The Book of Ezekiel

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Lesson 1

Introduction

The Prophet

Ezekiel, whose name, Yehezq’el signifies “strong is God,” “God will strengthen” or “whom God makes strong” (Ezek. 1:3; 3:8), was the son of Buzi, and was among the priests (possibly of the Zadokite line; 40:46; 44:15) who, in the year 598 B.C., had been deported together with Jehoiachim as prisoners from Jerusalem (2 Kings 24:12-16; cf. Ezek. 33:21, 40:1). Nothing is known of Buzi. No mention of this prophet is made in the Scriptures outside of his own book. He had a dearly beloved wife who died during his prophetic years but no children (24:16-18).

With the other exiles Ezekiel settled in a place called Tel-Abib. The name itself means “hill of corn ears.” The original name is probably til-abubi, Assyrian for a mound or heap produced by the action of storms. Sand hills of this kind were numerous in Babylonia and formed barren spots where the conqueror might very well place his captives. According to the Hebraist David- son, the Hebrew ear then detected in the sound the more attractive meaning which it suggested in their own tongue, and modified the word accordingly.

The place was near the Chebar (the “grand canal” or “great river”), an artificial watercourse of the Euphrates in Babylonia called in the cuneiform naru kabari near the city of Nippur (biblical Calneh), southeast of Babylon (Ezek. 1:1; 3:15). It enters the Euphrates at the ancient site of Erech. The modern name of this canal is Shatt en Nil, “the river Nile.” Archaeologists have confirmed the presence of ancient Jewish settlements in this area. The wealthy banking and real estate house of Murashu and Sons, whose 200 branches produced archives (dated 464–405 B.C.) that contain many Jewish names, and provides external verification of the settlement of Jews in the region. The excavator wrote:

Very numerous are Persian and Aramean personal names in these documents. Unusually large is the number of Jewish names known from the Old Testament, especially from the books of Ezra and Nehemiah. There can be no doubt that a considerable number of Jewish prisoners carried away by scholars accepted the authorship of the book by the prophet after whose name the book is called. The notorious critical scholar S.R. Driver even admitted, “No critical question arises in connection with the authorship of the book, the whole from beginning to end bearing unmistakably the stamp of a single mind” (Introduction to the Literature of the OT 279). The book is autobiographical, written in the first person singular throughout. Similarity of thought and arrangement make it clear the entire book is the work of one mind and one hand, namely that of the prophet Ezekiel.

Nebuchadnezzar were settled in Nippur (C. Fisher, Excavations at Nippur, 1905).

The prophet seems to have spent the rest of his life there. In the fifth year after the captivity of Joachim, and according to some, the thirtieth year of his life, Ezekiel received his call as a prophet (Ezek. 1:2, 4; etc.) in the vision which he describes in the beginning of his prophecy (Ezek. 1:4; 3:15). From Ezekiel 29:17 it appears that he prophesied during a period of approximately twenty-two years.

Authorship

In the first century the Jewish author Josephus said that “Eze- kiel…first wrote two books about these things and left them [for posterity]” (Antiquities 10.5.1). What Josephus probably meant was that the “two books” are the natural divisions of the book: chapters 1-32 and 33-48. All early biblical
Date of the Book: 593/2 to 562 B.C.

Ezekiel’s prophecies are dated around the exile of king Jehoiachin (597 B.C.). Thirteen of the prophet’s messages are dated precisely as to the day, month and year of King Jehoiachin’s exile to Babylon. The chart above lays out the general chronological arrangement of these prophecies with three exceptions (29:1, 17; 32:1) all of which were oracles against Egypt and thus belong together with the other Egyptian prophecies.

The reader should note that almost all of the dates listed are in chronological order (unlike Jeremiah’s practice of haphazardly introducing events from different times) and range from 593 to 571. Interestingly, he begins his book with a reference to the “thirtieth year” (1:1). Otherwise everything is dated from the time of the captivity of Jehoiachin. Some have concluded the former is a reference to his thirtieth birthday, since priests began their work in that year (Num. 4:3, 4). Thirty years previous to this would have been the 18th year of Josiah’s reign, in the year that the book of the Law was discovered in the temple, and so the beginning of that king’s religious reformation. This may have represented an event Ezekiel’s priestly family could have been involved with and certainly was a marker in the history of Judah and Jerusalem (see 44:15). Either of these is a suitable explanation. Four other theories have been propounded to explain the reference. None of them is particularly convincing. Whether the passage is a reference to one or the other, or something else altogether, is impossible to ascertain with absolute certainty at this time.

At any rate, Ezekiel was called to his prophetic ministry in the fifth year of the exile of King Jehoiachin—593 B.C. The prophet’s last discourse was dated in the twenty-seventh year of Jehoiachin’s exile—571 B.C. (29:17). Ezekiel never mentions the release of Jehoiachin in 560 B.C. Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that his messages cover the period from 593 to 571 B.C. and were written down in their present form from 571 B.C. through about 562 B.C.

Purpose of the Book

The prophecy of Ezekiel was given to the people of Israel during their Babylonian sojourn for several reasons. We may deduce these reasons from the content of the book itself and the circumstances of their delivery.

One reason for Ezekiel’s prophecies was to speak locally to the exiles whom Jeremiah addresses by letter (see Jer. 29), as people who continued, even in the midst of divine punishment, to listen to false prophets and practice idolatry. The contents of Ezekiel indicate that
little has changed in the attitude of the Jewish people who have come to Babylon, in spite of this dreadful experience.

Another occasion for his work was in order to outline the blessing that follows necessary divine judgment. Ezekiel’s purpose in writing chapters 1-32 was to show both the necessity and inevitability of Judah’s tragic national fall to Babylon because of her sin against God’s holy character. After the fall of Jerusalem Ezekiel was given the additional commission to show the necessity and inevitability of Judah’s restoration to fellowship with God (chaps. 33-48).

Still another reason was to emphasize God’s sovereignty which will bring about Israel’s judgment and ultimate restoration. As with all of the great prophets of the Old Testament, Ezekiel sees God as in control of history. Things are never viewed as careening wildly or frantically out of his hands, but are always under his calm jurisdiction and wise management. God is in control and when a great national tragedy occurs like the one Israel had experienced, his hand is assuredly in it. The prophet was charged with a commission to a disloyal and disaffected people: “I send you to the children of Israel, to a rebellious nation that has rebelled against me” (2:3). Not only had the Lord already judged them, he would add to it if they persisted in their insubordination.

Also, Ezekiel prophesied in order to warn Israel as a faithful and observant “watchman” regarding imminent judgment. The Lord’s people, even while in the throes of painful chastisement, were quite rebellious and faithless. God told the prophet, “Son of man, I have set you as a watchmen for the house of Israel. Therefore, hear the word at my mouth, and give them warning from me” (3:17). Both in this context (3:17-21) and in one other (33:1-9), the prophet is told to speak the Word of the Lord without hesitation or reserve: “If you warn the wicked of his way to turn from it, and if he does not turn from it, then he shall die in his iniquity, but you have delivered your soul” (33:9).

Like almost all of the Old Testament prophets, Ezekiel also provides us with substantial promise of the coming New Age and of the Messiah who was to usher it in. The chief Messianic passages are: The Lord As The Little Sanctuary (11:16-20), The Wonderful Cedar Sprig (17:22-24), The Rightful King (21:26, 27), The Faithful Shepherd (34:11-31), The Great Purification (36:25-35), The Great Resurrection (37:1-14), The Great Reunion (37:21-28), The Overthrow of Gog (38-39), The Life-giving Stream out of the Temple (47:1-12).

Finally, Ezekiel’s prophecies serve to stress the need for individual responsibility and national accountability before God. Who can forget the powerful words that still thunder across the centuries from that prophet’s pen: “The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son; the righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him” (18:20). This idea is taught elsewhere in Scripture, of course (see Deut. 24:16; 2 Kings 14:6; 2 Chron. 25:4; Jer. 31:29, 30; Isa. 3:10; Rom. 2:9), but where else in the Bible is an entire chapter given over to the idea (see Ezek. 18)?

**Major Themes**

The following represent some of the major themes of Ezekiel’s important prophetic work:

- Ezekiel’s commission from God as a “watchman” (Ezek. 2-3)
- The siege of Jerusalem (Ezek. 4-7)
- The parable of the two eagles (Ezek. 17)
- Personal responsibility: “The soul that sins, it shall die” (Ezek. 18:20), so repent while there is time (Ezek. 18:30-32)
- The apparent fall of David’s throne (Ezek. 19), but which actually survived, to his day, through Zedekiah’s royal daughters who were not slaughtered with the king’s sons, and who later escaped with Jeremiah (Jer. 43:6).
- Oholah and Oholibah, a parable about Israel and Judah’s unfaithfulness (Ezek. 23)
- Prophecies against Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistia (Ezek. 25), Tyre (Ezek. 26-28), and Egypt (Ezek. 29-32)
- The “valley of dry bones” and the resurrection of Israel (Ezek. 37)
• Gog and Magog (Ezek. 38-39)
• The New Temple (Ezek. 40-48)

Outline of Contents
   A. Call of Ezekiel (1:1-3:27).
   B. Overthrow of City and State Predicted (4:1-7:27).
   C. Sin and Fate of Jerusalem (8:1-11:25).

   A. Ammon, Moab, Edom, Philistines (25:1-17).
   B. Tyre and Sidon (26:1-28:26).

   A. A Prophet for the New Age (33:1-33).
   D. The People: Resurrection of the dry bones of Israel; reunion of Judah and Israel (37:1-28).

   B. Return of the Lord to his Temple (43:1-12).
   C. Dedication of the Temple (43:13-27).

   B. Apportionment of land for priests, Levites, and the prince (45:1-17).

   A. Life-giving Stream from the Temple (47:1-12).
   C. Portions of the tribes, Priests, City and Prince (48:1-35).

Questions
1. What is the meaning of Ezekiel’s name? ______________________________________

2. Whose son was the prophet? _________________________________________________

3. Was Ezekiel married or single? _______________________________________________

4. Where did the prophet live in Babylonia? _______________________________________

5. In what year of Joachim’s captivity was he called as a prophet? __________________

6. How long did Ezekiel prophesy? ______________________________________________

7. How do you explain Josephus’ remark about Ezekiel being author of two books? ______

8. What leads us to believe the book was written by a single author? ________________

9. Give the range of dates for the prophecies of Ezekiel. ____________________________

10. How many of the prophet’s oracles are dates precisely as to day, month and year? ______

11. Five reasons are given for the prophecies of Ezekiel. List them below:
   a. ____________________________________________________________________________
   b. ____________________________________________________________________________
   c. ____________________________________________________________________________
12. List a few of the major Messianic Prophecies of Ezekiel:

   a. __________________________________________
   
   b. __________________________________________
   
   c. __________________________________________
   
   d. __________________________________________
Historical Background of Ezekiel

Decline of Assyria and Rise of Babylon

Ezekiel’s early youth witnessed a quick revival of pure religion, along with a move away from pagan practices in the land. What prompted this revival was the discovery of the book of the law in the Temple during repairs of the ancient building (2 Kings 22:8). The fortunes of the family of Ezekiel rose along with the reforms of Josiah, but waned again when he died. Sadly, the military failures of Josiah along with the king’s premature death, also brought paganism back into vogue. Therefore, the nation was corrupted both from within and from without.

As had been the case for many centuries, the land of Palestine was a pawn between two great Empires. Geographically the land was a bridge linking the two great population centers of Mesopotamia and Egypt. There were pro-Egyptian and pro-Chaldean parties active in Jerusalem in the days of Zedekiah and before. The population always seemed to feel that one great power would counterbalance the other, or when one dominated, it was anticipated that the other would deliver security. Thus, they did not rely upon the Lord as their Redeemer, but they looked to the strong arm of man. Unfortunately, the arm of flesh will often fail, as it did in this instance.

The life of the prophet Ezekiel was roughly contemporary with the decline of the Assyrian Empire and the ascendancy of the Babylonian. The life of the prophet Ezekiel was roughly contemporary with the decline of the Assyrian Empire and the ascendancy of the Babylonian. The collapse of Assyria as a major power began under Asshurbanipal in 652 B.C. when a general rebellion broke out in Babylon led by his own brother Shamash-shum-ukin. Disaffection spread as far as Palestine, Asshurbanipal showed clemency to Manasseh and allowed him to strengthen his fortifications (2 Chron. 33:14) in order to gain a vassal near the Egyptian border, since reconquest of that land was now out of the question.

When Asshurbanipal died in 627, the end of the Empire was near at hand. His son Sin-shar-ishkun had shared his throne since about 629. When the old king died, a certain general launched a rebellion and declared another son as king. After several years of warfare, Sin-shar-ishkun triumphed, but this internal conflict disastrously weakened the Empire. Assyria’s enemies made the most of this weakness. The Medes unsuccessfully attacked Nineveh, Scythians intruded into western Asia, and the Babylonians led by the Chaldean prince Nabopolassar (626-605) made a play for independence. In October of 626 Nabopolassar defeated the Assyrians outside Babylon. The following month he was enthroned there. Repeated efforts by Assyria could not remove him.

In 614 Cyaxares of Media took Assur, the Assyrian capital. In 612 Nabopolassar, with his Median allies assaulted Nineveh, and after a three month siege, it was taken also. Sin-shar-ishkun perished in the fall of the city. Asshur-uballit II took remnants of the army to the east and crossed the Euphrates to the south where he was defeated by the Chaldeans. The Chaldean prince Nabopolassar then advanced against Assyria, crossed the Euphrates and proceeded against Assyrian-held territory in Babylonia. In 609 he defeated the Assyrians at Dur-Sharrukin (Tiglath-pileser’s palace) and then moved further west to take Calah (Calah was the palace and residence of Asshurbanipal). In 605 Nabopolassar took Babylon and then moved on to Assur. The city fell to the Chaldeans in 604. After a victory over the Chaldeans at Carchemish, the Chaldean prince then moved back to Babylon, where he reigned as king of Babylon from 605-604 B.C. He moved west and ruled from Carchemish. He died in 604 and his son Nebuchadnezzar became king of Babylon and moved his capital to Babylon. The downfall of the Assyrian Empire and the rise of the Babylonian Empire marked a turning point in world history, and the Book of Ezekiel is a major witness to this historical development.

The Book of Ezekiel
Babylonian Empire

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Historical Background of Ezekiel

Haran as a final refuge. But in 610 the Babylonians and their allies captured Haran. Repeated efforts by the Egyptian pharaohs Psammetichus and Necho II (609-595 B.C.) to keep Assyria alive as a buffer between Egypt and Babylon had proven futile. An attempt to retake Haran in 609 failed miserably, and Assyria breathed her last.

Babylon and her allies had become the supreme military force in the ancient Near East. Subsequent to 609 B.C. the map of the Ancient Near East to the east of the Euphrates River changed dramatically. Media and Babylon now shared the lands formerly held by Assyria. It is not known precisely how these lands were divided between the two allies, but the biblical world, especially Palestine, was engulfed by the Babylonians.

Judah's Final Kings
Judah's Reformer King, Josiah (640-609 B.C.)

As Assyria was losing her grip on her empire, Judah found herself once more a free and independent country. Manasseh had remained a docile vassal of Nineveh to the end of his reign, and was succeeded (2 Kings 21:19-26) by his son Amon (642-640), who apparently continued this policy. In 640 B.C. Amon was likely assassinated by an anti-Assyrian element within the palace. The assassins were immediately executed and the king’s son Josiah was placed on the throne.

Josiah, son of king Amon, and mother Jedidah, became King of Judah at age 8, and reigned 31 years (639-609 B.C.). The story of Josiah is found in 2 Kings 22-23, and 2 Chronicles 34-35. 2 Kings 22:2 says Josiah's reign was good, and that he followed in the steps of King David, and was obedient to the Lord. The name Josiah means “May Yah (Jehovah) give.” His reign represented the last surge of political independence and religious revival before the total disintegration of the Kingdom of Judah, which ended with the destruction of Jerusalem in 587 B.C. When Josiah was 20 years old, he began to clean up Judah and Jerusalem, destroying the heathen altars and the shameful idols on the hills, according to 2 Chronicles 34:3. He did the same thing in the cities of Manasseh, Ephraim, Simeon, and Naphtali.

Later, he set up a collection system for gifts for the Temple, and paid carpenters and masons to repair the Temple, from the damage and neglect by the earlier Kings of Judah. A scroll was found in the Temple by Hilkiah the High Priest. The scroll, containing the Laws of God, was read to King Josiah. When Josiah found out that the reason for the Lord’s great anger on Judah and Israel was that the ancestors had not obeyed the laws written in the Scriptures, he ripped his clothing in despair (2 Chronicles 34:21). The king then gathered the elders and all the people to the Temple, read the scroll to them, and required everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin to make a pledge to the Lord, to follow his commandments. So, Josiah removed all of the idols from the areas occupied by Jews, and required all of them to worship God (2 Chron. 34:33). Josiah held a great Passover celebration that was not seen in Jerusalem since the days of Samuel the prophet. Josiah’s reform was by far the most thoroughgoing in all of Judah’s long history.

Later, King Necho of Egypt marched with a large force to
Carchemish on the Euphrates to assist Asshur-uballit in a last effort to retake Haran from the Babylonians. The Egyptian monarch warned King Josiah not to interfere while his army passed through Judah (2 Chron. 35:21). But Josiah refused to turn back, and led his army into battle at the valley of Megiddo. Whether Josiah was formally an ally of Babylon, as Hezekiah once had been, or was simply defending the territorial integrity of his land, one thing was certain. He could not have wished for an Egypto-Assyrian victory. The result of that would have been to place him at the mercy of Egypt’s larger ambitions.

The battle itself probably took place near the city of Megiddo proper, where the coastal road passes through the Carmel range. The enemy archers struck King Josiah with their arrows and fatally wounded him. He died in Jerusalem, and was buried there. All of Judah mourned for him, including Jeremiah the prophet. Josiah’s son, Jehoahaz, was selected as the new king.

Jehoahaz (609 B.C.)

It appears from 2 Kings 23:31, 36 that Jehoahaz (or Shallum) was a younger son of Josiah. If so, he was doubtless placed on the throne in preference to Jehoiakim in the expectation that he would continue the policies of his father, which (politically speaking) were essentially against the policies of Assyria and Egypt and pro-Babylonian.

Necho, meanwhile, proceeded to the Euphrates to take part in the assault on the city of Haran. This effort failed miserably. The Babylonian Chronicle does not name the Pharaoh, but does describe this Egyptian advance in 609 B.C.:

> In the month of Tammuz, Ashur-uballit, king of Assyria, along with a great Egyptian army crossed the river…marched against the city of Haran to conquer it…The garrison which the king of Akkad had stationed in it they…slew…and he encamped against the city of Haran, until the month of Elul he made an attack upon the city and took nothing, but did not withdraw (D. J. Wiseman, Chronicles of the Chaldean Kings 63).

With Mesopotamia firmly in the control of the Babylonians, Necho set about to consolidate his power west of the river. As one of his measures, he summoned king Jehoahaz of Judah who had reigned only three months to his headquarters at Riblah in central Syria, deposed him and deported him to Egypt (2 Kings 23:31-35; cf. Jer. 22:10-12). This removed a pro-Babylonian influence from a buffer state immediately to his east. He was intent upon placing a pro-Egyptian ruler on the throne in Judah.

Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.)

After deporting Jehoahaz to Egypt, Pharaoh Necho placed his brother Eliakim on the throne as an Egyptian vassal. The land was placed under heavy tribute, which was raised through a head tax levied on all free citizens. He also changed his name to Jehoiakim. Judah remained under Egyptian domination from 609-605 B.C. and surely chafed under the burdensome levies of Egypt.

Jehoiakim’s history is briefly stated in 2 Kings 23:34-24:6 and 2 Chronicles 36:4-8, which must be read in connection with Jeremiah 22:13-19; 26; 36. Jehoiakim was no worthy successor of his father, but a petty tyrant unfit to rule. His irresponsible disregard of his subjects is illustrated by his action early in his reign when, apparently dissatisfied with his father’s palace, he squandered his limited funds building a new and finer one, using forced labor to do it. This provoked the Lord against him, and Jeremiah condemned his selfishness and extravagance (Jer. 22:13-19). During his reign Nebuchadnezzar invaded Palestine, entered Jerusalem, and compelled Jehoiakim to pay tribute to him.

After three years Jehoiakim, rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar (2 Kings 24:1), thereby bringing ruin upon himself and upon the country. Dying after a wicked reign of eleven years, he was buried “with the burial of an ass, drawn, and cast forth beyond the gates of Jerusalem” (Jer. 22:19). It was Jehoiakim who slew the prophet Uriah “and cast his dead body into the graves of the common people” (Jer. 26:23); and it was he also who impiously “cut with the penknife and cast into the fire” Jeremiah’s roll of prophecies from which Jehudi had read three or four leaves to the king (Jer. 36:23).

In 605 B.C. a sudden upset of the delicate balance of world power placed Judah before a new danger. In that year Nebuchadnezzar fell upon the Egyptian forces at Carchemish and sent them reeling in utter defeat. Jeremiah introduces his oracle against Egypt with an historical remembrance of this seismic
event in the politics of the ancient Near East (Jer. 46:2ff). Pursuing the Egyptians southward, the Babylonians delivered them a second and even more crushing defeat in the vicinity of Hamath. This opened the way to southern Syria and Palestine.

In August, 605, however, the Babylonian advance was delayed by news of the death of Nabopolassar. Nebuchadnezzar returned home to assume the throne of the Empire. By the end of 604 Babylonian troops had advanced into the Philistine plain, where it took and destroyed the city of Ashkelon (Jer. 47:5-7), deporting major elements of its population to Babylon. Judah was thrown into consternation over this turn of events, as the great fast held in December of 604 indicates (cf. 2 Kings 24:2; Jer. 35:11). Finally, in December of 598 the army of Babylon set out for Judah. In that very month Jehoiakim died. He may have been assassinated because he put the nation at such suicidal risk with the Babylonian king, and in the desperate hope of gaining leniency from Nebuchadnezzar.

Jehoiakim (598 B.C.)

With Babylonian troops headed to Judah to punish the land for its rebellion and refusal to pay tribute, the eighteen-year-old son of Jehoiakim was placed on the throne and imprisoned, the king’s uncle Mattaniah (Zedekiah) was installed as ruler in his place. The story of Zedekiah is found in 2 Kings 24:17-20, 25, and 2 Chronicles 36:11-13. Apparently he was never viewed as a legitimate ruler, only a puppet of Babylon. This made him impotent as a leader. Zedekiah oversaw the fall of Judah in his decade of leadership. His reign saw nothing

Judah’s immediate border, and the greater and more imminent threat always seemed to be the closer one. Late in 601 Nebuchadnezzar met Necho on the frontier in a battle in which both sides suffered heavy casualties but wherein neither side won the day. Encouraged by the seeming ability of Egypt to thwart Babylonian military power, Jehoiakim rebelled against Babylon. This proved to be a fatal error.

Even though the Babylonians were busy elsewhere for the next couple of years, Nebuchadnezzar was unwilling to let Judah go. Until he could move his army en masse against the Judaeans, he dispatched guerrilla bands into Judah to keep them off balance for the time being (cf. 2 Kings 24:2; Jer. 35:11). Finally, in December of 598 the army of Babylon set out for Judah. In that very month Jehoiakim died. He may have been

(2 Kings 24:8). On March 16, 597 B.C., just three months later, the city of Jerusalem surrendered to the overwhelming force of the Babylonian army assembled at its gates. Egyptian help did not come, though it was apparently expected by some (2 Kings 24:7). Jehoiachin was taken in shackles to Babylon. The queen mother Nehushta, the high officials, leading citizens, together with an enormous booty (the treasures of the palace and the sacred vessels of the temple), were carried off to Babylon (2 Kings 24:10-17).

For thirty-six years Jehoiachin remained in prison at Babylon. When Nebuchadnezzar died, his son Evil-merodach finally released the Judean monarch and gave him an honorable seat at his own table (2 Kings 25:27-30; Jer. 52:31-34).

Judah’s Final King, Zedekiah (597-587 B.C.)

After Jehoiachin was deported

Egypt was undoubtedly deeply involved in the rebellion. The prophecy of Ezekiel contains extensive condemnations of Egypt because of its treachery in inciting this insurrection.
# Summary Timeline of Historical Events

## Jerusalem Caught Between Egypt and Babylon
- Josiah’s Reign (640-609 B.C.).
- Book of the Law discovered (622 B.C.); possible year of Ezekiel’s birth (Ezek. 1:1).
- Cyaxares the Mede took Assyria in 614 B.C.
- Nineveh captured and destroyed in 612 B.C. by Medo-Babylonian alliance.
- Jehoiakim (609-598 B.C.) served Egypt until 605; then rebelled (2 Kings 24:1).
- 605 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar defeated Egypt at Carchemish (Jer. 46:2ff).
- 604 B.C. Babylonians destroyed Ashkelon (47:5-7).
- 601 B.C. Egypt defeated Babylonians at the Egyptian border.
- Jehoiakim rebels (2 Kings 24:1), taken in fetters to Babylon (2 Chron. 36:6); died in 598 B.C.

## Judah: Unwilling Vassal To Babylon
- 598 B.C. Jehoiachin, 18 yr. old king (2 Kings 24:8).
- Taken captive and deported after a three month reign in 597 B.C.
- King’s uncle Mattaniah (Zedekiah) became king (597-587 B.C.).
- False prophets promised a two year exile (Jer. 28:2-4).
- Uprising in Babylon (595/4 B.C.), exiles implicated (Jer. 29:20-23).
- 594 B.C. Plans for rebellion among small states of Palestine.
- Ezekiel called to be a prophet and watchmen; sees chariot vision (593 B.C.).
- Ezekiel’s Temple Vision (592 B.C.).
- Ezekiel’s Discourse with the Elders of Israel (591 B.C.).

## The Fall of Jerusalem
- Envoys sent to Babylon to assure Nebuchadnezzar (29:3).
- Zedekiah rebels (2 Kings 25:1).
- Autumn of 589 B.C., Babylonian army in Palestine.
- January 588 B.C., Jerusalem under siege for the second time.
- Jeremiah 34:6-7: Only Lachish & Azekah remain.
- Summer, 588 B.C.; Egyptian army enters Palestine; siege raised temporarily (Jer. 37:5).
- People grow optimistic (Jer. 34:8-11; 37:3-10).
- Meanwhile, Ezekiel was pronouncing judgments upon Pharaoh and Egypt for their treachery (587-585 B.C.).
- Jeremiah still urged surrender; Zedekiah was willing but afraid (Jer. 38:14-23).
- In July, 587 B.C. the walls were breached.
- Zedekiah escaped the city, but was captured near Jericho.
- Zedekiah’s sons slain, blinded, taken in chains to Babylon.
- One month later, Jerusalem was burned, her walls broken down.

## After The Fall of Jerusalem
- Gedaliah ben Ahikam made governor at Mizpah.
- Ishmael killed Gedaliah and destroyed the Babylonian garrison (Jer. 41:1ff).
- Jews fled to Egypt, taking the prophet Jeremiah by force (Jer. 42).
- In 582 B.C. the third deportation takes place (Jer. 52:30).
- In 573 B.C. Ezekiel received his New Temple Vision (Ezek. 40:1ff).
- In 571 B.C. Ezekiel’s final prophecy, a judgment on Egypt is proclaimed (Ezek. 29:17).
but continual agitation and sedition till the roof came down upon the nation’s head. Removal of the nation’s best minds left it crippled. The nobles left to serve Zedekiah seem to have been reckless and incompetent men.

The idea of a king appointed by a foreign ruler was never accepted by the people who continued to regard Jehoiachin as their legitimate king (Jer. 37:1). Note that Ezekiel continued to date the events of his prophetic work in terms of the year of king Jehoiachin’s captivity while Zedekiah was ruling in Jerusalem. He refused to accept the counsel of Jeremiah the prophet, who gave him messages from the Lord. He rebelled against King Nebuchadnezzar, even though he had taken an oath of loyalty (2 Chronicles 36:12-13). Egypt was undoubtedly deeply involved in the rebellion. The prophecy of Ezekiel contains extensive condemnations of Egypt because of its treachery in inciting this insurrection. Egypt’s Pharaoh Hophra (Apries: 589-570), successor of Psammetichus II (594-589), had resumed a policy of interference in Asia. Only Judah, Tyre and Ammon seem to have committed themselves to revolt. Edom came in on the side of the Babylonians when they invaded the region (Obad. 10-14; Lam. 4:21f.; Psa. 137:7). Zedekiah himself, judging by his repeated secret consultations with Jeremiah (Jer. 21:1-7; 37:3-10, 17; 38:14-23), was far from assured in his own mind, but unable to withstand the enthusiasm of his nobles.

Babylonian response was swift. By January of 588 the Babylonian army arrived, and Nebuchadnezzar laid siege to Jerusalem in the ninth year of the reign of King Zedekiah, and continued to the eleventh year. Outlying strong points were taken one by one, until only Lachish and Azekah remained. In the summer of 588, news that an Egyptian army was advancing northward forced the Babylonians to lift the siege of Jerusalem temporarily (Jer. 37:5). A wave of relief swept over Judah, with only Jeremiah continuing to predict the worst (Jer. 37:6-10; 34:21f.).

The Egyptian force was quickly beaten back, and the siege was resumed. Though Jerusalem bravely held out until the following summer, its fate was sealed. At the last, the food had run out, the walls were breached by the enemy, and Zedekiah attempted to escape the city, but was caught and taken into custody in the plains of Jericho. He was then removed to Riblah, where he was tried and sentenced before the King of Babylon. He was forced to watch as his sons were killed before his eyes, then his eyes were put out and he was taken to Babylon (2 Kings 25:6-7). General Nebuzaradan of Babylon then burned down the Temple and the palace, and tore down the walls of Jerusalem.

A Babylonian Governor: Gedaliah (587)

Jeremiah 40-44 and 2 Kings 25:22-26 provide a postscript to the story. After the fall of Jerusalem, the Babylonians organized Judah into the provincial system of the empire. The land had been completely wrecked. Its cities were destroyed, its economy was ruined, its leading citizens were killed or deported, its remaining population consisted chiefly of poor peasants considered incapable of making trouble (2 Kings 25:12; Jer. 52:16). The Babylonians appointed Gedaliah, a man of noble family, as governor of the land. Probably because Jerusalem was utterly uninhabitable, he placed the seat of government in Mizpah.

Gedaliah earnestly sought to conciliate the people (cf. Jer. 40:7-12), and labored to restore the land to some semblance of normalcy (v. 10). But the diehards regarded him as a collaborator with the enemy. Neither Jeremiah 41:1 nor 2 Kings 25:25 states the year in which Gedaliah’s governorship ended, so we do not know exactly how long it lasted, but in the end he was murdered by Ishmael, a member of the royal house. A small Babylonian garrison was slaughtered, as well as a number of innocent bystanders. Ishmael then fled to Ammon where resistance to Babylon persisted.

The friends of Gedaliah, though innocent of the treachery, feared Nebuchadnezzar’s vengeance, and against the earnest pleas of Jeremiah, resolved to flee to Egypt taking the unwilling prophet with them. A third deportation in 582 B.C. mentioned in Jeremiah 52:30 may have represented a reprisal for these rebellious actions.

Questions
1. The life of Ezekiel was roughly contemporary with the decline of what great world empire? ______________
2. What world empire was rising to great power during the life of the prophet Ezekiel? ______________
3. What nation worked to keep Assyria alive as a buffer between itself and Babylon? ______________
4. Who was the final king of Assyria?

5. What year was Nineveh captured?

6. Name Israel’s reformer king.

7. Describe the circumstances of King Josiah’s death.

8. Why was Jehoahaz on the throne for only three months?

9. What were the circumstances of the Battle of Carchemish in 605 B.C.?

10. To what foreign leader did King Jehoiakim owe his position?

11. What was Jeremiah’s opinion of King Jehoiakim? Why?

12. Why was a great fast held in 604 B.C.?

13. What foreign power was responsible for Judah’s rebellion against Babylon after 601?

14. How long was King Jehoiachin on the throne?

15. Why was King Zedekiah impotent as a leader in Judah?

16. What three states rebelled against Nebuchadnezzar in 589?

17. Why did the Babylonians lift the siege of Jerusalem in 588?

18. Describe the circumstances of Judah after the fall of Jerusalem in 587 B.C.

19. Who was appointed governor of Judah?

20. Why was the governor murdered?
21. What year did the third deportation take place? __________________________________________

22. What was the probable cause of the third deportation? ________________________________

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