

SETTING UP A SIGNAL FIRE IN BETH HACCAREM (Jer 6:1)

In the 1930s archaeologists discovered a group of ostraca in the ruins of the outer gate at the site Lachish, the ancient Judahite city. All the evidence suggests that these ostraca (broken pieces of pottery used to write on) were written in the last days of the kingdom of Judah before the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar utterly destroyed Jerusalem in 586 *B.C.* *The ostraca are now known as the Lachish Letters.*

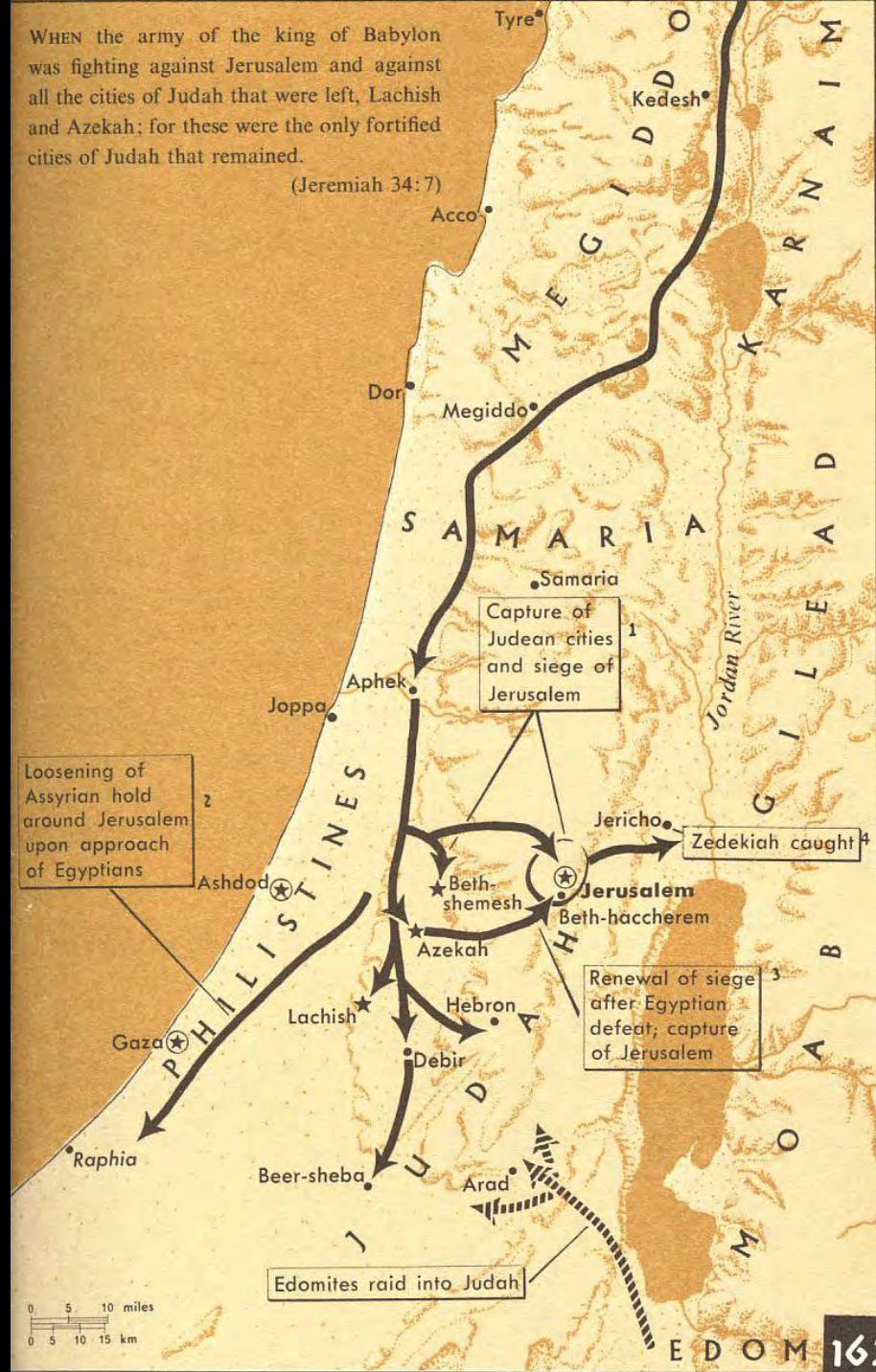
The letters address a man named "Yaosh." Yaosh, always called "my lord" in the letters, probably commanded Lachish's defenses and participated in the frantic diplomatic and military attempts to stave off the Babylonian invasion. Letter IV has a particularly harrowing tone as it ends: "and let (my lord) know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord has given, for we cannot see Azekah." The "signals of Lachish" were a fire lit on top of a high point or tower, as part of the national defense system - early technology to warn of an impending attack.

The only thing worse than the lighting of a signal was seeing it no more. That could mean only one thing: the enemy was approaching. Having lost sight of the signal-fire in Azekah, those in Jerusalem strained in hope to see the signal-fire of Lachish. Maybe the Babylonians would be stopped there! Judging by the destruction at Lachish, however, such a hope was in vain.

The Lachish Letters therefore provide a chilling background for Jeremiah's warning: "set up a signal-fire in Beth Haccarem" (Jer. 6:1). Scholars have recently suggested that Beth Haccarem was a site about 3 miles southwest of Jerusalem, almost exactly halfway between Jerusalem and Bethlehem. It thus represented the last stop before the invading Babylonian army reached Jerusalem. Jeremiah's point is clear: the destruction of Jerusalem had drawn very near. God's judgment was about to ring forth.

WHEN the army of the king of Babylon was fighting against Jerusalem and against all the cities of Judah that were left, Lachish and Azekah; for these were the only fortified cities of Judah that remained.

(Jeremiah 34:7)



From Ramah viewing North

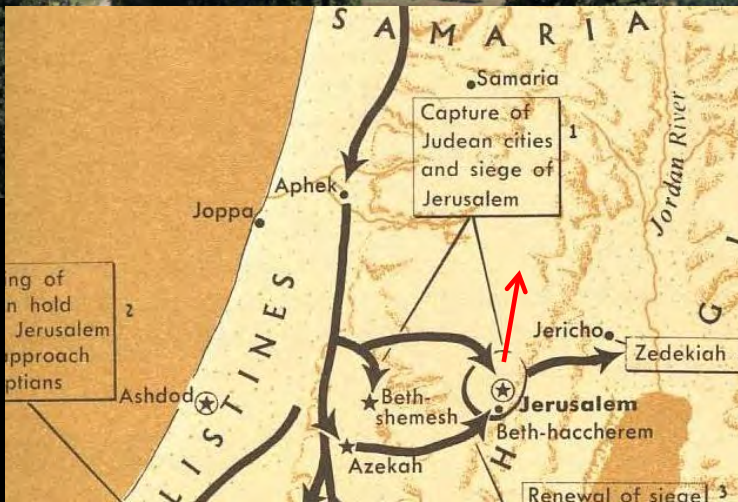
“Gibeon”



“Tel Ramah”



“Gibeah”



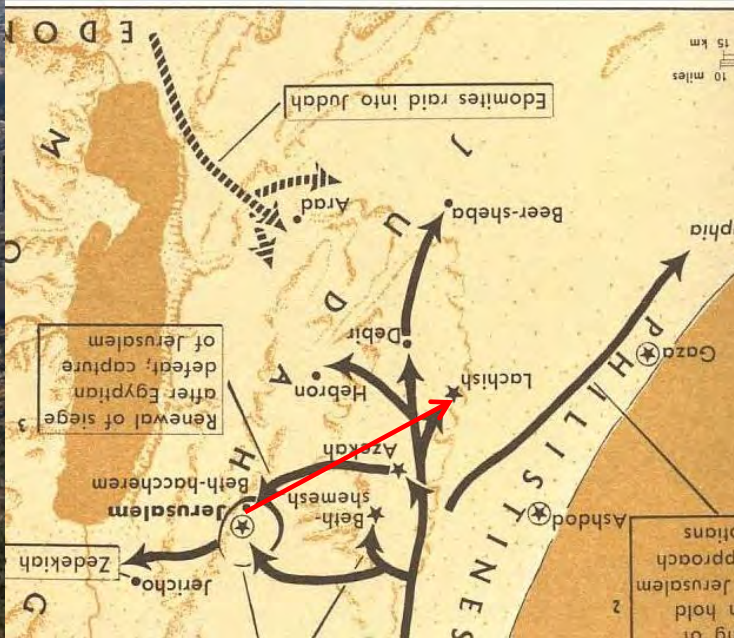
From Ramah viewing Southwest

“Azekah”

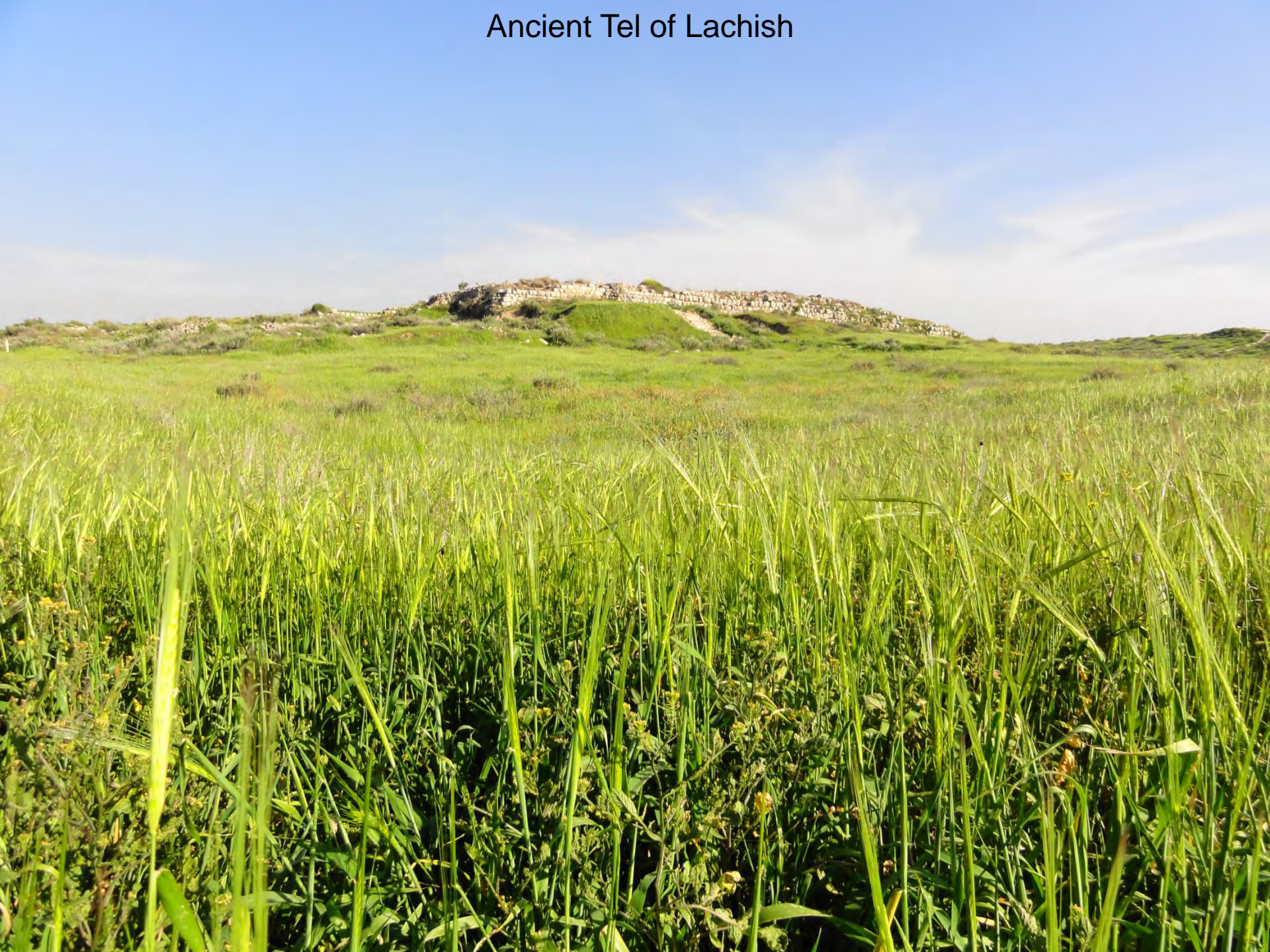


From Beth-haccarem viewing Southwest

“Lachish”



Ancient Tel of Lachish



Ancient Tel of Lachish

