

Did Jews enter Egypt two months after Jerusalem was destroyed?

The *Watchtower* magazine (see Box below) says Jews entered Egypt within two months of Jerusalem being razed by Nebuchadnezzar.

Is it possible that all the events recorded in the Bible could have taken place during those two months?

It is crucial for the *Watchtower* that they did. The *Watchtower* starts the “Seventy Years” from the moment the Jews left Judah and entered Egypt, making this a critical pivotal date for the *Watchtower*.

(*Watchtower*, October 1 2011, pages 27-28)

A Jewish revolt brought the Babylonians back to Jerusalem. (2 Kings 24:20; 25:8-10) They **razed the city**, including its sacred temple, and they took many of its inhabitants captive to Babylon.

Within two months, “all the people [who had been left behind in the land] from the least to the greatest, together with the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians.” (2 Kings 25:25, 26, *NIV*)

Only then, in the seventh Jewish month, Tishri (September/ October), of that year could it be said that the land, now desolate and unworked, began to enjoy its Sabbath rest.

The diagram on the following page highlights events listed in the Bible that took place from the destruction of Jerusalem to the time that Jews entered Egypt.

The page after that considers issues that need to be addressed.

The final page provides a few reference comments.

Is it possible for all these events to take place within two months?

10th day
5th month

Jerusalem destroyed.
(Jer. 52:12)

Gedaliah commissioned and installed as governor. Administration set up at Mizpah.
(2 Kings 25:22)

Army officers and men in the open country hear of Gedaliah's role.
(2 Kings 25:23)

They gather at Mizpah. Gedaliah reassures them: "Serve Babylon and prosper".
(2 Kings 25:24)

News reaches Jews in the lands of Moab, Ammon, and Edom that Judah is under Gedaliah. They pack up, travel home, go to Gedaliah, and have an abundant summer harvest.
(Jer. 40:11, 12)

7th month

Gedaliah, Jews, and soldiers are murdered by Ishmael at a feast.
(Jer. 41:1, 2)

Next day, eighty mourners come with offerings and incense to the house of the LORD.
(Jer. 41:4-5)

Ishmael takes captives from Mizpah and sets out for the Ammonites.
(Jer. 41:10)

Johanan goes to fight Ishmael. Catches up near Gibeon.
(Jer. 41:11)

Ishmael and eight others escape and go to the Ammonites.
(Jer. 41:15)

Egypt

Johanan leads the survivors, stopping at Geruth Kimham near Bethlehem.
(Jer. 41:15)

Jeremiah is asked: "Pray that the LORD your God will tell us where we should go."
(Jer. 42:3)

The word comes to Jeremiah **ten days later**.
(Jer. 42:7)

Jeremiah commands them: "Stay in this land and the LORD will build you up."
(Jer. 42:10-12, NIV)

Azariah and Johanan tell Jeremiah he is lying. The people disobey God's command to stay in the land of Judah.
(Jer. 43:2, 4)

Some of the issues that need to be addressed

The events listed as taking place from the time of Jerusalem's destruction until the Jews' entry into Egypt require far more than two months. For example, it would have taken a far longer time for the information to reach Jews in the neighbouring countries of Moab, Ammon, and Edom, then to pack their families, return to the villages and towns, and then travel to Gedaliah. (Jer. 40:11-12)

Page 27 of the October 1 2011 *Watchtower* refers to 2 Kings 25:25, 26 as follows:

Within two months, “all the people [who had been left behind in the land] from the least to the greatest, together with the army officers, fled to Egypt for fear of the Babylonians.” (2 Kings 25:25, 26, *NIV*)

However, the verses at 2 Kings 25:25-26 actually state (*New World Translation*):

“And it came about in the seventh month that Ishmael the son of Nethaniah the son of Elishama of the royal offspring came, and also ten men with him, and they got to strike down Gedaliah, so that he died, and also the Jews and the Chaldeans that happened to be with him in Mizpah. After that all the people, from small to great, and the chiefs of the military forces rose up and came into Egypt; for they had become afraid because of the Chaldeans.”

The imposition of “*within two months*” and “who had been left behind *in the land*” result from prejudice.

The Bible does not specify how long Gedaliah worked as the Governor before he was murdered. Many scholars, including Jewish scholars, believe Gedaliah ruled for 4 years. The expression “seventh month” provides no solid evidence since it does not provide the year. This means the *Watchtower* is unable to get the solid answer it needs.

The Bible states the people who went with Johanan were the survivors from *Mizpah*. (Jer. 41:16)

The *Watchtower* wishes to commence the “Seventy Years” at the moment that the party of Jews entered Egypt. It journeys to that date through its date of Jerusalem's destruction, but this is unnecessary. An easier path for the *Watchtower* would have been to argue that the “Seventy Years” began when Jews entered Egypt in 607 BCE and that Jerusalem fell earlier, possibly in 611 BCE.

Some reference comments

[Gedaliah] was murdered as part of a conspiracy led by a Judean royalist party under the leadership of Ishmael, son of Nethaniah, son of Elishama, a member of the royal family. **The date of this conspiracy is unknown.** However, Jeremiah 52:30 mentions another Judean deportation to Babylonia in the twenty-third year of Nebuchadnezzar (582/581 BCE), and thus it seems reasonable to assume that it occurred after Gedaliah's murder, which certainly would have been interpreted by the Babylonians as signalling a new rebellion. The account of the plot and its aftermath in Jeremiah 41—43 implies that this was indeed the case.

(*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, page 483, Arnold and Williamson, editors. See also pages 703-704.)

The assassination of Gedaliah, **a few years after the destruction** [of Jerusalem].

(*The Fasts in the Book of Zechariah* Yair Hoffman, Tel Aviv University, in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, page 189, editors Lipschits and Blenkinsopp)

A third batch (832 people) went off captive to Babylon at the final fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE (cf. 2 Kings 25:1-21; Jer 52:29), and a fourth lot of 745 people in 582 BCE, **after the murder of the Babylonian nominee Gedaliah** (2 Kings 25:22-26; cf. Jer 52:30). While some of "the poor people of the land" were exiled thus (Jer 52:15), we are also told explicitly that "the rest of the poor of the land" were left in Judah to cultivate the land (Jer 52:16)—empires were economic organisms, and had to pay their way.

(*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, page 187, Arnold and Williamson, editors)

After the murder of the governor Gedaliah, 745 were deported, for a total of 4,600 (Jer 52:30)

(*Dictionary of the Old Testament: Historical Books*, page 285, Arnold and Williamson, editors)

The rule of Gedaliah lasted, **according to tradition, only two months**, although Grätz argues that it continued more than **four years**.

(<http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com>)

Two months is hardly enough to allow for the dust to settle after the destruction and mayhem of the Babylonian campaign, some administrative apparatus to be set up at Mizpah, the conspiracy to develop in Ammon (Jer 40:13-16), people to dribble back from other regions, some of them quite distant (Jer 40:7-8, 11-12), and the last harvest of the agrarian year to be gathered in (Jer 40:12). It therefore **seems preferable to connect Ishmael's terrorist act with the deportation mentioned in Jer 52:30, dated to the 23d year of Nebuchadnezzar.**

(*Bethel in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, Blenkinsopp, in *Judah and the Judeans in the Neo-Babylonian Period*, page 97, editors Lipschits and Blenkinsopp)

41:12 / The fact that the encounter between Johanan and Ishmael took place in Gibeon is a bit confusing in that Gibeon is southwest of Mizpah, while Ammon, Ishmael's final destination, is southeast. We can presume that there was some kind of unknown exigency that demanded that Ishmael not go directly to Ammon.

(*New International Biblical Commentary: Jeremiah, Lamentations*, Tremper Longman III, page 263)