**Front cover page:**

Logo Jerusalem in Babylonia

Logo Bible Lands Museum

25 confetti

Jerusalem in Babylonia

Image of Al-Yahudu Tablets in cuneiform script

The centerpiece of the exhibition is a collection of unique artifacts which shed light on the lives of the Judean exiles in Babylonia. The destruction of the Kingdom of Judah and the first Temple and the Babylonian Exile were seminal events in the history of the Jewish people.

Those Judean exiles who survived the grueling journey into exile were settled in the land between the Euphrates and Tigris, and began to rebuild their lives. It was in this land that the Judeans shaped their religion, and were transformed into the Jewish People – the nation which survived against all odds. Throughout their journeys in the Diaspora, they would retain the memory of the Rivers of Babylon, the symbol of longing for Zion and hope for redemption.

The artifacts displayed in this exhibition belong to a collection of clay tablets, written in cuneiform script in Akkadian. These artifacts reveal the names of dozens of Judean exiles and their offspring, and provide the first evidence of its kind of their life in Babylonia over the course of nearly a century—from the first generation after the destruction to the time of the Persian monarch Xerxes, the biblical King Ahasuerus.

**Body of the catalogue:**

**The End of the Kingdom of Judah**

After the fall of the mighty Assyrian Empire at the end of the seventh century BCE, the last Judean kings found themselves at the heart of the fierce conflict between Babylonia and Egypt – the two great powers who aspired to rule over the area of Syria and the Land of Israel. Initially, Jehoiakim, the king of Judah, accepted the yoke of Nebuchadnezzar II. However, after three years he rebelled against him. This rebellion led to a Babylonian campaign against Judah and to the first exile, documented in the Bible and in the Babylonian sources, which occurred in the days of Jehoiachin, the son of Jehoiakim.

 Image of arrowheads and sling stones: Arrowheads and sling stones used in battles against Judah, various sites in Judah, beginning of the sixth century BCE, courtesy of the Israel Antiquities Authority. Photo: Moshe Caine.

The chronicle from the time of Nebuchadnezzar II (a photo of which appears on the wall of the exhibition) tells that on 2 Adar of the seventh year of his reign (598/7 BCE), Nebuchadnezzar conquered Jerusalem (referred to as ‘the city of Judah’ in the Akkadian) and appointed a king over it who suited him. This description matches the narrative in 2 Kings (chapter 24), describing the banishment of Jehoiachin and his family together with the upper class, and the installation of Jehoiakim’s brother, Zedekiah, as king in Jerusalem. Zedekiah, the last of the Judean kings, also rebelled against Babylonia; but this time, the rebellion ended with the obliteration of the Kingdom of Judah, the destruction of the Temple and an additional wave of deportations from Judah to Babylonia.

Broken pottery was discovered in the layers of destruction uncovered in the City of David, in the Jewish Quarter in Jerusalem, in Tel Lachish and Ein Gedi, which testify to lives abruptly cut short. Arrowheads and sling stones were also discovered, silent testimony to the fierce battles which took place there. The destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple in the month of Av, in the nineteenth year of the reign of Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylonia, was a traumatic event etched deeply into the nation’s memory to this very day.

**New Light on the Judean Exiles**

Upon their arrival in Babylonia, the Judean exiles were settled in different communities. The most notable among them was called Al-Yahudu – ‘the city of Judah,’ the same name used by the Babylonians to refer to Jerusalem.

The Babylonians settled the exiles in royal lands, in exchange for their obligation to pay taxes which were collected from their agricultural produce (particularly dates and barley). The exiles and their offspring were required to serve in the Babylonian army or were recruited for civil work, such as construction projects or the digging of canals (‘the Rivers of Babylon’), which constituted the lifeline of the land between the Euphrates and Tigris.

Image of Tablet Al-Yahudu, number 1: The most ancient artifact in the collection – a promissory note written in 572 BCE, only fourteen years after the fall of Jerusalem, at the time when Nebuchadnezzar II still reigned in Babylonia. The collection of Cindy and David Sofer, Al-Yahudu, number 1, Photo: Ardon Bar Hama.

In the Al-Yahudu artifacts we find more than seventy-five individuals whose first names identify them as Judean exiles. The name of the God of Israel appears in many of their names, and quite a few of them are familiar to us from the biblical lexicon of names or from extra-biblical sources. Some of the names reflect the circumstances of exile, such as Glayahu (God exiled or was exiled). Other names reflect the exiles’ longing to return to their homeland; e.g., Yashuv-Zadiq or Ya’aleihu.

One of the notable families in the Al-Yahudu artifacts is the family of Samkhayhu, from the first generation of Judean exiles in Babylonia. These artifacts enable us to trace his descendants over the course of four, or perhaps even five, generations – all of whom were given Hebrew names. The fact that they were given Hebrew names reflects the exiles’ aspirations to retain their religious and national identity in this alien environment.

Image of a model of the village

 **From Darkness to Great Light**

The Babylonian Exile became one of the most decisive events in the history of the Jewish People and their religion. When Babylonia was conquered by the Persians in 539 BCE, their king, Darius, allowed the citizens of the empire who were exiled by Babylonia to return to their homelands.

In the generations that followed, many Jews, including Ezra and Nehemiah, returned to Judah. Many others, however, chose to remain in Babylonia. The Jewish Diaspora in Babylonia became one of the most important communities in Jewish History. This is primarily due to the tremendous impact it made as a result of the composition of the Babylonian Talmud (between the third and fifth centuries CE).

The Jewish community in Babylonia existed for approximately 2500 consecutive years, until the establishment of the State of Israel.

Image of the title page of tractate Bekhorot, Babylonian Talmud: Image of the title page of tractate Bekhorot, from an edition of the Babylonian Talmud which was published in Germany after World War II. Concentration camps are depicted on the bottom of the page, and Jerusalem is depicted on the top of the page. The Rivers of Babylon, which appear in-between, express the longing for Zion. Heidelberg, 1948, Abraham Ettinger collection.

**Inner back cover page:**

This exhibition displays items that were kindly lent by Cindy and David Sofer, London, William L. Gross, Green family collection, Dr. Haim Grossman, Aliza and Shlomo Mussayeff and the Israel Antiquities Authority. The exhibition was made possible by the generosity and contributions of Cindy and David Sofer, The David Berg Foundation, George Blumenthal, Eugene and Emily Grant, Beth Sanders, Meira and Shlomo Sanders, Naomi and Peter Neustadter, The Elie and Batya Borowski Foundation, CBH Compagnie Bancaire Helvétique, the international friends of the BLMJ in America, Great Britain, and Germany, the Lands of the Bible Archaeology Foundation, the Israel Ministry of Culture and Sport, The Israel Ministry of Education and the Municipality of Jerusalem.

**The Bible Lands Museum, Jerusalem** presents a rich and unique collection of artifacts from ancient Near Eastern cultures together with special exhibitions which deal with history, archeology and the world of the Bible. The museum offers fascinating tours and a variety of creative educational and cultural programs.

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Museum hours:

Sunday – Thursday: 9:30 am – 5:30 pm. Wednesday: 9:30 am – 9:30 pm. Friday, Saturday and holiday eve: 10 am – 2 pm. Holidays: closed.

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**Outer back cover page:**

Visual exhibition

Museum’s Logo

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