

Lachish Ostraca

Lachish Ostrakon II

To my Lord Yaosh: May Yahweh cause my lord to hear tidings of peace this very day, this very day! Who is thy servant but a dog that my lord hath remembered his servant? May Yahweh afflict those who report an evil rumor about which thou art not informed!

Lachish Ostrakon III

Thy servant Hoshaiath hath sent me to inform my lord Yaosh: May Yahweh cause my lord to hear tidings of peace! And now thou hast sent a letter, but my lord did not enlighten thy servant concerning the letter which thou didst send to thy servant yesterday evening, though the heart of thy servant hath been sick since thou didst write to thy servant. And as for what my lord said, "Dost thou not understand? – call a scribe!", as Yahweh liveth no one hath ever undertaken to call a scribe for me; and as for any scribe who might have come to me, truly I did not call him nor would I give anything at all for him! And it hath been reported to thy servant, saying, "The commander of the host, Coniah son of Elnathan, hath come down in order to go into Egypt; and unto Hodaviah son of Ahijah and his men hath he sent to obtain...from him." And as for the letter of Tobiah, servant of the king, which came to Shallum son of Jaddua **through the prophet, saying, "Beware!", they servant hath sent it to my lord.**

Lachish Ostrakon IV

May Yahweh cause my lord to hear this very day tidings of good! And now according to everything that my lord hath written, so hath thy servant done; I have written on the door according to all that my lord hath written to me. And with respect to what my lord hath written about the matter of Beth-haraphid, there is no one there. And as for Sennachiah, Shemaiah hath taken him and hath brought him up to the city. And as for thy servant, I am not sending anyone thither [today(?), but I will send] tomorrow morning. And let my lord know that we are watching for the signals of Lachish, according to all the indications which my lord hath given, for we cannot see Azekah.

Lachish Ostrakon V

May Yahweh cause my lord to hear tidings of peace and good [this very day!, this very day!] Who is thy servant (but) a dog that thou hast sent thy servant the [letters...Now] thy servant hath returned the letters to my lord. May Yahweh cause thee to see [...]. How can thy servant benefit or injure the king?

Lachish Ostrakon VI

To my lord Yaosh: May Yahweh cause my lord to see this season in good health! Who is thy servant (but) a dog that my lord hath sent the letter of the king and the letters of the princes saying, "Pray, read them!" And **behold the words of the princes are not good, (but) to weaken our hands and to slacken the hands of the men who are informed about them saying, "Why do ye thus even in Jerusalem? Behold unto the king and unto his house are ye doing this thing!"** [And,] as Yahweh thy God liveth, truly since thy servant read the letters there hath been no peace for thy servant...

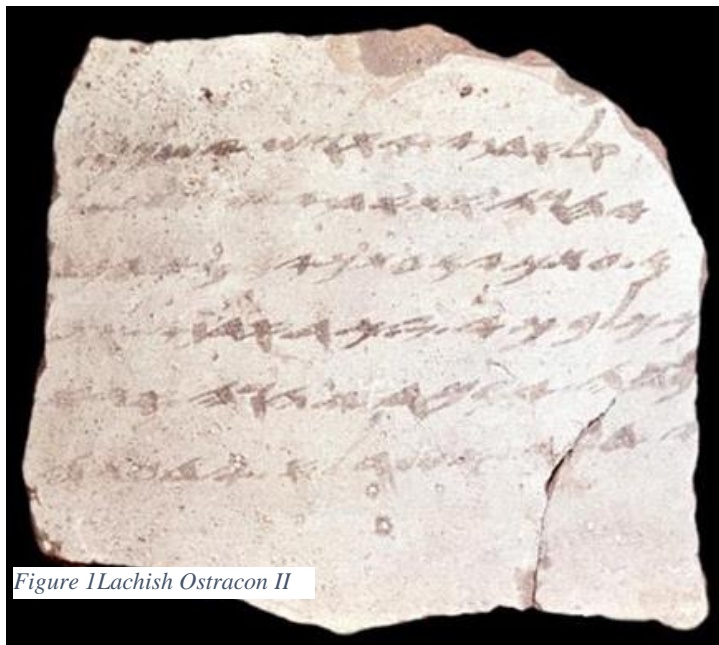


Figure 1 Lachish Ostrakon II



Lachish Ostrakon VI

Lachish Ostrakon VIII

May Yahweh cause my lord to hear tidings of good this very day! [...]. The lord hath humbled me before thee. Nedabiah hath fled to the mountains [...]. Truly I lie not – let my lord send thither!

Lachish Ostrakon IX

May Yahweh cause my lord to hear [tidings] of peace! [...] let him send [...] fifteen [...]. Return word to thy servant through Shelemiah (telling us) what we shall do tomorrow!

In Letters II through VI Hoshaiiah is defending himself to his superior (named Yaosh) , but we are not sure what for. Some think it may be that he was sympathetic with the Jeremiah faction that was submitting to the Babylonians instead of rebelling. The ostrakon come from similar shaped jars and the same time period. Five of the pieces fit together as fragments of the same vessel. All of the pieces of ostrakon, except two, were found on the floor of the guardroom seems to suggest they were dropped there by Yaosh himself or last handled by him after he received them from Hoshaiiah.

In Letter III Hoshaiiah reports to Yaosh that a royal mission is on the way to Egypt, and that a jcompany of this group has been sent to his oupost (which is Lachish) for provisions. This would indicate they were a pro-Egyptian party under Zedekiah's leadership. In this letter there is reference to "the prophet." There is a likely this is Jeremiah the prophet since he was well known for many years, Nebuchadnezzar knew of Jeremiah and his writings where widely circulated and many people followed his advice and surrendered.

Letter IV is written by the army officer at a military outpost to his superior officer at Lachish and says Azekiah has fallen. In Jeremiah 34:7 Lachish and Azekah are the last two cities to fall outside Jerusalem. There was a communication system that used fire/smoke, etc.

Letter VI This is similar to Jeremiah's words in Jeremiaha 38:4 where the very words in the Hebrew are that Jeremiah is weakening the hands of the troops. Hoshaiiah writes that the royal officials (sarim) had sent out circular letters which "weaken the hands" of the people because the over-optimistic royal officials. The soldiers with boots on the ground knew the situation, but the king's men where sending letters that did not indicate an understanding of the severity of their situation.