

Under The Fig Tree



WEEK 36

Day 1

Ezekiel Chapter 29. Egypt was a major civilization of the ancient world for more than 2500 years before Ezekiel's time. Modern-day historians and archaeologists have discovered much about the successive dynasties and a great number of books have been written. Egypt was a self-contained culture that developed its unique form of religion. The Pyramids bear witness to the way Egyptians focused much attention on the after-life. They worshipped many gods. Empowered by the God of Israel, Moses confronted some of the chief gods of Egypt at the time of the Exodus. This, however, did not put a stop to idolatry that kept the people of Egypt in spiritual darkness and fear of death. It may have been the Egyptians, typical of those who live in darkness, whom the Writer to the Hebrews had in mind when he spoke of Yeshua's sacrificial death: *inasmuch then as the children have partaken flesh and blood, He Himself likewise shared in the same, that through death He might destroy him who had the power of death, that is, the devil, and release those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.* (Hebrews 2:14-15).

The Chapters we will read today speak of God's judgment on Egypt. The prophecy against Egypt was in the tenth year. Ezekiel's ministered between 593 and 570 BC. The exile of Judah was for 70 years, beginning in 586 BC. With this information and the fact that Egypt was to be scattered among the nations for 40 years (Verse 13) it appears that Babylon's conquest of Egypt coincided with the latter part of Judah's exile. This was at the end of what is called the *Late Period* of Egypt's Dynasties, which ended in 525 BC, when the Persians replaced the Babylonians as the ruling world power. Later, in 332 BC, the Greeks, under Alexander, would replace the Persians as rulers of Egypt. Under Cyrus, the moderate Persian ruler, both Judah and Egypt would be resettled in their lands.

Ezekiel's Prophecy makes it clear that it was God who brought an end to Egypt, and it was God who restored the exiles after 40 years.

Chapters 30 to 32. Visionary language, used for the fall of Egypt, is found elsewhere in the Bible. In Chapter 30, Verse 3, we have the phrase, *the time of the Gentiles*, which occurs again in Yeshua's end-time Prophecies (Luke 21:24). What can we deduce from this? We recall that Judah

went to exile in two stages. God used the first stage as a warning concerning the fuller exile some years later, so that there would be an opportunity to repent. Furthermore, the 70 year exile itself was a shadow of the longer term purposes of God. It was a forerunner of a far worse exile - eternal separation from God for those who reject the Gospel of Yeshua HaMashiach. Similarly, the downfall of Egypt under Babylon points to the end times, when great woes will fall on all nations, as shown in the Book of Revelation, forewarned through Daniel and confirmed through Yeshua. Layer upon layer of God's plan and purposes have been revealed progressively through the history of the world. Through the experiences in Ezekiel's day, we are intended to learn that we must listen to what God says and respond accordingly. He means what He says! Ezekiel's Prophecy over Egypt is a clear revelation that key events in history are not due simply to the interactions of the nations: God speaks through this history.

Ezekiel's Prophecies, like Jeremiah's, seem stark and bleak. In Chapter 31, the terminology of the Pit and Hell are used. The Egyptians understood this terminology, and the seriousness of the warning. The fall of Egypt was as terrible as the fall of Judah. Yet, is the message as bleak as it seems? The more important message of the Bible is God's plan of redemption. As deep as the despair resulting from God's judgments was the sacrifice of Yeshua. As dark as the days of suffering was the Light of the Gospel. God caused Egypt to suffer judgment so that future generations might seek God for salvation. They were to learn that their idol-worship was an abomination, but that if they had faith in Yeshua and repented then they too would be saved. God had redemption in mind more than punishment, when He brought down the idolatrous nation. Egypt is the Gentile counterpart of Israel and Judah, preparing the way for all people to understand that God holds out His Hands, through Yeshua, to all who will believe and be saved.

The times of the Gentiles, therefore, can be looked at from two sides. One side is the utter despair of the woes that God brings upon the world. The other side is the main purpose of God that, through the signs in the earth, all mankind might wake up, repent and turn to Him in faith.

The imagery of Ezekiel's Prophecy over Egypt was applicable to the fall under Babylon and also pointed to the end times. Included is the picture of a shaking earth (Chapter 31, Verse 16) and the darkened sky (Chapter 32, Verses 7-8). These signs were fulfilled at Yeshua's Crucifixion (Matthew 27:45-56), and they will be fulfilled again prior to Yeshua's return (Matthew 24:29).

Day 2

Chapter 33. Ezekiel's call to be a watchman was recorded again. The details are the same as in Chapter 3. Review the details, noting that the watchman does not act upon his own initiative. He acts on the command of God and, at that time, he has great responsibility. In our own day-to-day lives we must counsel, correct and encourage one another according to the ways of God. We must take every opportunity to share the Gospel message and the wisdom of God. On these things we must not be silent, being sensitive to the moving of the Spirit of God. This is not the same as the specially commissioned watchman, who is concerned with bringing major warnings and must only act on the instructions of God. This was what Ezekiel was called to be.

One of his tasks was to remind those in exile that God was looking for those who would repent of their sins, so that judgment would be turned away from them. People must not be self-righteous, but trust only in the righteousness of God.

The news came of the fall of Jerusalem. The time of Judah's exile had now begun, and would continue for a full 70 years. Those taken captive were brought down to Babylon to join the other exiles. It was time for God's discipline so that, through the seventy years, the Jews would repent and return to God.

Chapter 34. Jeremiah prophesied to the leaders of the Jews while Jerusalem still awaited judgement. Now, Ezekiel waited for them in Babylon with the same message, condemning the false shepherds of Judah. He also prophesied that one day, in the future, there would come a King, in the line of David, who would be the Good Shepherd, and who would take care of God's people. This, we know, is Yeshua HaMashiach (John 10:7-30).

Chapter 35. Mount Seir was in Edom, on the borders of Judah. One can imagine that a person might stand there and survey the Land of Judah. This mountain symbolized those who gloated over the fall of Judah; Ezekiel gave a prophetic warning that their gloating instead of sympathy would bring judgment on Edom. We reviewed this in earlier chapters of both Ezekiel and Jeremiah. God's judgment was to fall on those who sought harm for Israel and Judah rather than lamenting over the exile. This has relevance for today, a time of the regathering of Jews from another long exile, since 70 AD. Consider this carefully and note the details. Mount Seir can represent any nation that gloats over the way God has judged Israel.

Chapter 36. Read the words of this Chapter very carefully. The Prophecy was given long ago just at the beginning of the 70 year exile. At this low point of Judah's history came this great promise of restoration. If you visit Israel today, or hear about the way the country has been reborn, read this Prophecy carefully. Meditate upon the fact that this is God's end time promise to the faithful remnant. The Children of Israel are identified with the land God promised to Abraham. The land became like a wilderness after the second exile in 70 AD. It became bereft of trees and other

vegetation and was infested with malarial swamps. After the extreme suffering of the Jews in the Second World War, the nation was reborn in 1947. Since then the land has come back to life as a fulfillment of Ezekiel's Prophecy. God, however, has in mind more than the prosperity of the Land. The cleansing and fruitfulness of the Land of Israel is a metaphor for what God will do in the hearts of those who seek Him through Yeshua. The cleansing of the Land is like the washing of the Holy Spirit. Chapter 36 contains a reminder of the New Covenant (Verse 25 to 28). The New Covenant promises of God, fulfilled in Yeshua, remind us of the four promises of God in Exodus 6:6-8, which are the basis of the four cups taken at the Passover Meal. If we have eyes to see, we realize that Ezekiel Prophesied how the types and shadows of the Exodus would be fulfilled through the giving of the Holy Spirit and New Life in Yeshua, the Great Shepherd of His people. All these truths are woven into the Prophecies of the Bible.

Day 3

Chapter 37. Read this Chapter carefully, remembering the context in which it was written. When the Christian Church grew among the Gentile nations, many of the prophecies for Israel and Judah were appropriated. God's plan for Israel was misinterpreted. The character of God is revealed through the Scriptures. The vision of the valley of dry bones brings encouragement for revival in the Church. Nevertheless, we must remember that this vision was given directly to the exiles. They were brought from Judah after a great slaughter at the hand of the Babylonians, leaving many people lying dead in the valleys around the City. Thus the imagery of the valley of dry bones had immediate impact. God said that He could raise the dead and give new life to His people. The dry bones are also symbolic of the exiled nation, no longer living in their land under the blessings of God. God promised that He would revive the nation once more. He indicated that He would even open the graves and revive many people who were already dead. When Yeshua was crucified this happened as a confirmation that He is Messiah, and also a sign of the power of God to resurrect the dead (Matthew 27:52-53). All this was first to be understood in the context of the exile and then as pointing to the power of the Gospel to save. It was a Prophecy given directly to the Jews of Ezekiel's day.

Added to the vision of the dry bones was that of a broken stick that was brought back together. This showed the long term plan that, at some future time, God would bring back both Israel and Judah and make them one nation again, free of idolatry and never again to be divided. For all the centuries since this Prophecy was given, the world has not yet seen the final fulfillment of this Prophecy. We are witnessing a stirring in the Middle East today in these new days of preparation. *David My servant shall be king over them*, said the Lord (Verse 24). David was the shadow of Yeshua HaMashiach, born in Bethlehem to the Virgin Mary, 2000 years ago. Yeshua will soon return to fulfill Jeremiah 37.

Chapter 38. Ezekiel Chapters 37 to 39 contain important Prophecies for the end times that must be studied over and over again alongside other end-time Prophecies, including Daniel, Revelation and Zechariah. Together, the Prophets provide both key facts and an overall picture of the latter days. These Chapters are here for us to read, discuss and bring to prayer as the days of their fulfillment draw near. Many people have sought to understand the precise details and set them in order, but there are serious disagreements as to those details. It is unlikely that complete understanding will be given prior to the actual events. The nature of Prophecy is that we study it and become prepared for the fulfillment, ready to recognize the events as they take place. Then we can say, as Peter did when he preached about the coming of the Holy Spirit (Acts 2:16), *this is that which was spoken by the prophet...*

Therefore, read Chapter 38 carefully, noting the details. The nations named in the Chapter, and their gods, were known in Ezekiel's day: Rosh, Meshech, Tubal, Gog, Magog, and so on. They are types of the nations that will rise up in the last days to invade the resettled Land of Israel. We recognize some of the names retained by nations today, such as Persia, Ethiopia and Libya. Gomer is thought to have been the area which is now Germany. Rosh could be Russia. Verse 8

speaks directly of our own time, when, after many days Israel has returned to their Land. These days are called the *latter days*, and this return to the Land was prophesied to precede a worldwide conspiracy against Israel: a confederation of nations will invade the Land, during these latter days. The signs in our world today, make such an invasion seem very imminent. We look at the rising ideologies and wonder which will be the dominant ideology that unites the world and seeks to destroy Israel. We must be careful not to jump to conclusions. In our day, not only is there a growing move to unite the world under one system of government, one currency and one religion, but this is also the time when the Gospel message is going out with enormous effect. Some religions and ideologies, even those that are currently prominent, may fall to the power of the Gospel, whilst something more subtle and deceptive may rise to dominate the world. Be careful, therefore, to watch and pray and not jump too quickly to conclusions as to the exact nature of the end-time invasion of Israel. There will be tremendous signs to accompany this great uprising. In Israel, there will be a great earthquake (Verse 19). This may be the time when the Mount of Olives is split in two (Zechariah 14:4), when the Lord puts His feet again on the mountain.

Chapter 39. The invading alliance of armies will be destroyed in the Land of Israel. This will be a supernatural occurrence that reminds us of the devastations of Egypt in Exodus. This will be the time of God's judgments on the idolatrous nations of the world. It will take seven months to bury the slain (Verses 13 to 15) and seven years to destroy all the abandoned weapons. They will be modern-day weapons of war, symbolized in the Prophecy by spears and javelins of ancient culture. This will be likened to a feast day of the Lord (Verse 17 to 20), a picture that is repeated in identical detail in Revelation 19:17-20. Verses 21 to 29 of Ezekiel 39 confirm the promise of Israel's restoration after the remnant has been cleansed of idolatry, disciplined for their sins, and when the remnant seeks the Lord whole-heartedly. The exile was for this reason, and also so that God can teach all other nations, through His dealings with Israel and Judah, about His covenant purposes for the entire world.

Chapter 40. We do not know the reason for the detailed vision Ezekiel was given for the Temple. The Temple built by Solomon had fallen when Jerusalem was besieged exactly fourteen years previously (Verse 1). The vision of a magnificent new Temple would have been a great encouragement to the exiles, giving them a vision for the return to the Land, on the very day that they would be mourning for the fall of Jerusalem. When Ezra and Nehemiah led the exiles back to the Land after 70 years, the reconstructed Temple was not like the one seen in vision. Later, Herod's Temple was a grander structure but even this was not the fulfillment of what Ezekiel saw. In fact Herod's Temple was destroyed by the Romans in 70 AD and that was the last Temple in Jerusalem right up to the present day. Some people think that the Temple described at the end of Ezekiel is for the 1000 years when Yeshua reigns on earth after His return. We must wait and see. Against this argument is the truth that *He* is now the Temple and we, His people are living stones in its construction. Therefore, the Temple finds fulfillment not in stones and mortar but in the lives of Yeshua and His disciples. When Moses was given the pattern of the Tabernacle and built

it in the wilderness, it was a representation of a reality in Heaven. Could Ezekiel have seen a similar type and shadow of the heavenly reality? Every part of the Temple he was shown, just like the Tabernacle, is full of symbolism of heavenly truths. See what the Holy Spirit says as you prayerfully consider the details.

Day 4

Chapters 41 to 44. We will take two days to read the last few Chapters of Ezekiel. Here is fine detail of what Ezekiel saw, wrote down and told to the exiles. Above all, this was a vision of the last days. It would, nevertheless, have given immediate encouragement to the exiles, sorrowful each day for their captivity and the ruin of Jerusalem. The detail gave encouragement for future days. Recorded, as it is in the Bible, it also gives encouragement to us, so that we might look to the future just as the exiles once did. It remains to be seen whether this Temple will ever be built on earth. At the time of Ezekiel, the exiles planned for the rebuilding of their Land and the Temple according to this vision. They would later find that this could not be accomplished to the perfect standard of the vision. The vision shows us what God alone might do. None of us can visualize what will happen in the 1000 year reign of Yeshua on this earth recorded in Revelation. We do not know how this vision will be manifest even then. We know that this was God's vision to Ezekiel and that He wants us to know the details. All the details centre on the Torah of God recorded in the Books of Moses. God's order has not changed. This may be a description of a heavenly reality, brought to us in familiar visual terms, but symbolic of something that we do not yet understand. Could this be symbolic of the New Jerusalem that will come down from Heaven (Revelation 21:10)? That is another possibility. Yeshua showed that He is the fulfillment of the Temple (Matthew 12:6, John 2:19-22). For this reason, Ezekiel's vision is an important study for all of Yeshua's disciples. Whatever else we are learning; we are studying patterns that point to our Saviour. We must leave the rest to God to reveal in His own time.

Day 5

Chapters 45 to 48. Complete the study of the Temple. It is like a blue-print for a design. It is so detailed that, with sufficient resources, we could try to build it. There may be attempts to build such a Temple in Jerusalem. Some religious Jews are making preparations for building a new Temple in our days. However, Ezekiel was not instructed to build it, only to note the details and pass on what he saw. Let us do what we were expected to do, simply study the details that Ezekiel was shown and note well what God said. The way He will use the vision may be shown to us one day, when the time comes.

Day 6

The suffering of this world would be overwhelming unless it was kept in perspective. It is unfeeling to distance ourselves from the hardship that many people face. That is why Torah emphasizes, more than anything else, care for the poor and the lonely. We are to serve one another as Yeshua served us. The Flood brought devastation to the entire world: this was the extreme of what humans have suffered on account of sin. The exile of Israel and Judah, with all the pain of the conflicts with the Babylonians that preceded it, was also real suffering. We must not lose the empathy with those who suffer as we read the Scriptures. Suffering is experienced in the world today, with poverty, sickness and disaster in many areas of the world. Without losing our empathy with the suffering world, there is still another important emphasis from our Bible studies that we must not miss. Yeshua was the greatest example of how to understand this emphasis. He suffered on account of our sins more than any man or woman in all history. Hebrews 12:2 brings balance to our understanding: *for the joy set before Him He endured the Cross*. The New Testament teaches us to take this attitude ourselves. We read in Hebrews 12:1-2: *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin that so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking to Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith...* Time and again, in the Bible, we are told to look beyond the suffering of this world to the glory that God has in mind for our eternal future.

God has set limits on the time-span of this earth. We can't be sure of the exact number of years from the first day of Creation to the moment when Yeshua returns, but the Bible allows us to make a very good approximation. It has been approximately 5000 years since the Flood - that is all. The evidence of the rocks and mountains that were reformed after the Flood are evidence of this, despite what evolutionary scientists say. It is just 2500 years since Judah was exiled to Babylon, and 2000 years since the Crucifixion of Yeshua. Now the signs are that He will soon return. Following the Fall, God allocated only a few thousand years to restore to Himself a family of faith from the entire world. The limited time-span of history helps us to put the suffering of the world in perspective. It does not remove the pain but it gives hope within the pain.

Our hope is for the eternal future after the pain of this world is over, confined as it is to a few thousand years. The Bible helps us to prepare for the future, though sometimes the Scriptures are hard to interpret. The Bible is full of figures of speech and the Prophets were given much picture language through which God speaks to us. There is much that is understood plainly and there is much that is held in mystery, so that we look to the future in faith. In addition, God speaks to us through the circumstances of our lives. No human teacher is capable of what God can do. We use computers and white-boards to help us teach: God uses the entire universe. He also uses the experiences of history.

There is a figure of speech called irony. This is used when the meaning is opposite to the words spoken. It is like a bow drawn back to shoot an arrow forward. God brought His people into circumstances that were like a dramatic irony. Darkness emphasizes light; suffering emphasizes the joy of release from bondage. God does not allow the valley experiences to go beyond His redemptive purposes. With this in mind, we consider the message of the Prophets and the experiences of Israel and Judah in exile. One view of our studies in Isaiah, Jeremiah and Ezekiel is

that these were dark, painful days of punishment from a hard and judgmental God. Another view reveals the promise God gave during those difficult days, like light penetrating the darkness. The suffering of exile, if patiently endured in the sanctuary that God gave those who trusted Him, was a preparation for understanding what God did for us through Yeshua. The exile and the intervening years of Israel's history was a preparation for the coming of Yeshua. Beyond this is the hope that is being built in all His people for His soon return.

Therefore, let us take full advantage of the opportunity of drawing this contrast by reading next from the Gospels. With Ezekiel as a backdrop, let us turn to the brief summary of the coming of Yeshua recorded by Mark.

Mark Chapter 1. Read these Chapters for yourself and see what the Holy Spirit highlights. This is an account of the fulfillment of all the promises of God embedded in the Prophecies, and in the types and shadows of the Tanach. John prepared the way, calling to repentance those whose hearts were stirred from across the entire Land of Israel. These were the ones whom God had in mind when he made promises that a remnant would return after the exile. Up to this time, Israel's experience was very much down to earth. Their struggles had been with oppressive nations- Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece and Rome. Now we see that there was also a spiritual battle. Our understanding is lifted above the circumstances of the physical earth. Yeshua confronted satan and began to drive out demons. He also called disciples to learn from Him through His years of earthly ministry.

Chapter 2. Even if the Jews who were in exile had believed the promises of God through Ezekiel, they would not have known the manner by which God would fulfill the promises. Yeshua ministered for three and a half years to demonstrate that He was the fulfillment of all that the Scriptures spoke. He healed the sick and cast out demons, whilst showing His power to forgive sins. Step by step He showed His authority and His fulfillment of all Torah. Here He showed Himself Lord of the Sabbath.

Chapter 3. The multitudes followed Him. Was this the One of whom the Prophets spoke? It was a long hard time, from a human perspective, since God had built hope through the Prophets. Yeshua showed them that He had come to serve them, also being the One whom the Father had appointed to fulfill all His promises.

Chapter 4. Those, whose hearts were towards God, heard God's invitation and found encouragement through the parables: those, whose hearts were hard against God, heard the opposite to this. The parables were Yeshua's means of identifying those who truly sought God. He spoke through His teaching and also through His miracles. Even the stormy sea obeyed Him. He was the One through whom God created the universe. Through the signs and miracles, those who followed Him were encouraged to reflect on these things. Isaiah had once spoken concerning these days: *The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, and upon those*

who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned. (Isaiah 9) The promised light, of whom Ezekiel had spoken in the exile, was now in the world! Yeshua walked this earth among His people so that they could witness the Light of God and come to that Light. Here were all the promises of God in total fulfillment.

Day 7

A Day for Rest and Further Reflection

Mark Chapters 5 to 8. While the words of the Prophets are often mysterious and embedded in visionary language, the account of the Gospels is in plain language, easy to follow. *Spiritual* aspects of the link between the mysteries of God and their manifestation in Yeshua will take us longer to understand. They are like the Temple at the end of Ezekiel, and the visions in Revelation. These matters are discerned in the Spirit, and await the time of God's further revelation. Yeshua's ministry to needy people, Man to man, is described here in the Gospels. Read the account and put it into the context of the promises God gave through the Prophets, thereby finding balanced understanding. Read four more chapters today.
