

# Lion and Lamb Apologetics'

## The Egyptian Journey of Jeremiah in the Bible

*The archaeological and geological evidence*

MAREK DOSPĚL

1



Jeremiah in the Bible flees Judah and settles in Egypt. Only ruins remain of Memphis, the ancient Egyptian capital where Jeremiah may have once preached to his fellow exiles.

When the biblical prophet Jeremiah decided to leave Judah and spend the rest of his life in Egyptian exile (Jeremiah 43), it must have been after some difficult deliberation. Many Judahites before him fled to Egypt in the aftermath of the Babylonian conquest of Judah in the early sixth century BCE. Claiming divine revelation, however, the prophet first scolded his compatriots for seeking comfortable lives in foreign cities, saying:

Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: If you are determined to enter Egypt and go to settle there, then the sword that you fear shall overtake you there, in the land of Egypt, and the famine that you dread shall follow close after you into Egypt, and there you shall die. All the people who have determined to go to Egypt

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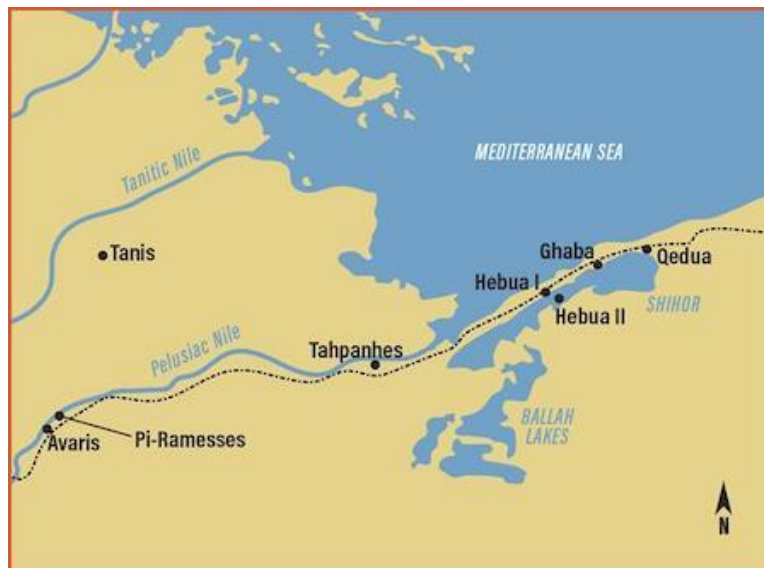
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to settle there shall die by the sword, by famine, and by pestilence; they shall have no remnant or survivor from the disaster that I am bringing upon them. (Jeremiah 42:15b–17).

Despite these denunciations and the prophesy of Egypt's imminent destruction by the expanding Babylonian Empire, the prophet Jeremiah himself ultimately settled in the land of the pharaohs. [Jeremiah in the Bible travels](#) from Mizpah (north of Jerusalem) through Gaza and places called Migdol and Tahpanhes. Where are these sites, and can archaeology help us draw a more detailed map of Jeremiah's journey?

2

In his article "Jeremiah's Journey to Egypt," published in the Spring 2023 issue of *Biblical Archaeology Review*, James K. Hoffmeier finally confirms the route that brought the biblical prophet to Egypt. Professor Emeritus of Old Testament and Ancient Near Eastern History and Archaeology at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Hoffmeier explores recent archaeological and geological evidence to identify several sites along the coastal road, which, at the time, passed just north of a lake called Shihor. Among them are also the prominent sites of Ghaba and Hebua (ancient Tjaru) that lay on the road connecting Egypt with Judah (see map below).



Archaeology reveals details of the prophet Jeremiah's journey to Egypt.

Map by Biblical Archaeology Society.

As discussed by Hoffmeier, local geology and hydrology are crucial for decoding the biblical and Egyptian sources about ancient routes in the eastern Nile Delta, including changes to the branches of the Nile River. For instance, we know that as the Pelusiac branch of the Nile silted up towards the end of the second millennium BCE, it changed the landscape and altered travel routes in the region. What used to be a lagoon open to the sea became a lake that biblical texts call Shihor. "Lower Nile levels resulted in the

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decline of Shihor, which gradually became an enclosed lake in the following centuries as the Mediterranean coastal ridge was exposed, allowing travelers to journey across an area that was previously covered with water,” explains Hoffmeier. “Indeed, the toponyms associated with Jeremiah’s entry into Egypt, along with recent archaeological discoveries, make it clear that the route to Egypt had changed by the sixth century.”

The ancient lagoons of the eastern Nile Delta left imprints visible on satellite images and in sediment analyses, and recent archaeological excavations have identified formidable fortresses along the new coastal road between Egypt and Judah. At Tell el-Qedua, a large fortified compound has been uncovered that likely corresponds to Migdol in Jeremiah’s description. At Hebua, a massive fort and adjacent settlement from the time of the 26th Dynasty (664–525 BCE) attest to the importance of the site right when the prophet Jeremiah would have been traversing this border region.

3



This stela of King Apries, erected at Tahpanhes in 582 BCE, attests to military activity in the region. *Photo courtesy James K. Hoffmeier.*

Further confirmation of the northern coastal road’s routine use in the time of Jeremiah comes in the form of Egyptian monumental inscriptions. At Tell Deffeneh (ancient Tahpanhes), archaeologists discovered an inscribed stone in 2011 (see image above). Set

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up in 582 BCE—four years after Nebuchadnezzar's destruction of Jerusalem—this stela confirms concentrated Egyptian military activity in the northeastern Nile Delta that was aimed at eliminating the Babylonian threat. Another recently uncovered [stela of King Apries](#) from ancient Tahpanhes (yet to be published) allegedly mentions the Egyptian army passing by the fort of Tjaru (Hebua). Geological and archaeological findings thus draw a precise map of Jeremiah's journey.

To further explore all the historical evidence for reconstructing the prophet Jeremiah's route to exile, read James K. Hoffmeier's article "[Jeremiah's Journey to Egypt](#)," published in the [Spring 2023 issue](#) of *Biblical Archaeology Review*.

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