followed the spine of the central hill country and connected Jerusalem with Shechem and points farther north. As he neared the site he would have first seen the town's impressive fortifications. The offset-inset plastered stone town wall at TEN averaged about 4.4 m in width. In places, however, the total width of the fortifications could reach ca. 14 m (at some of the towers and including the external stone revetment and sections of a dry moat which were probably opportunistically used quarry sites).<sup>19</sup> By comparison, the wall at Dor (8.5 hectares) was only 2 m wide; that at Megiddo (10 hectares; a similar offset-inset) was about the same width as the wall at TEN; the wall at Lachish II (8 hectares) was about 3.7 m; only Jerusalem (ca. 60 hectares) at the end of the Iron Age had significantly thicker walls (e.g. the Broad Wall at 7 m).<sup>20</sup> Despite its modest size (3.2 hectares), TEN was thus one of the most strongly fortified settlements in Judah. It is likely that these formidable defenses recommended the town to the Babylonians as the most suitable site for Gedaliah's rump administration.

From the exterior Mizpah would have looked much the same as it had for centuries, though there were probably huts and tents dotting the area around it, temporary dwellings for recently displaced residents, refugees, new citizens, and Babylonian soldiers. Jeremiah would have passed by the town on the east and approached its gate system, located on the northeast side of the mound, probably from the north (Fig. 4.1.1). A low saddle connected the hill on which the site stood with the Ramallah ridge to the north, probably the primary reason for originally locating the gate at that point.<sup>21</sup> The entrance to the Stratum 3 town

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Babylonian period: Nadav Na'aman, "The 'Conquest of Canaan' in the Book of Joshua and in History," in *From Nomadism to Monarchy: Archaeological and Historical Aspect of Early Israel*, ed. Israel Finkelstein and Nadav Na'aman (Jerusalem: Yad Izhak Ben-Zvi and Israel Exploration Society, 1994), 224, n. 13.

- 19 Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Tell en-Naşbeh: A Re-evaluation of the Architecture and Stratigraphy of the Early Bronze Age, Iron Age and Later Periods" (PhD diss., University of California, Berkeley, 1993), 319–32, summarizes the data on the offset-inset wall. The original TEN report also describes the fortifications; see Chester C. McCown, "The Defenses of Tell en-Naşbeh," in *Tell en-Naşbeh: Excavated Under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè*, vol. 1, *Archaeological and Historical Results*, ed. Chester C. McCown (Berkeley: Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion, 1947), 191–94.
- 20 Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 331. Ephraim Stern, "Stratigraphical Summary of Architectural Remains," in *Excavations at Dor, Final Report*. vol. 1A, *Areas A and C: Introduction and Stratigraphy*, ed. Ephraim Stern et al., Qedem Reports 1 (Jerusalem: Institute of Archaeology, Hebrew University of Jerusalem, 1995), 29.
- 21 McCown, "Archaeological Problem," 53.

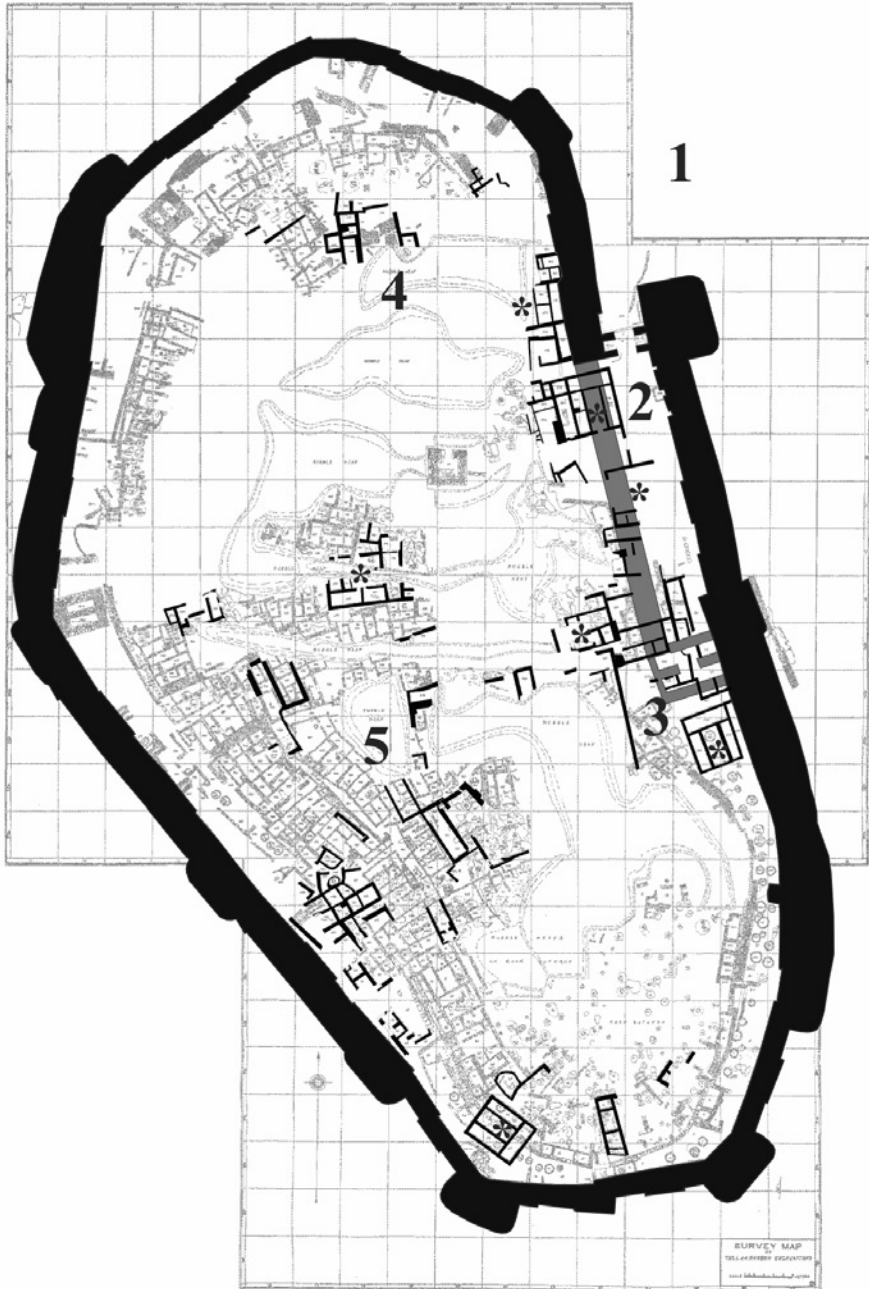


FIGURE 4.1 *Map of TEN Stratum 2. Black walls belong to Stratum 2. The grey sections are the four-chamber gate and the western wall of the inner-outer gate complex of Stratum 3 dismantled during construction of Stratum 2. Pale architecture elements are primarily remains of Stratum 3. Numbers indicate points mentioned in connection with Jeremiah in the text. For example Fig 4.1.1 in the text below refers to area 1 on the plan. An \* indicates a four-room house. Grid squares are 10 m on a side.*

had been protected by a massive inner-outer gate complex.<sup>22</sup> The outer gate was formed by overlapping stretches of the town wall coming from the north and the south and consisted of two chambers on either side. Each chamber contained benches, as did the small plaza outside. The eastern gate chamber was part of a massive tower which, including revetments, measured about 17 m by 14 m. The entire outer gate was about 30 m wide and 14 m deep. The inner gate was of the four-chamber type. Not including the town wall, which it abutted on the east, it was about 14 m wide by about 10 m deep. The two gates were connected by a passage about 65 m long and 12 m wide. On the east this passage was protected by the town wall. On the west a wall of similar width connected the two gates. The entire gate complex was about 90 m long and 25 m wide (including the revetment) and occupied an area of about 0.25 hectares, amounting to about 8% of the total area of the town.

When the prophet entered the town through its two-chamber gate he would have encountered his first major surprise (Fig. 4.1.2). While the two-chamber gate appeared much as it always had, the area of the rest of the gate complex was radically changed. First, most of the wall which had connected the western sides of the two gates had been removed down to near its foundations, leaving only a few courses intact. In the area behind where the wall had stood the prophet would have seen the 5 m high bedrock scarp which stood just to the west of this wall. The outer gate had been built in an area where there was a large expanse of flat bedrock. The scarp began just south of the outer gate and stretched for about 48 m to the south. Because this scarp started just inside the outer gate, and continued south, the gate complex had to be very long; there would have been no easy way to ascend into the town over the scarp at any point before the area in which the four-chamber gate was built. After the removal of most of the western wall the entire area from the scarp on the west to the town wall on the east, a space of 25–30 m in width, had been leveled with debris; a variety of new buildings were under construction in this newly created open area.

Just inside the two-chamber gate he would have noticed a four-room house going up (Figs. 4.1.2 and 4.2).<sup>23</sup> The front three rooms had already been completed and the back broad room was still being built. The central room lay directly above the gate complex's old western wall and utilized it as the foundation for its two side walls. A small part of the town wall between the rear

22 Jeffrey R. Zorn, "An Inner and Outer Gate Complex at Tell en-Naşbeh," *BASOR* 307 (1997): 53–66, describes the gate complex in detail. See also the discussion in McCown, "Defenses," 195–201.

23 Building 110.01 in Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 538–45.



FIGURE 4.2 *Four-room house (Building no.01) inside two-chamber gate (in background).*

wall of the house and the gate was being reused as a stairway to provide access to the center of the town. The house itself was impressive, being about 13 m long by 10 m wide and compared favorably even to houses that once stood in Jerusalem itself.<sup>24</sup> The walls were substantial and often included stones of near ashlar quality. Two of the rooms flanking the central space had stone cobbled floors. The pillars used in the eastern and half the western wall of the central space were imposing stone monoliths whose quarrying would have involved much effort; these were not the sort of pillars built up of rough field stones so common in typical Judean homes. An annex expanded the house right up to the rock scarp. In the annex a cistern was being hewn and a set of stairs to the building's second story was under construction. Its proximity to the gate would suggest to Jeremiah that the building might have some official function, rather than being a simple dwelling. The prophet would have seen several other buildings under construction south of the inner gate, including another four-room house just south of the one adjacent to the gate.<sup>25</sup> Jeremiah may have puzzled over why such a large part of the town's defenses had been dismantled. In all its long history Mizpah had never been captured and destroyed, despite its prominent position on the main invasion route from the north; indeed, some considered the eastern Michmas pass a more viable means of approaching Jerusalem

24 E.g., the "House of Ahïel" in Area G of the City of David. Shiloh, *Excavations*, 18.

25 Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 591–611.

(Isa 10:27b–32) than the road past Mizpah. These formidable defenses were the primary reason for its long inviolate status. There were at least two factors that likely contributed to the decision to take down so much of the inner-outer gate complex. The most important may have been the need for additional space for larger buildings that a new, though small, administrative center would require. A second factor may have been Babylonian concerns that a too well-fortified center might form the nucleus for yet another Judean revolt, as would, in fact, happen.

Because of the rock scarp Jeremiah would not have been able to view or gain access to the interior of the town, so he would have proceeded south to the area of the four-chamber gate, the original final entry point into the town (Fig. 4.1.3).<sup>26</sup> Here, too, a surprise awaited him. The gate had been removed down to its foundations and walls for some sort of structure were being built over it. Just beyond the area where the gate had stood, where there had once been a small plaza fronting the gate, another four-room house was being raised; the back wall of its rear broad room was only a few meters from the old gate.<sup>27</sup> This building would have effectively blocked direct access to the gate if the gate were still standing. The house was of almost identical size and quality of construction to the one south of the two-chamber gate, but it was still not finished and the prophet could not guess its role.

On previous visits to Mizpah Jeremiah would have become familiar with a unique aspect of the town's layout. The settlement's original fortifications were made up of the rear walls of the broad back rooms of the dwellings arranged around the periphery of the town.<sup>28</sup> This unprepossessing defensive line would not have been adequate to the task once Mizpah had become Judah's main strongpoint against attacks from the north. It was said (1 Kgs 15:16–22) that, in a war between King Asa of Judah and King Baasha of Israel, Baasha had attempted to seize Ramah and fortify it, effectively moving the border to the very outskirts of Jerusalem. When Baasha was forced to withdraw because of a threat along his northern border Asa was said to have used the materials assembled by Baasha to fortify both Mizpah, which guarded the main road to Jerusalem, and also Geba, which likewise defended the Michmas pass. Instead

26 Zorn, "Inner and Outer Gate"; McCown, "Defenses," 199–201.

27 Building 145.02. Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 710–14.

28 Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 312–16. Thomas L. McClellan, "Town Planning at Tell en-Naşbeh," *ZDPV* 100 (1984): 54–55. McCown, "Defenses," 191. Chester C. McCown, "The Buildings of Tell en-Naşbeh," in *Tell en-Naşbeh: Excavated Under the Direction of the Late William Frederic Badè*, vol. 1, *Archaeological and Historical Results*, ed. Chester C. McCown (Berkeley: Palestine Institute of Pacific School of Religion, 1947), 222.

of constructing the new fortifications over any part of the old town of Mizpah, a move which would have likely outraged its Benjaminite inhabitants, the new fortifications were built down slope 5–10 m from the original town.<sup>29</sup> The sharply sloping space between the old wall and the new wall, the intramural space, was filled up with debris to create a level and usable surface. Instead of leaving the intramural space empty, the kings of Judah had put it to a special use. A series of at least sixty-one stone lined silos had been sunk into the debris around the southern half of the site.<sup>30</sup> Because the town sloped downward from south to north no silos had been dug in the northern half of the intramural area; water that flowed down through the narrow streets of the town would have emptied into that area and ruined any grain or other products stored in the silos.<sup>31</sup> Instead, a series of eight drains had been constructed in the northern intramural area, nine if the drain through the gate complex is included, to channel this runoff through the offset-inset wall and out of the town entirely. Jeremiah would have expected to see a dozen or so such storage silos south of the gate, but they had been entirely filled in and covered over. Indeed, the new four-room house under construction just south of the gate was being built over at least one of these old silos. The filling in of the silos would also have puzzled Jeremiah. These silos had the capacity to hold enough grain to feed hundreds of people for months. In the past they could have been used to feed the small number of soldiers permanently garrisoned at Mizpah, or as food for other royal workers or officers, or for trade, or even as a reserve food supply for Jerusalem. It seemed odd that Gedaliah's new administration would not have continued to use these storage facilities for its own needs.

As Jeremiah turned west from the area of the old gate complex to enter the town of Mizpah proper he would have experienced his greatest surprise of all. The town, as he had known it, was completely gone, almost. Like most of the Judean hill towns with which the prophet was familiar, Mizpah was built on a limestone ridge which eroded from the summit in a series of natural terraces. Because of their construction on such hills these settlements had roundish

29 Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 319–32, discusses offset-inset wall in detail.

30 This is the total number that was preserved; it is perhaps possible that there were a few more that did not survive. Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 251–257, discusses these silos in detail. Note that the excavators called narrow storage chambers cut into bedrock "silos," while stone-lined storage chambers cut into fill were called "bins."

31 How water was manipulated and stored is covered in Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Tell en-Nasbeh's Contributions to Understanding Iron Age Israelite Water Systems," in *As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah ...: The Tell en-Nasbeh Excavations after 85 Years*, ed. Jeffrey R. Zorn and Aaron J. Brody, GSANE 9 (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2014), 225–79. Also Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 259–85.



outlines. The main road(s), really narrow alleys, followed these contours and formed one or more rings around the site.<sup>32</sup> The hill on which Mizpah was built was shaped roughly like a broad bean. The band of houses on the periphery of the site would be downhill from the road, while those on the other side of the road would be uphill or on the same level as the road. If the settlement were large enough there would be another ring road higher up the slope. In order to provide access to blocks of dwellings in the center of the hill, and to provide quicker access from one side of the town to the other, there might be crossroads constructed perpendicular to the slope of the hill. Mizpah had likely had seven to nine such crossroads. The roads themselves were usually dirt packed and averaged 1.7 m in width.<sup>33</sup>

The Mizpah that Jeremiah had known before was, except for its massive fortifications, a typical crowded Iron Age rural agricultural town.<sup>34</sup> Inside the defenses it was packed with around 200 dwellings (there were also some structures and agricultural installations just beyond the town walls) and probably had a population of 900–1000.<sup>35</sup> The great majority of these houses were of the three-room type (similar to four-room houses, but with only two long front rooms) which were about 60 m<sup>2</sup> in area, though there were also a few four-room (only a little larger than the three-room type), two-room, and non-standard plan homes. Most of these structures had partial second stories and courtyards. A number of structures had contained presses used for extracting olive oil. Many, but not all, of the dwellings had cisterns fed either by rain diverted in from the building's roofs or by drains from an adjacent road. Extended families in nearby dwellings likely shared such water resources since not all such houses had a cistern.<sup>36</sup> Over the centuries these houses had often seen internal rearrangements of rooms in order to accommodate expanding and contracting families.

32 The road system is discussed in Zorn "Re-evaluation," 341–59, and in McClellan, "Town Planning," 59–60, 62, 64. The notion that a ring-road plan was typical of Iron Age Israelite settlements was discussed in Yigal Shiloh, "Elements in the Development of Town Planning in the Israelite City," *IEJ* 28 (1978): 36–51.

33 There were exceptions where certain roads helped channel water and were stone paved. See Zorn, "Water Use," 239–40, 244–45; McClellan, "Town Planning," 59, 64–65.

34 The Iron Age II town of Mizpah with which Jeremiah would have been familiar is Stratum 3 at TEN. The new town he is seeing under construction is Stratum 2 of the Babylonian to Persian Periods. These two strata are characterized in Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 114–85. Short summaries can be found in Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Naṣbeh, Tell en-," *NEAEHL* 3:1098–1102.

35 Jeffrey R. Zorn, "Estimating the Population Size of Ancient Settlements: Methods, Problems, Solutions and a Case Study," *BASOR* 295 (1994): 31–48.

36 Zorn, "Water Use," 265–71.

What the prophet now saw was a vastly different townscape. Scores of houses, especially at the northern end of the site, had been knocked down, leveled out, and built over with new structures. To the west of the inner gate a long enclosure wall was under construction.<sup>37</sup> In other parts of the town the old houses had been destroyed, debris was being moved about by peasant workers, and new buildings were under construction. In still other parts of the site some houses still stood, apparently awaiting demolition, while other houses were in the process of being torn down. Because of the height of the debris left from the demolition of the old houses, and the widespread leveling, much of the natural stepped appearance of the site had been smoothed over, leaving much larger, flatter stretches of ground than had existed before. The new structures he saw taking shape took advantage of the wider expanses and were much larger and more widely spaced than those he knew from the crowded old town with its narrow alleys. He saw a number of four-room houses under construction; these too were virtually identical in size and construction material to those he had seen in the old gate area.<sup>38</sup> However, there were also larger buildings scattered around. It would have been clear to the prophet that the cramped and often squalid homes of peasant farmers that had existed at Mizpah during the centuries of the Judean kingdom would not have been appropriate to the needs of Gedaliah's administration. So, these had been demolished to make way for structures more suited to the needs of the new regime. So many buildings had already been demolished that it was clear that the work must have begun while Jerusalem was still under siege. The Babylonian intent had been to destroy Jerusalem, both as a punishment to the rebellious kingdom, and to serve as a warning to others in the area. Still, Nebuchadnezzar would have known that the area required some administration, and that that administration would need its own functioning infrastructure in place once Jerusalem was captured and destroyed. Hence, the work at Mizpah had been underway for some time. Jeremiah must have wondered where all the farmers had gone now that their town had been appropriated by the new Babylonian sponsored regime. Ironically some number of the laborers leveling the old houses had probably been residents of the town. Most of those who would live in the emerging town would have been part of the new administration. Many of the buildings under construction would have had official functions, such as for storage, and there would have been many fewer buildings for the old inhabitants. Since these farmers were tied to ancestral lands around Mizpah some of them likely moved to nearby villages, while others built houses just beyond the

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37 Zorn, "Problems," 418–19, 424.

38 Zorn, "Problems," 419–27.

town walls. Perhaps some would have jobs with the new administration and reside in the new structures inside the town.

Near the northern end of the town (Fig. 4.1.4) a large building, much larger than any of the new four-room buildings, had already been completed (over 20 m long preserved remains). Its walls were substantial. It consisted of a series of rooms (at least a few paved) arranged around a large open stone-paved central courtyard (7.5 m wide and over 11 m long). The structure did not follow the plan of a typical Judean house, or even that of the small palaces and administrative residencies of Judah.<sup>39</sup> Jeremiah would soon learn that this was a foreign building style imported from Babylonia and that it was the residence of Gedaliah. It was likely at this building that Gedaliah met the military commanders, such as Ishmael and Johanan (Jer 40:7–11), who were still operating in the countryside and had not yet surrendered, and attempted to secure their allegiance and to reconcile them to Judah's new position in the Babylonian empire. No doubt Gedaliah's oath (Jer 40:9) to serve as a mediator between these men and the Babylonians was intended to assure them that there would be no reprisals. Instead of demanding that they relinquish control of the towns they held he ceded them to these officers and allowed them to retain whatever food resources they had harvested soon after Jerusalem's fall (Jerusalem fell in August, and these were the crops still to be harvested), instead of turning them over to his administration. Similarly, the text says that the refugees who had fled to surrounding countries returned and were able to bring in a late-in-the-year harvest, but it does not mention Gedaliah taking any of that for his administration (Jer 40:12). Perhaps he relied on crops that had been harvested in Benjamin during the siege, and also on royal estates (e.g. Mozah) and depots (e.g. Ramat Raḥel) that had not been destroyed, until more of the local agricultural infrastructure was repaired. Probably this building housed a few Babylonian soldiers (Jer 41:3), royal women (Jer 41:10), eunuchs, and some Judean soldiers (Jer 41:16). The text does not specify where in Mizpah Jeremiah (and Baruch) resided, with Gedaliah himself, or in a house of his own.

It seems clear that the events described above took place shortly after the fall of Jerusalem. What is not so clear is the date of Ishmael's assassination plot (below). The coup is said to have occurred in the seventh month (Jer 41:1), but the year is not given. Jerusalem fell in the fourth month, so the text seems to imply that the attack on Gedaliah took place only three months later. However, the third Babylonian deportation (Jer 52:30) and the Babylonian attack on Ammon reported by Josephus,<sup>40</sup> which were surely reprisals for Ishmael's

39 Zorn, "Problems," 423–24, Fig. 7. Building 74.01 in Zorn "Re-evaluation," 424–27.

40 *J.A.* 10.9.7.



FIGURE 4.3  
*M(W)SH stamp impression.*

actions instigated by the Ammonite king Baalis (Jer 40:14), took place five years after the fall of Jerusalem. It does not seem likely that Nebuchadnezzar would wait so long to inflict such punishment and that instead the biblical author telescoped events that took place over several years into a much shorter time span.<sup>41</sup> Probably the events of Jer 40:13 and following took place three or four years after those of Jer 40:12. If this chronology is correct, then any prophecies delivered by Jeremiah for this span have not been recorded. Were these quiet times which required no such oracles?

In the years following Jeremiah's arrival at Mizpah he would have likely seen the rest of the old town leveled and final new structure erected by Gedaliah's administration. At least six of the large four-room house buildings had been constructed, along with several other structures,<sup>42</sup> including one with long magazine-like rooms used (probably) for storage (Fig. 4.5).<sup>43</sup> A large number of jars brought into these storage facilities would have been stamped with *M(W)SH* impressions (Fig. 4.3), indicating that they had been brought from the old royal estate at Mozah.<sup>44</sup> Other jars may have been stamped with Lion impressions (though not all the storage jars were necessarily stamped).<sup>45</sup> Because the new administrative center contained several large public buildings and larger individual dwellings (four-room houses), and because these buildings were more dispersed from each other and did not often share walls, the population was smaller than the old crowded town, probably no more than 400–500 at

41 Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 114–15.

42 Zorn, "Problems," 426, 428, Figs. 3–6.

43 Zorn, "Problems," 424, 426, Fig. 8.

44 The vast majority of jar handles with this impression were found at TEN, signifying a special role for this site in the use of these jars. Zorn, Yellen and Hayes, "m(w)sh," 164–67.

45 Lipschits, "Shedding New Light," 62–63.



FIGURE 4.4  
*Rear corner of Mesopotamian-style bathtub-shaped coffin.*

most.<sup>46</sup> Among the towns inhabitants were a contingent of Babylonian soldiers, and perhaps some officials who either resided there, or visited periodically. This is clear not only from biblical references (Jer 40:10, 41:3; 2 Kgs 25:24–25), but from artifacts such as inscriptions (Fig. 4.5), ceramic coffins (Fig. 4.4), a bronze beaker, and “Skythian” style arrowheads found at the site.<sup>47</sup> Some of these

46 Zorn, “Estimating,” 44.

47 Zorn, “Problems,” 433–37, 439–40. Especially intriguing is the fragment of a bronze circlet bearing a dedicatory cuneiform inscription (Fig. 4.5). See the contrasting interpretations in Stephanie Dalley, “Gods from North-eastern and North-western Arabia in Cuneiform Texts from the First Sealand Dynasty, and a Cuneiform Inscription from Tell en-Naşbeh, c.1500 BC,” *AAE* 24 (2013): 177–85, and David Vanderhooft and Wayne Horowitz, “The Cuneiform Inscription from Tell en-Naşbeh: The Demise of an Unknown King,” *TA* 29 (2002): 318–27. For details about the “bathtub” shaped coffins see Jeffrey R. Zorn, “Mesopotamian-style Ceramic ‘Bathtub’ Coffins from Tell en-Naşbeh,” *TA* (1993): 216–24; also Jeffrey R. Zorn, “More on Mesopotamian Burial Practices in Ancient Israel,” *IEJ* 47 (1997): 214–19. Recently the suggestion has been made that some such tubs were used for the fulling process; e.g. Laura Mazow, “The ‘Bathtub Coffin’ from Tel Qitaf: A Re-Examination of Its Context and Function,” *PEQ* 146 (2014): 31–39. Note, however, that many such tubs, both in the Levant and Mesopotamia, are found in funerary contexts, and even containing human remains; moreover, a number of bell-shape burial jars, with parallels in Mesopotamia, have also been found in the Levant. On the beaker, see Jeffrey R. Zorn, “The Date of a Bronze Vase from Tell en-Naşbeh,” *TA* (1996): 209–12.



FIGURE 4.5 *Fragment of bronze circlet bearing a partial dedicatory cuneiform inscription perhaps of the second millennium Sea Land king Ayadara (galama).*

objects could have been used by the Babylonians themselves, or by Judeans aping Mesopotamian fashions. Jeremiah would have seen little evidence of high end foreign trade. Most of the Judean elite who participated in such trade were either dead or in exile. It is possible that some trade continued with Ammon, as suggested by pottery, and perhaps by the continued Ammonite interest in Judean affairs.<sup>48</sup>

A thorny issue that would have confronted Gedaliah was whether to build a temple to Yahweh at Mizpah to replace the destroyed Jerusalem temple. Certainly his administration would have felt the need to have a nearby location in which to carry on the cult of the national god. In addition, despite the reforming efforts of Hezekiah and Josiah, Judah had a long history of cult places to Yahweh outside of the Jerusalem temple (e.g. the temple at Arad) and so a temple to Yahweh at Mizpah might not have seemed unusual. On the other hand, any surviving members of the Jerusalem priesthood, who had been attempting to consolidate cultic power in their own hands, probably took umbrage at the thought of setting up a temple at Mizpah.

A variety of texts link cultic activities with Mizpah, though the historicity of most of them is open to debate. In Judges it is the site of a pan-tribal oath

48 Aaron J. Brody, "Transjordanian Commerce with Northern Judah in the Iron IIC – Persian Period: Ceramic Indicators, Interregional Interaction, and Modes of Exchange at Tell en-Nasbeh, in *As for me, I will dwell at Mizpah ...*": *The Tell en-Nasbeh Excavations after 85 Years*, ed. Jeffrey R. Zorn and Aaron J. Brody, *GSANE* 9 (Piscataway: Gorgias, 2014), 59–93.

ceremony (21:5, 8); in stories of the prophet Samuel it is a site of prayer, fasting and a water ceremony (1 Sam 7:5–6); in the eighth century a Mizpah (though it is not at all clear that the Mizpah of Benjamin is intended) was a snare for priests (Hos 5:1); in the Hellenistic era it is again a site for prayer and fasting (1 Macc 3:46). None of these texts, however, mention a permanent cult site or any sacrificial ritual at Mizpah. Only one text (Jer 41:4–6), which mentions northern pilgrims on their way to the temple of the Lord with grain and incense offerings, might suggest that Gedaliah had a temple built at Mizpah. Unfortunately the text does not precisely locate the actual site of the temple, and it is possible, since the text mentions no animals for sacrifice, that the intent of the pilgrims was to make an offering at the site of the ruined Jerusalem temple. Certainly the debate in Gedaliah's time over whether to build a temple at Mizpah was as contentious as modern scholarly debate over whether one existed.<sup>49</sup> As a priest, and as a prophet who had sometimes questioned the role of the temple and its priesthood (Jer 7:1–14; 20:1–6; 23:11; 26: 1–12; 32:34), Jeremiah would likely have been in the thick of such a debate.

Ishmael's plot against Gedaliah took place in the seventh month (September–October) of probably either 584 or 583, likely in association with the Festival of Booths (Lev 23:33–43; Num 29:12–40) which correlates with the arrival of the northern pilgrims mentioned later in the story (Jer 41:4–8). Apparently Gedaliah had invited Ishmael and some of his men to feast with him, presumably at Gedaliah's residency mentioned above. None of the other officers mentioned earlier seem to have been invited. Perhaps this special invitation is connected with Ishmael's status as a member of the Davidic line. A great deal has been written in the last decade about the role of feasting in ancient Israel and the Near East in general.<sup>50</sup> Josephus provides a colorful description of this event (though whether based on any real knowledge of the occasion, or

49 E.g., the contrasting opinions in Lundbom, *Jeremiah 37–52*, 117–18, and Joseph Blenkinsopp, “Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period,” in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, ed. Oded Lipschits and Joseph Blenkinsopp (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2003), 97–99, who argues that the old Israelite temple at Bethel still functioned and could have served Gedaliah's needs.

50 For some recent literature with bibliography, see Avraham Faust, “Pottery and Society in Iron Age Philistia: Feasting, Identity, Economy, and Gender,” *BASOR* 373 (2015): 167–98; Deirdre N. Fulton, et. al., “Feasting in Paradise: Feast Remains from the Iron Age Palace of Ramat Raḥel and Their Implications,” *BASOR* 374 (2015): 29–48; Justin Lev-Tov and Kevin McGeough, “Examining Feasting in Late Bronze Age Syro-Palestine Through Ancient Texts and Bones,” in *The Archaeology of Food and Identity*, ed. Kathryn C. Twiss, Center for Archaeological Investigations Occasional Paper 34 (Carbondale, IL: Center for Archaeological Investigations, 2007), 85–111; Sharon Zuckerman, “... Slaying oxen and

fashioned from his own knowledge of such practices in his own time, is unknown), with lavish food, gift giving, and much drinking; so much drinking that Ishmael committed his murder after Gedaliah had passed out.<sup>51</sup> No doubt Gedaliah, who was only a member of an important scribal family, by hosting this feast, was hoping to display his preeminent position in the remnant Judean society while also cementing some sort of reciprocal alliance with Ishmael, who, as a member of the Davidic family, could provide significant support to Gedaliah's regime. As the one hosting the feast Gedaliah showed his dominant position, but by excluding the other important officials in this small region he was elevating Ishmael above them. No doubt the meal included sumptuous amounts of local cuisine, but perhaps not imports.<sup>52</sup> Ishmael and his men are said to have undertaken a general massacre of the populace during this Mizpah feast (Jer 41:3), but later on he is able to leave the town with a significant number of captives (Jer 41:10, 13–14, 16). Jeremiah's location during all of these events is unknown, even whether he was at the feast itself.

The text states that the next day Ishmael lured eighty pilgrims who were apparently on their way to the Jerusalem temple (see above) into Mizpah and murdered all but ten of them (Jer 41:4–8). No reason is offered for this action. The text relates that Ishmael then had all the bodies dumped into an especially large cistern, said to be the work of King Asa in the early ninth century. This is at least seventy of the pilgrims, along with some unspecified number of Mizpah's inhabitants. In the approximately two thirds of the site that was excavated, no monumental water system, such as found at some other Israelite sites, was uncovered.<sup>53</sup> However, the bedrock of TEN was honeycombed with many rock-cut installations, including tombs, silos, and cisterns. In the areas

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Killing Sheep, Eating Flesh and Drinking Wine...': Feasting in Late Bronze Age Hazor," *PEQ* 139 (2007): 186–204.

51 *Ant.* 10.169

52 Carol Meyers, "Menu: Royal Repasts and Social Class in Biblical Israel," in *Feasting in the Archaeology and Texts of the Bible and the Ancient Near East*, ed. Peter Altmann and Janling Fu (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2014), 136–39, 144–47, also includes additional bibliography on feasting in Israel and the ancient Near East.

53 Yigal Shiloh, "Underground Water Systems in the Land of Israel in the Iron Age," in *The Architecture of Ancient Israel*, ed. Aharon Kempinski and Ronny Reich (Jerusalem: Israel Exploration Society, 1991), 275–93. The rarer use of בּוֹר as "pit" seems less likely. No large pit was found at the site, unless some section of the moat uncovered at points outside the offset-inset wall is intended. However, this moat was only found in a few locations and is most likely an opportunistic reuse of stone quarries used to bolster the town's defenses. Zorn, "Re-evaluation," 323–24, 327. Cf. Dag Oredsson, *Moats in Ancient Palestine* (Stokholm: Almqvist and Wiksell International, 2000), 121–23.



excavated 104 cisterns were uncovered.<sup>54</sup> In a sample area in the southwest corner of the site, fifteen cisterns were well enough recorded to allow for computation of estimates of their capacities. The average capacity of these cisterns was about 18 m<sup>3</sup>, or 18,000 liters. However, there was great variability in cistern size. For example, the standard deviation was 16.4; this means that two thirds of the cisterns fell within a range of between about 2–34 m<sup>3</sup>. The smallest cistern was 2.2 m<sup>3</sup> while the largest in that area, Cistern 159, was 57.5 m<sup>3</sup>. Cistern 285, at the north end of the site, was even larger, approximately 85 m<sup>3</sup>. Were any of these cisterns large enough to hold the bodies of Ishmael's victims?<sup>55</sup> Determining the area occupied by a human body is difficult because it is not a simple, regular shape. Also, filling a cistern with bodies would require that space be left inside the cistern for a person (or perhaps more than one person) to stand and arrange and stack the bodies. The size of a cistern mouth would preclude simply dumping the bodies. They would pile up and just fill the area immediately below the cistern mouth. Some cisterns were two or more meters deep, and so stacking the bodies high would have been difficult. As a result, the entire capacity of any cistern might not have been used. However, it is possible to give a rough idea of the maximum number of bodies that might be fit into a cistern.

The human body is primarily made up of water, so the volume of a human body roughly matches the volume of a similar weight of water.<sup>56</sup> One kilogram of water occupies one liter of volume. For the purposes of this hypothetical example, a weight of 60 kg covering both males and females is assumed, so about 60 liters.<sup>57</sup> There are 1000 liters in a cubic meter. So, the hypothetical 60 kg Israelite would occupy 0.06 m<sup>3</sup>, but this does not take into account the shape of a human body. A study which estimated the volumes of mass burials from the Holocaust, based on da Vinci's Vitruvian Man, arrived at 3.3 f<sup>3</sup> or 0.09 m<sup>3</sup>

54 See Zorn, "Water Use," 255–71, for cisterns and water storage.

55 As far as the author is aware, no one before now has attempted to answer this morbid question.

56 Actually, because of the presence of fat, the volume is somewhat different depending on various factors, but dividing weight in kg by 1.05 kg/liter gives a more accurate volume. See Harry J. Krzywicki and Kenneth S.K. Chen, "Human Body Density and Fat of an Adult Male Population as Measured by Water Displacement," *American Journal of Clinical Nutrition* 29 (1967): 305–10.

57 A study of the human remains from Pompeii estimated average male weights at 66 kg and females at 50 kg. Maciek Henneberg and Renata J. Henneberg, "Reconstructing Medical Knowledge in Ancient Pompeii from the Hard Evidence of Bones and Teeth," in *Homo Faber: Studies on Nature, Technology and Science at the Time of Pompeii*, ed. J. Renn, G Castagnetti (Rome: L'Ermadi Bretschneider), 182–84.

as the volume of an adult male.<sup>58</sup> Using this higher figure, Ishmael's minimum seventy victims would have occupied an area of at least 6.3 m<sup>3</sup>. A study of the deposition of sheep and goat carcasses in mass burials suggests about seven human bodies per cubic meter, or about 10 m<sup>3</sup> total.<sup>59</sup> An additional 2–3 m<sup>3</sup> should be added to accommodate a person standing in the cistern positioning the bodies. It seems that a cistern of around 9–13 m<sup>3</sup> would provide ample space for Ishmael to dispose of seventy victims. Even if the number of victims were twice this amount a number of the larger cisterns at TEN could have handled the corpses. Of course, this is a rough approximation, but it does give some sense that the cistern in question need not have been inordinately large compared to other cisterns at the site.

Soon after Ishmael's failed coup Jeremiah's time at Mizpah came to an end when he was dragged off to Egypt (Jer 43:6–7). However, Mizpah likely continued as the administrative center for Judah until some of those who had been sent into exile returned from Babylonia and reinstated Jerusalem as the Judean capital. Mizpah remained an important settlement well into the Persian period,<sup>60</sup> which is clear not only from biblical references (Neh 3:7, 15, 19) but also from the various Persian period finds that come from the site (e.g. mid-fifth century storage jars from the house inside the outer gate, *Yehud* stamp impressions, wedge-and-circle impressed pottery, imported Greek wares and so on).<sup>61</sup> Unfortunately, the texts do not say who Gedaliah's successor was and are equally silent about whether Jeremiah had any contact with Judah after he was carried off to Egypt. The rest of this tale, accordingly, is shrouded in silence, even though the existence of a vibrant Jewish community in Egypt centuries later, especially in Ptolemaic times, is well-known.<sup>62</sup>

58 Charles A. Bay, "8.0 – Treblinka: Reconstruction of the Death Camp," <http://www.shoah-treblinka.com/Website%20Treblinka%20New/DeathCampInternet/DeathCampNew.html>.

59 C.P. Young, P.A. Marsland and J.W.N. Smith, *Foot and Mouth Disease Epidemic. Disposal of Culled Stock by Burial: Guidance and Reference Data for the Protection of Controlled Waters* (Bristol: Environment Agency, 2001), 16. The figures in Table 4.2 indicate a density of about 424 kg/m<sup>3</sup>. This is about seven 60 kg humans.

60 Oded Lipschits and David S. Vanderhooft, *The Yehud Stamp Impressions: A Corpus of Inscribed Impressions from the Persian and Hellenistic Periods in Judah* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2011), 45, 256. It is difficult to determine from the text (Jer 43:4–7) how many people fled to Egypt; v. 6 could be construed to be just those at Mizpah, but the rest of the passage suggests a larger number.

61 Zorn, "Problems," 441, 443–44; Lipschits and Vanderhooft, *Yehud*, 15–17, 19, 21, 42–45, 761–62.

62 Joseph M. Modrezejewski, *The Jews of Egypt: From Rameses II to Emperor Hadrian*, trans. Robert Cornman (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1995), 21–157.

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